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Philosophy 101

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### **Reading Questions Week 5**

**Plato, "Morality and Happiness" – pp. 487-492**

1. Explain the three different ways Socrates believes we consider things to be good.

**According to Socrates, the Good is an authoritative truth that eliminates any remaining structures. When the soul revolves around enlightenment, it attains actuality and perception. However, when it relies on boundless quality, its conditions are constantly unraveled and incomprehensible. The Good is approached in the same way by the soul. Additionally, goodness is the highest form of knowledge that justifies our understanding and discernment. It is also considered the most elevated data.**

**Socrates believed that there are three different ways in which we consider things to be good. Firstly, some things are considered good because they bring pleasure or enjoyment to us. This is a subjective way of defining goodness as it varies from person to person. Secondly, some things are considered good because they have a practical use or function, such as food or medicine. This is an objective way of defining goodness as it is based on the usefulness of the thing itself. Lastly, Socrates believed that some things are inherently good simply because they possess certain qualities like beauty, truthfulness, and justice. This is an idealistic view of goodness that suggests that there are universal standards of what makes something good.**

2. Present in your own words the "Ring of Gyges" story that Plato's brother Glaucon discusses. What is the ultimate point Glaucon is trying to make about why we behave justly?

**Glaucon argues that Justice is not beneficial for oneself but rather assists in gaining rewards. If a simple man were given a ring, he would eventually be undermined because Justice cannot be guaranteed if it is not rewarded. People may resort to harming others for their benefit. Ultimately, we all suspect that Justice alone is insufficient.**

3. What do Glaucon and Adeimantus ultimately think is the best life for a man, and how should we pursue it? Do you agree or disagree, and if so, then why?

**According to Glaucon and Adeimantus, justice is appealing as it prevents unfair treatment towards oneself. Therefore, people seem to act justly due to selfish motives. The story of Gyges' ring confirms both arguments as it reveals that people only behave morally because they fear being caught and punished. Consequently, individuals act justly without considering others, such as maintaining a good reputation. Glaucon and Adeimantus believe that nobody behaves justly out of pure motivation and that justice is usually driven by self-interest. I agree with them, as individuals are free to choose their path in life.**

**Aristotle, "Ethical Virtue" – pp. 492-495**

1. Characterize the "happiness" (Greek: eudaimonia) that Aristotle thinks is the ultimate end for man's pursuits.

**Happiness is the most notable good because it is the result of an action, it is self-sufficient, and it is complete. The most notable benefit of happiness is that it marks the end of an activity, it is independent, and it is finished. Aristotle acknowledges that happiness is the ultimate good because it fulfills the three criteria for being the highest good. The three criteria are: It is an unqualified end, it is a finished end, and it is an independent end.**

2. What does Aristotle argue is the function of a human being?

**According to Aristotle, identifying the human function can also help us understand what it means to be a good person. This is similar to how we determine the characteristic function of an artifact in order to comprehend its purpose. The capacity of individuals determines their goodness, as outlined by certain premises. Premises 1 and 4 can be extended to include not only creatures, but also plants. Furthermore, premise 1 is sound as an entity's greatness is determined by how effectively it fulfills its inherent function. Artifacts and other human-made objects possess certain characteristics that are evaluated based on their purpose or function.**

3. What does Aristotle mean by saying virtue is a disposition, and not just a feeling or a capacity?

**Aristotle says that virtue is a character trait as it enables one to fulfill their role effectively and be proud of themselves. Unlike emotions, virtues are not limited. Although they are not feelings or limitations, the only logical conclusion is that they are characteristics of one's character.**

4. How do we gain virtue?

**To operate appropriately, characteristic functions require adherence to their corresponding virtues. Premise 4 conveys that virtues are qualities or attributes that enable a characteristic to fulfill its purpose effectively. An instance of such a virtue would be the sharpness of a blade, as it allows for efficient cutting.**

5. Explain how virtue is like a mean, or balance point between extremes. Present an example of such a virtue.

**The vices are extremes, which include lack and intemperance. It's possible to feel apprehensive or certain or have cravings, but these sentiments can be justified if they occur at the right time, for the right reasons, towards the right people, with the right intentions, and in the right manner. This is considered the best and transitional state of being that aligns with virtue. Virtue is defined as a state of choosing to act in a way that is relative to us and determined by reason.**