Pablo Ruiz Picasso

1881- 1973

Spain

“When I have wanted to express something, I have done so without thinking of the past or the future”
Virtue Ethics

Prof Willie Pienaar
University of Stellenbosch
We all have questions about the essence of human existence - HAPPINESS

What would make us happy? ‘EUDIAMONIA’

Western Greek Philosophy 400 BC
- Human conversation
- A discipline with its own method – by questions
- Even today we dwell in the dark!

The final knowledge is unknown to us
Fifth an Fourth Century BC - Athens

- The Greeks had no sense of sin
  - "bad shots" Could happen to anyone – “take better aim next time”
- The Greek concept of a good life
- Greek culture – generous celebration of life is to live now, to flourish, achieve, learn, appreciate and enjoy - hedonism
- The healthy, fit, trained body was the summit of Greek perfection
  - Gymnasium from ‘gymnos’ meaning naked
    (Judeo-Christian view of nudity a chilling contrast – shame)

  “A splendid era of mighty men”
  Honour or fame or heroism

- Latin – Virtus meaning “manliness”
  The philosophers of the time (Socrates) did not agree
Virtue – What would a good person be like?

Three kinds of people by nature – “attend the Games” - Pythagoras

1. Spectators of life
   - Experience, reflect, inquire, knowledge seeking

2. Competitors “Most virtuous”
   - Honour, fame, heroism

3. Those who buy and sell in the stands
   - Gain the object

Still defining ‘Virtue’
The shift from warrior to civic morality

- Heroism, fame and honor - open to relatively few
- Every citizen should be included in the concept of a good life
- It took philosophers, artists, the theater and writers to introduce theory, rhetoric, questions about the deeper meaning of life - virtue.
- Socrates moved beyond the irresolvable questions about the nature of the world and focused on human nature, self-knowledge, the important question of how to live!
Questions about what really matters

- There is a goal
- A purpose
- A value in life worthwhile as an end in itself – not only a means to an end.

A kind of ‘goodness’ that gives value to wealth and success or pleasure

It is a kind of knowledge – knowledge about the intrinsic values of things that man do and desire – wisdom!

A young man asked Socrates if virtue can be taught?
Socrates asked the young sophist –

- Do you know what virtue is? “No” said the young sophist
- Socrates - “Now that you know that you do not know, we can begin to make progress”

“Then, do you not think that the quest for ethical understanding and the living of an examined live is more important than the conclusion we can not come to?”

“Should we not strive towards virtue and therefore inherit the good life?”
Plato 429-347 BC

We need to ask the fundamental questions about the purpose of life.
Plato

- “Polis” – meaning ‘city’
  - Police, policy, politics
- “A man without the sense of justice will not be able to limit to his desires – always discontent”
- “Because we are social beings, only justice or fairness can bring harmony”

Personal happiness only possible through the happiness of others

‘Connectedness’
We learn by experience, we “taste the world”

- **Practical wisdom** – the ‘mean’
  - Cowardice ↔ Rashness

- An appropriate expression of needs and appetites eg. anger

- In harmony – self and others

  “To treat a friend like another self”

Search – Strive – Ongoing
Rene Descart
1596-1650

- Mathematician –

Old beliefs are dwindling - Pope/king/nobility are put in place by God – all people are equal – we have to live by social contract - authority of state replaced by authority of reason

Now to decide on my social contract
Connectedness
Virtues

- Should be cultured
- Should become trait of character – “The good person”
  - Courage
  - Temperance
  - Liberality
  - Justice
  - Honesty
  - Altruism
- To do good only because it is good
  - I can always do this
  - Everybody can, always do this
Nichomachean Ethics

- We are rational, intellectual beings. A life of contemplation.
- Our concern for others results in mutual use and pleasure.
- “The good life is spent in search of the good life.”
The good life is spent in search of the good life – the means and end in itself  ARISTOTLE