

Plato's practice of death



In the Phaedo, Plato argues that a true philosopher practices death as if at every moment life were behind him. To understand what Plato meant by a true philosopher practicing death, it is imperative to define philosophy, and death according to Plato and Socrates. Philosophy is defined as the love and search for wisdom. On a deeper level, it refers to the search of what makes a man happy. For philosophers, philosophy or the love for and pursuit of knowledge is a way of life and not just an intellectual pursuit. Plato and Socrates define death as the ultimate separation of the soul and body. They regard the body as a prison for the soul and view death as the means of freedom for the soul. Considering Plato and Socrates definition of death, in the life of a true philosopher, death does not occur when bodily functions cease. Rather, the true philosopher is already dead before they die or before bodily functions cease.

The true meaning of the phrase “ a true philosopher practices death as if at every moment life were behind him” can be found in these definitions. For the true philosopher, life involves the search for the meaning of life or what brings happiness in life, and conforming to it. True philosophers regard the body as an obstacle to the search for knowledge and meaning in life. The need to look after the body presents numerous distractions in the quest for knowledge. As such, a true philosopher’s main goal is to be free of the body and its entanglements, to pursue knowledge.

Plato views human nature as dualistic or composed of the soul and the body. When a true philosopher disentangles himself/herself from the body, the soul remains. In other words, the true philosopher deserts the body to live in, and seek satisfaction of the soul, which is exactly what Socrates and Plato define

as death. In so doing, the true philosopher practices dying or separation of the soul and the body, long before physical death occurs.

Practicing of death is essential in refining people's character. The pursuit of bodily pleasures is the root of all evil in the society. That is why all religions in the world encourage people to abandon the search for bodily pleasures and seek spiritual gratification, which is the stance taken by Plato.

Separating the body from the soul enables human beings to see beyond the gratification of the flesh and pursue the things they believe in, without fearing the consequences these things might have on the body, and is so doing, demonstrate courage that can only be seen on a higher level than the body.

Part 2: Nietzsche's eternal return

Nietzsche takes an evidently different view from Plato on life. He argues that we should live every day as though everything that happens in life will return eternally. Nietzsche takes on an approach that is not popular with religions and some philosophers to explain his point. For Nietzsche, the secret to living a fulfilled life is accepting and embracing reality. This is the true mark of a free spirit, or a spirit that is not hindered by anything. Many people suffer physically and mentally and go through life just trying to survive, in the hope for a better after life that transcends the current life. This is the stance taken by some religions such as Christianity. However, Nietzsche calls this self deception.

In living life as though every day will recur, Nietzsche encourages one to accept what is and what has happened, and move to a higher level of

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liberation where one can will for what has happened to reoccur. The true meaning of life as Nietzsche explains is "saying yes to life". He argues that it is not possible to separate good from bad and that suffering is a part of life that is imperative to achieve greatness. The truly free spirit is one that is grateful for everything that has happened, and one that can will for life to reoccur with all its joys, pains and sorrows, as this is the true joy of life.

Free spirits enjoy life on earth and live every day to the fullest. Given a chance, they can will for everything to reoccur just as it has, as it would still deliver the same lessons that make great people. Free spirits have learned to embrace reality and not just get through life in hope for a better afterlife. This, according to Nietzsche, is living every day as though everything that happens will reoccur, and it is the true mark of a free person.

Embracing Nietzsche's philosophy makes people better and braver. By embracing reality, one is no longer afraid of what might happen. Rather, one can live a joyful life and take every joy, sorrow and instance of suffering as a chance to attain wisdom. The reason why one can will for an eternal recurrence is because the wisdom is not attainable without the experiences.

Part Three: My view

Of the two approaches to life, my preferred approach is Plato's practice of death. Plato takes on a more realistic approach to life, and the end results of Nietzsche's philosophy on life can still be achieved with Plato's model, without having to will for an eternal recurrence. As successful people anywhere in the world will agree, attaining greatness requires one to subdue the body. Successful people usually work harder than other people. They

have little regard for the wellness of the body and they force their bodies to go beyond the comfort point to achieve success. In practicing daily death of the flesh, successful people attain wisdom and greatness. Nietzsche's model stresses on embracing the joys of life and living a full life on earth. However, it falls short by failing to recognize the fact that no one can truly enjoy life without hope. In the case of Plato, the hope is for eventual freedom in physical death. In the case of successful people, the hope can be for greatness or wealth but the path to this eventuality requires the daily death of the body which according to Plato is dying before you actually die.