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The Good Life

We are in a time where no one can agree on anything; we cannot agree whether we should support the war, Occupy Wall Street, or even universal health care. However, there is one concept that everyone agrees on. We all, no matter what race, religion, or sex, want to live the good life. What does that mean? Well, the answer is going to be different for everyone. To some it is having a loving husband or wife, two kids, two-car garage, and a white picket fence. To others it is more extreme - to have the mansion, the Lamborghini, and the stereotypical magazine-like husband or wife. Plato was right, the good life is going to be different to each and every person due to everyone having a different idea of what the good life is. That is even seen between Plato and Socrates.

Plato defines the good life as one who ventures out of the cave, exactly what he was showing in the “Allegory of the Cave.” You cannot live the good life unless you see what is causing the shadows and what is outside the cave. Without that you are merely seeing a tiny part of the world, a world that is not real, and thus you can not live the good life in it. In the “Allegory of the Cave” Plato explains the scene as follows: there are prisoners who have been bound since birth that have never seen light and are unable to move left or right. Behind them on a ledge is a fire, which has statues in front that make shadows. To the prisoners the only stuff they have seen is the shadows so to them the shadows are reality. A prisoner is then set free and is forced to look at the fire and statues which to him represent the, now, most real aspect of life. However, the prisoner still only believes that the cave is the whole world. The prisoner is then dragged outside and is blinded by the light and looks at what he has seen before, shadows, then moves on to reflections, then to everything else that the world has to offer. The whole idea behind Plato’s allegory is that in order to be educated you have to venture outside of the cave. To apply this concept to our lives, it means that we must not just rely on what we see and hear through mainstream media channels. Instead, in order to find the real truth, we must venture out on our own. That means we must realize that by us watching the most popular media sources to learn about the wars, we are merely just prisoners, chained, watching the shadows. We must venture outside of these popular media sources in order to make a real argument of what is really happening in the world. You can venture outside of the social norm by reading independent newspapers, newspapers that you don’t share the same political views with, and the local newspaper for where the event is happening. By doing so this would allow you to be educated from all political viewpoints of the stories, from the sides you agree on, the sides you disagree on, and on the sides you are indifferent to. This means that people will think you are crazy for venturing outside of the idea of completely trusting a single media source. It also means that you realize that you are willing to learn new things, challenge ideas, and teach others. That makes a good leader, one who is willing to venture outside of the cave, spread the word, and lead people no matter how hard it is outside of the cave so that they can realize that what is in the cave is not as real as they previously thought.

Socrates defines the good life as attained through perfect love and a lack of desire. One might argue that life will always have desires. Everyone has always wanted something and everyone will. Even though many assume that those with money have all wants satisfied, it is fair to assume that they lack one thing, happiness. I personally believe it is hard to obtain Socrates’ definition of the good life since humans by nature are irrational and have unlimited wants, as taught in entry-level economics. If we can never obtain a lack of desire then it is impossible to attain the good life.

Plato has a very refined idea of education. One must learn mathematics and dialectics. With mathematics the students are to start on basic concepts, increase in complexity, and finally move to abstract forms so that they are ready to learn about the stars. By studying math they are able to understand abstract concepts. By being able to understand abstract concepts like math they then can grasp other abstract concepts like goodness and badness. Dialectics is a form of questioning and answering, sometimes thought of as someone playing devil’s advocate. Plato’s idea of education is much different than Americans’ idea of education simply because one is not done until near the age of fifty! The person trains until age eighteen learning basic studies, followed by two years of military training, ten years of mathematics, five years of dialectics, fifteen years as civic leaders, and upon completing the years of studies and work’ they are ready to lead and are aware of the form of goodness, maturity, and the good life.

To me, the good life would be a life where I knowingly chose to love and where I made the most positive impact on the greatest number of people. Whether that means I have a yacht, private jet, and a position on *Forbes*, or simply just a shack, as long as I love someone and make a positive impact on people’s lives then I have struck the good life. I personally do not think money at all helps when it comes to living a happy life. To me it ruins the ability for someone to experience true happiness. For example, before I moved to Texas, my parents had the most wealth they have ever had in their lives. They each had high paying jobs, one working within the government and the other working for a major media company. At the time, our family was unhappiest; we were falling apart. Not only was the family disintegrating but also each person as an individual was falling apart. When our move to Texas did not pan out as planned, our family had to join together to make life work in this new, foreign place called Texas. Because it did not pan out as planned, our family income dropped dramatically, but it caused my parents to be more involved with the family. As you can see having the most money in the world does not guarantee happiness.

The good life is easily achievable, quite contrary to Plato’s and Socrates’s definition of it. Plato and Socrates give a definition of the good life as something that seemingly stands out as if only a small portion of society could achieve when in reality every human being has a fair chance of enjoying the god life. The idea of the good life has been transformed from something very hard to achieve back in the days of Plato and Socrates to something that is easily achievable in modern day society. To sum it up we all need to work to achieve the good life, whether that is with or without education is up to you.

Work Cited

Plato. 1968*. The Republic of Plato*. Translated by Allan Bloom. United States: Basic Books.