

CHAPTER Three

Socrates: Morals, Ethics and God

As the *Preface* stated, Aristotle notes that ethics begins with knowledge and this raises the traditional, nagging question about human behavior: does knowledge effect, or even affect human behavior? This question raises a second: what change, if any, can formal education have on human behavior? Plato is the first to confront this nagging question, indirectly through Socrates, his teacher in the *Apology*, but formally within his dialogue, *The Meno*.

If knowledge is power, then self-knowledge is the source of power.

The knowledge and possession of wealth, honor and reputation certainly affected the actions of Socrates' fellow Athenians. Indeed, they sought the kind of knowledge which resulted in the acquisition of honor, wealth and reputation what today we call *applied knowledge*. The demand for such knowledge is what occasioned his fellow Athenians to hold the Sophists in high esteem as teachers because they taught the kind of rhetorical kind of applied knowledge which won the one arguing the argument regardless of the argument's truth or falsity. That demand also resulted in the Athenians' guilty verdict for Socrates and their decision that he drink hemlock. The same emphasis upon and trust in such "practical" knowledge (today labeled technology) is the same demand echoed within the Community College weighted requirement that A.A. and A.S. graduates have forty (40) units in a major and only twenty (20) units in what is a "dumbed down" general education (or literacy) requirement whose purpose is ostensibly to render the recipient able to read and write - the requirement results from the contemporary emphasis upon materialism and "making a living" (which realistically means having the wherewithal to pay taxes), paying no attention to the quality of that living.

As we shall see, Aristotle recognized that the knowledge which affected ethics is factual knowledge acquired by experience coupled with the free choice to perform a virtuous action; such experience results from sensible perceptions. Socrates observed the practical power of winning an argument vis á vis losing one's life in a law court as he experienced the rejection of his peers to his simple search for the meaning of being wise.

To believe in the truth compels reason to search for understanding.

Traditionally, as per Francis Bacon's *Novum Organon* (1620) "knowledge is power". But, if knowledge is power, then self-knowledge is the root or source of

that power. The root or source of any knowledge has to be self-knowledge for the simple reason that each person begins with the knowledge of self as the basis of the decision to perform a specific action. The occidental problem is that few westerners know *who they are* as human beings since they define themselves by **what they have** or **whom they know**. This identification problem intensifies with two facts: American occidentals lack knowledge of their history and of planet earth's geography. Consequently, few Americans can find themselves and they do not know where to look so they are more influenced by people who claim to know and who back up that claim by "success" gained by money, honor and reputation. These Americans become sheep led by shearers - or contemporaneously, advertisers!

Occidentals increasingly obtain their meaning from material possessions or personal reputation; an indication of this is the fact that American's way of deciding the "truth" is to conduct a "pole". Americans do not ask whether an action is right or wrong; rather, Americans currently ask what the consensus is and then determine what is right or wrong - since the common perception is that the Truth of being exists in the way humans think rather than in the way things are! Yet, the resulting perception and experience of self and the self-knowledge are the only things which provide us humans the perspective necessary to use any and all other acquired knowledge in a human way. Given the fact that our occidental tradition begins with Socrates, we must ask how did Socrates define "self-knowledge" and how did we arrive at our current state of mind toward material possessions, our increasing boredom, our search for "what life owes us" and consequent tendency to suicide?

**To be truthful is to remember,
but to lie is to forget.**

Socrates taught that self-knowledge is the basis of human wisdom and that wisdom is the highest virtue which human beings can achieve, so, in this sense, self-knowledge is human excellence or virtue. The occidental drama pitting self-knowledge and human wisdom against other kinds of knowledge, opinion poles and social morals begins in the fifth century B.C. with the *Apology* of Plato.

Does human empowerment derive from knowledge others have of us, or from knowledge we have of ourselves?

Plato wrote his seventeen year old reflections of his seventy year old teacher's responses to the Athenian accusations of impiety, corruption of

youth and treason in the *Apology* some 2,500 years ago. The *Apology*, therefore, is a good place to start an ethics course because Socrates was accused of being vicious for moral reasons as witnessed by the charges of being an atheist and a corruptor of Athenian youth. These charges were the equivalent to committing treason by Athenian standards so the majority of his Athenian peers considered him an evil person within their society, one worthy of exile or death. But, the question is: can a human being's worth be determined by other people's opinions?

The Athenian society accepted the viewpoint that politicians, poets and crafts-people were wise precisely because they all used their *logos*, or *speech* to organize their respective worlds: politicians organized the city-state through *nomos*, or *law*, poets the Greek language through *poein*, *making words sing*, crafts-people materials, such as clay and marble through *techne*, or *skill* in sculpting, painting and so forth. Indeed, the itinerant teachers of that part of Greece were called *sophists*, or *wise-men* because they taught lawyers how to win the cases they pleaded and politicians how to be popular and be called *wise* merely by teaching them to organize their speech and perfecting their speaking abilities.

To be wise within Athens meant *to organize your words* in a manner *such that you would win an argument or law suit by verbal power*, whether one took the affirmative or negative side of the issue. Indeed, to organize meant to empower because it showed the ability to control; to be rational, after all, shows the ability to control. So, truth was not the goal, rather, to manipulate answers in such a manner that one won the argument was the purpose. This was the Athenian custom, the moral thing to do and this was the approved activity of Athenian teachers. Sophists

were the morally acceptable teachers. Has human behavior or society changed much in the ensuing 2,500 years?

To know oneself is to be empowered.

Socrates, however, refused to accept money for asking questions after his manner of instruction. He claimed that he could not give students anything, since he possessed no knowledge, or answers so he did not deserve a fee. Ethically, however, it was wrong to take money for doing nothing and it was unethical to claim that he taught them knowledge when he lacked any such knowledge to teach. Socrates only questioned other people about the meaning and truth of their answers, and he only did this because he sought self-knowledge. This self-knowledge was a practical knowledge which each individual person could give to him or herself and this self-knowledge was an obligation Socrates was convinced that all human beings had first, toward themselves, secondly, toward society.. Self-knowledge, therefore, equaled self-empowerment. This self-knowledge meant knowing that you did not know; but, since knowing that you did not know is wisdom for a human being, such self-knowledge was the equivalent of human virtue, the perfection of being human. Thus, Socratically, having self-knowledge was equivalent to possessing human virtue and, therefore, had no necessary relationship to being wealthy, being respected or having a reputation.

The Apology describes the public trial of Socrates charged with three crimes against the state of Athens: corrupting the youth, questioning things above and under the earth, or atheism and taking money for instruction. Being found guilty of the first two charges was the equivalent of committing treason against the state and three penalties were possible: to cease these actions and pay a fine, to accept exile from Athens or, if found guilty after claiming innocence, to die by drinking hemlock.

**To be true to oneself is to be truthful
and to be truthful is to be ethical.**

The moral thing to do was to admit guilt, beg forgiveness and accept the fine. But, Socrates refused to plead guilty, rather he chose to invoke Athenian law and to defend himself against these charges. This meant, however, that he was obliged to accept the decision of 501 Athenian jurors. (19a-b) But, if they found him guilty, the law required him to drink hemlock. Thus, their decision meant that he did or did not offend public morals and the penalty for such an offense then as today is death. The significance of this decision affected the manner in which defendants pleaded their cases before the Athenian court. However, Socrates would not plead as was the custom; he chose to be ethical and die rather than to be moral and live:

I have been defeated because I was wanting, not in arguments, but in overboldness and effrontery because I would not plead before you as you would have liked to hear me plead, or appeal to you with weeping and wailing, or say and do many other things, which I maintain are unworthy of me, but which you have been accustomed to from other men. But when I was defending myself, I thought that I ought not to do anything unmanly because of the danger which I ran, and I have not changed my mind now. I would very much rather defend myself as I did, and die, than as you would have wanted me do, and live.

If the accused pleaded innocent, then, Athenian law permitted the Greek citizen to defend himself against the charges in a public trial to be judged by his peers. Socrates defended his personal actions before a jury of 501 peers. Ethics went on trial before morals.

To self-reflect is to be truthful and to live; to think what others think about you is to lie and to die.

Socrates argued that his actions had justice and truth as their basis, whereas the moral actions of the Athenians were

based on wealth, honor and reputation. Indeed, Socrates made three claims: first, that his actions originated in a proclamation by the Delphic Oracle, the Athenian Prophetess (20e-21c), secondly, were guided by an inner voice (perhaps, conscience) (31d-e) and finally, were performed out of obedience to the God (23a-d, 28e-29c, 29e-30b). Socrates even contends that God sent him to Athens as a horsefly to a horse (30e-31a), his mission being to sting Athens into the awareness that Athenians should "make your first and chief concern not for your bodies nor for your possessions, but for the highest welfare of your souls..." (30a-c) His mission was to sting the Athenian horse into self-knowledge.

Socrates calls attention to the basic problem confronting human behavior in the very first sentence of the *Apology*. The basic problem is to discover the truth, so "truth" itself is on trial, since he saw truth to be the difference between the **way things are** and the **way men say** things are:

I do not know what impression my accusers have made upon you, Athenians. But I do know that they nearly made me forget who I was, so persuasive were they. And yet they have scarcely spoken one single word of truth. (19A)

"Truth" is the English translation of the Greek word *aletheia*, meaning literally *a*, not, and *letheia*, *to forget, to hide, to bury and to cover up*. Socrates tells his accusers, therefore, that they have used words to describe his actions in such a way that even he, Socrates, almost "forgot" who he is. His self-knowledge was almost covered up by the words others used to describe him. Yet, he "does not forget", rather he remembers and proceeds to use words to remind his peers of what they have hidden, to uncover the truth which they have buried and covered up with their words. Socrates shows history the true purpose of rationality, what it means to be a rational animal, namely, to set the truth free by uncovering the obstacles hiding truth.

Questions require a belief in Truth, but answers do not.

Socrates begins his defense by asking: "...what did my critics say in attacking my character" (literally, **ethos**, *ethics*, the way I have myself, 19b)? Now, we come to realize that the basic problem between the **way men speak** and the **way things are** comes down to the fundamental issue of Confucian **honesty** as the condition of being alive humanly:

I must read their affidavit, so to speak, as though they were my legal accusers: Socrates is guilty of criminal meddling, in that he inquires into things below the earth and in the sky, and makes the weaker argument defeat the stronger, and teaches others to follow his example. (19b-c)

The charges are of two kinds: an old set referred to by the playwright, Aristophanes; and a recent set filed with the court by the three state prosecutors, Meletus, Lycon and Anytus. The charges are three: corrupting the youth of Athens, atheism and sedition, all treasonous offenses, that is, a capital offense. But, in a few words, Socrates is accused of nothing more than asking questions, of being honest, of seeking to understand how the Delphic Oracle could have said that Socrates was the wisest of men.

To be ethical is to live and to grow but to be moral is to stagnate, perhaps to die.

They accuse him of "making the weaker argument the stronger" because the only acceptable form of education and, consequently, the only morally acceptable manner of teaching was the sophistic way of providing students "canned" answers to hypothetical cases, regardless of guilt or innocence, error or truth. Socrates' manner of questioning his peers rendered "canned" answers useless. But, since the "canned" answer approach was the morally stronger argument, then Socrates was guilty of using a weaker argument, the question to overcome the stronger argument, the answer. The Socratic manner of instruction was, therefore, immoral and, in fact, undermined the very social fabric of Athenian society by corrupting the youth since they followed his example.

What, however, started Socrates' reflective habit of questioning? Here we see the relation of myth and religion to this Western birth of philosophic method and its relevance to an individual's ethics and a society's morals. Socrates' boyhood friend, Chaerephon went to the Delphic Oracle, the human mediator between Athens and the Goddess Athena and the God Zeus. This was the social custom in Athens. No important activity was undertaken until and unless the Athenian Oracle was consulted; this was true both for Greek and Roman societies. Socrates recounts the scene: "he asked whether there was anyone wiser than myself. The priestess replied that there was no one". Socrates continues:

When I heard about the oracle's answer, I said to myself, What does the god mean? Why does he not use plain language? I am only too conscious that I have no claim to wisdom, great or small. So what can he mean by asserting that I am the wisest man in the world? He cannot be telling a lie; that would not be right for him. (21B-c)

Questions unmask the weakness which answers claim as strength.

Seven centuries later, Aurelius Augustine explained his purpose for discussing philosophy at Cassiciacum by saying that his *faith sought understanding, fides querens intellectum*. Socrates believed in divinity and believed that the gods could not lie; Socrates' belief sent him seeking to understand what the Oracle stated, namely, that he was the wisest of men. Greek myth and Socrates' "religious duty" (21e-22) originates his search for self-knowledge and the meaning of human wisdom. So, a contemporary question is: whether or not the legal claim that religion can not occur in public occasions undermines its citizens' ethical actions - perhaps American law is more the cause of declining ethical values than anything else! Even Joseph Campbell and Mercea Eliade overlook this simple historical fact. Socrates himself characterizes his quest within the tradition of Odysseus for home and, much later of Jason for the golden fleece:

I want you to think of my adventures as a sort of pilgrimage undertaken to establish the truth of the oracle once for all. (22a-b)

Indeed, Socrates specifies that his religious belief is the driving force for his continued practice of questioning and pursuing the love of wisdom:

The law is what men say so to obey the law is to be moral.

That is why I still go about seeking and searching in obedience to the divine command. If I think that anyone is wise, whether citizen or stranger, and when I think that any person is not wise, I try to help the cause of God by proving that he is not. This occupation has kept me too busy to do much either in politics or in my private affairs. In fact, my service to God has reduced me to extreme poverty. (23b-c)

But, what has been the effect of Socrates' search for the meaning of wisdom through his philosophical method of questioning?

The effect of these investigations of mine, gentlemen, has been to arouse against me a great deal of hostility, and hostility of a particularly bitter and persistent kind, which has resulted in various malicious suggestions, including the description of me as a professor of wisdom. This is due to the fact that whenever I succeed in disproving another person's claim to wisdom in a given subject, the bystanders assume that I know everything about that subject myself. But the truth of the matter, gentlemen, is pretty certainly this, that real wisdom is the property of God, and this oracle is his way of telling us that human wisdom has little or no value. It seems to me that he is not referring literally to Socrates, but has merely taken my name as an example, as if he would say to us, The wisest of you men is he who has realized, like Socrates, that in respect of wisdom he is really worthless. (22e-23b)

What men say is not always the way things are!

The reason for such hostility is simple. Neither in fifth century B.C. Athens, nor in twentieth century A.D. America do citizens, whether as

individuals or as groups want to face up to their lack of knowledge, but particularly to their lack of self-knowledge and its consequent effect upon their behavior. This author thinks that a curious phenomenon occasions this lack of interest human beings show to face up to a lack of self-knowledge. We tend to become habituated to defining ourselves by **what we possess** and **by whom we are known**. Yet, whether those possessions be our knowledge or material goods, or whether these people whom we know know us is immaterial. However, we define ourselves through the power of what people think is valuable, literally, by **what men say** rather than by **the way things are**. This process distances us from ourselves with which we lose contact and consequently, lose perspective about the world.

If and when someone asks us questions, our self-definition is threatened. We feel de-stabilized, off-balance and get frightened. The question(s)

momentarily forces us to disassociate ourselves from the "truth" and "happiness" we have, and we now must make a personal choice (which we might not have done as yet) as to the truth or falsehood of the issue questioned and, therefore, of who we are versus who we think or others say we are. We are not prepared for making such a choice because we are not that balanced and secure about the truth of who we are. We lack the basic

To die frequently means to be alive,

foundation which self-knowledge provides. So we strike out: first, with a reassertion that what we "know" is true; then, we follow with the denial about the validity or relevance of the question; finally, we end with rejection of the person asking the question(s). Old Testament prophets and the New Testament Christ were rejected, persecuted and even killed because of the message they announced. This rejection can run the gamut from excusing ourselves from the conversation; from disassociating ourselves from the person who asks the question(s); to killing the person asking the question -- as in this case with the Athenians and as has been the case so many times in human history, that is, kill the messenger rather than accept the truth of the message!

Socrates, as each human being was raised within the family, both his private one and the public one, called the community. All humans are raised within the rules or law of the home and the community so, in this sense, all humans are raised to be moral, that is, to obey the rules of the household and of the community. Socrates alludes to this many places within the Apology (19-III, p.23;). Yet, he also states that "...I have a certain divine guide...from childhood. It is a kind of voice which, whenever I hear it, always turns me back from something which I was going to do but never urges me to act" (p. 33). So, given this "voice", Socrates states unequivocally, not only "...no man who could make me consent to commit an unjust act from the fear of death...", but:

The government with all its power did not terrify me into doing anything unjust. (p.34)

Thus, Socrates decides whether or not his action is right or wrong, that is just or unjust. This decision is the decision to be ethical and to live, versus the decision to be moral and to die. Socrates' demeanor highlights the truth of the Oriental thinker, Confucius on the other side of Socrates' world:

The Master said, "the ways of the true gentleman are three. I myself have met with success in none of them. For he who is really Good is never unhappy; he who is really wise is never perplexed; he who is really brave is never afraid. Tzu-king said, 'That, Master, is your own Way!'" (Analects, Bk. XIV, 30)

Plato's putting his memory of himself in writing as the Apology, as the seventeen year old student of Socrates listening and seeing the Athenian court of his 501

peers trying him for sedition, treason and the corruption of youth , did not document any unhappiness on the part of Socrates. Indeed, Plato characterizes Socrates as relieved with the trial and the court's decision, commenting that he was seventy and was looking forward to whatever afterlife might await him. Nor does Plato ever characterize Socrates as "perplexed". On the contrary, Plato characterizes Socrates as very matter of fact and comfortable in his conclusion about the meaning of the Delphic Oracle's statement that Socrates is the wisest citizen of Athens:

But, gentlemen, I believe that the god is really wise and that by this oracle he meant that human wisdom is worth little or nothing. I do not think that he meant that Socrates

To believe in the truth compels

was wise. He only made use of my name and took me as an example, as though he would say to men, 'He among you is the wisest who, like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is really worth nothing at all'. (*Apology IX, 23*)

Indeed, Socrates chides his fellow Athenians on their fear of death because such a fear is based on a lack of knowledge and, thus, a presumption that those who fear death know something that no human can know. Finally, Socrates states unequivocally: "I would very much rather defend myself as I did and die, than as you would have had me do and live". Socrates, therefore, pagan that he is certainly qualifies for the happiness, bravery and wisdom which Confucius laments that he lacks.

Socrates has come full circle. His philosophic search began with the statement by the Delphic Oracle and ends with his conclusion about the meaning of wisdom for humans and for God. The oracle's statement drove Socrates within, to search for the meaning of wisdom as predicated of himself, and led him to the truth about himself, about his fellow Athenian citizens and about God. Again, Plato emphasizes through the example of Socrates the purpose of human discourse and such is the reason he wrote his dialogues. Self-reflection and thus, self-knowledge (*metanoia*) provides simultaneously knowledge about other human beings and God. Socrates found that the most important knowledge a human being can have is self-knowledge, interior self-reflective knowledge where he also found that "voice" which warned him in the event he was going to do something wrong. Socrates concluded that he and other human beings have wisdom when they are aware that they do not know and God alone is wisdom.

Socrates proclaims his loyalty to the state of Athens and his support of the expulsion of the prior Athenian government administration as well as the restoration of the democracy now in power (21a). Furthermore, Socrates specifies his loyalty to the state of Athens as an obedient soldier "assigned to my position at Potidaea and Amphipolis and Delium...". (28e-29) So, this testimony proves that his ethical convictions do not result in illegal actions. Yet, despite his obedience

to the state in the face of death, he will not obey the state's demand that he cease questioning citizens about the meaning of wisdom. Here Socrates draws a line between public law and natural law: ethics obeys a higher law:

...I am your very grateful and devoted servant, but I owe a greater obedience to God than to you, and so long as I draw breath and have my faculties, I shall never stop practicing philosophy and exhorting you and elucidating the truth (literally, "uncovering what is covered up") for everyone that I meet. I shall go on saying, in my usual way...you are an Athenian and belong to a city which is the greatest and most famous in the world for its wisdom and strength. Are you not ashamed that you give your attention to acquiring as much money as possible, and similarly with reputation and honor, and give no attention or thought to truth and understanding and the perfection of your soul? (29d-e)

Here we have the answer to a nagging question: given the fact that this pagan Athenian Socrates showed such courage, wisdom and peace in the face of his trial and condemnation for treason and sedition, what could be the source of such virtues for a stone cutting pagan in the sixth century B.C.? Of course, a simple answer is the strength of his conviction originated with his self-knowledge, guided by "...a certain divine guide which is what Meletus has caricatured in his indictment...(which)...I have had...from childhood". But, no, the simple answer is that Socrates' courage, wisdom and peace roots in his obedience to God, his religious center. Nineteen centuries later, Thomas Aquinas, the Dominican teacher at the University of Paris calls attention to this same phenomena, namely, that given the fact that humans, such as the Athenians, can only judge external actions apparent to them, human law can make mistakes, so the divine law guides interior human actions to perform good actions. (*S.T. I-II*, 91, 4 and 95, 1) Thus, independent of human law, God, guides the conscience of humans to perform good actions, yet, this guidance permits them to choose such actions, as in Socrates' case, or to refuse such actions, as in the majority of Socrates' Athenian judges!

Aquinas also echoes Socrates' description of the "voice" as the "divine guide...I have had...from childhood" within his *Questiones Disputatae, De Veritate*, q. 17, a. 1 *De Conscientia*, or *Concerning the Conscience*. Aquinas calls the operation of conscience that by which humans inspect through knowledge any action to be taken, as, for example, taking counsel about something to be done. But, what is the characteristic of this "knowledge" through which conscience works. Aquinas provides a threefold characteristic, all three of which come from God: natural (indirectly from God, that is through one's self-knowledge of being human, acquired (that is, learned by education or by experience of living) or infused (directly by God). (*De Veritate*, q.17, a.5, ad 4) So, as Socrates describes this "voice", conscience signifies the application of knowledge to some act to be performed and the knowledge here results from self-examination and is Socrates'

self-knowledge. This is why Socrates states unequivocally, an “unexamined life is not worth living”, since such a life would not be a humanly lived life because such a life would lack self-examination and thus, conscience.

Questioning the statement by the Delphic Oracle has brought Socrates to the awareness of the importance of self-knowledge. (Later,

To be ethical is to be who I am; to be moral is to be whoever neers. societv. or some other

the thirteenth century A.D. Thomas Aquinas would echo the primary importance of the human soul in relation to wealth, honor and reputation as secondary when he observes: “According to the natural order, the body of the human being finds its purpose to be the soul and inferior powers of the soul, such as appetite and passions find their purpose to be reason”. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, CXXIX). This consequent self-knowledge has provided him perspective upon the world, his fellow citizens and God(s). He will not give up such an important discovery, the truth about human life and the perfection of human living.

Socrates himself compares his obedience to the state as a soldier facing death in war and of himself to God as a philosopher seeking truth, but facing death by hemlock. In so doing, Socrates dramatizes his preference for love of wisdom over love of material goods, honor and reputation and thus, over his own life within the city state:

...it would be shocking inconsistency on my part, gentlemen, if, when the officers whom you chose to command me assigned me my position at Potidaea and Amphipolis and Delium, I remained at my post like anyone else and faced death, and yet afterward, when God appointed me, as I supposed and believed, to the duty of leading the philosophical life, examining myself and others, I were then through fear of death or of any other danger to desert my post. That would indeed be shocking, and then I might really with justice be summoned into court for not believing in the gods, and disobeying the oracle, and being afraid of death, and thinking that I am wise when I am not. (28e-29b)

Plato's *Apology* clearly portrays Socrates as being ethical because he is religious. Furthermore, the *Apology* carefully describes Socratic philosophic method to be born from Socrates' belief in the myth of the Delphic Oracle and in the truthfulness of God. (Here originates Augustine's *fides quaerens intellectum*, literally, *faith seeking understanding*.) Thus, we observe a pagan from the sixth century B.C. crediting his love of wisdom, that is, the search for Truth Protagoras and Plato after him called philosophy with his belief in the existence of and truthfulness of what he termed God. Yet, this is only half of the story, that is, the description of how Socrates' search began. A fascinating fact is how this search ended.

Once Socrates understands what the Delphic Oracle meant by telling Chaerephon that “Socrates is the wisest in Athens”, this story ends with a conclusion truly amazing for a pagan:

But,
gentlemen, I

The Philosopher uncovers the truth

believe that the god is really wise and that by this oracle he meant that human wisdom is worth little or nothing. I do not think that he meant that Socrates was wise. He only made use of my name and took me as an example, as though he would say to men, ‘He among you is the wisest who, like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is really worth nothing at all’. Therefore, I still go about testing and examining every man whom I think wise, whether he be a citizen or a stranger, as the god has commanded me. Whenever I find that he is not wise, I point out to him, on the god’s behalf, that he is not wise. I am so busy in this pursuit that I have never had leisure to take any part worth mentioning in public matters or to look after my private affairs. I am in great poverty as the result of my service to the God. (*Apology*, IX, 23)

So, a philosophic search for Truth which began with a belief in the existence and truthfulness of God, literally, with a *faith seeking understanding* of what the God meant by saying that Socrates was the wisest in Athens, now ends with a new, special purpose for living his philosophic life! Socrates understanding that human wisdom means to live knowing that humans do not know, thus, knowing that one does not know brings him to a declaration of a belief in the purpose of living humanly, that is, an *understanding seeking the practice of that faith!*

The *Apology* presents a "democratic" state's first prosecution of the Western world's first teacher for treason and records the first use of ethics to defend the truth against the state's moral demand to stop questioning authority's

To find the Truth

definition of truth, the approved way of discovering the truth and public manner of finding fulfillment. (Can we have any wonder

why Plato thought democracy to be the most corrupt form of government! Democracy rules according to **what men say** -- government of, by and for the people -- rather than according to **the way things are.**) The Western world lives with the fact that the philosopher, Socrates was found guilty by the state and condemned to take hemlock because he pursued a philosophic method which uncovered the truth which the moral majority covered up.

I am quite clear that the time had come when it was better for me to die and be released from my distractions. That is why my sign never turned me back. For my own part I bear no grudge at all against those who condemned me and accused me, although it was not with this kind of intention that they did so, but because they

thought that they were hurting me; and that is culpable of them. However, I ask them to grant me one favor. When my sons grow up, gentlemen, if you think that they are putting money or anything else before goodness, take your revenge by plaguing them as I plagued you; and if they fancy themselves for no reason, you must scold them just as I scolded you, for neglecting the important things and thinking that they are good for something when they are good for nothing. If you do this, I shall have had justice at your hands, both I myself and my children.

To live honestly for a human

Now it is time that we were going, I to die and you to live, but which of us has the happier prospect is unknown to anyone but God. (41d-42)

One of the lessons Socrates teaches us social human beings about our unity, or individuality within the multiplicity, or society of family, friends and citizens is that in the face of death we have control over only one thing: ourselves. Indeed, any given human has control over only one thing in this mortal world: how we react to what comes into us. Whatever the kind of knowledge we have, the possessions we have acquired, the family we were born into, the society or state in which we were or are citizens, the reputation we enjoy, the powerful friends we can name, the simple fact is who we are and how we live. But, who we are and how we live roots and grows from our self-knowledge. So, if we have self-knowledge, then whatever manner of death and whatever occurs after death, we are at peace, balanced and centered. The

If to be human includes being social,

only control, therefore, available to any human being within this human condition is the control of oneself which is the result of self-knowledge; self-knowledge is the human virtue of honesty, the result of being ethical. The one obligation of any human being is, therefore, to be true to self - later, in the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas emphasizes the paramount importance of an individual's conscience and the consequent necessity of an informed conscience. (*Summa Contra Gentiles CXXIX*)

But, what relation do ethics and this virtue of honesty have to truth which all human beings seek? The Greek word which we translate as truth was and is: *aletheia*. The relevance of this word to the Greek idea of human virtue and perfection is clear when we analyze its meanings. This Greek word comes from the prefix *a*, meaning, "not" and the verb *lethein*, meaning, to forget, to hide, to bury and to cover-up. So, the Greeks in general and Socrates in particular defined truth as what it is-not, rather than what it is. Indeed, to seek truth as it is manifests the vice of *hubris*, or pride - perhaps a natural awareness of what the *Old Testament* describes in Adam and Eve's decision to seek the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Socratic and Greek *truth*, as we previously noted, is not forgetting, not hiding, not burying, not covering up. *Truth*, therefore, for a human being is being open to the way things are, in the face of what people say; thus, an *honest* person manifests an openness to being since *truth is*. The *(h)onest* human being, therefore, is the person who is (*onein, to be*). Socrates, therefore, was at peace in the face of death because he was (is); he "is or has himself" because he is ethical. The difference between Socrates within the *Apology* and Ivan Ilych in *The Death of Ivan Ilych* is the difference between an ethical human being and a completely social animal. The price of being *moral*, rather than *ethical* is high, as we shall see in *Chapter Two*, "Ivan Ilych: Ethics and Morals". The cost is the difference between being *who I am* and *who I am not* and the thought of suicide intrudes into my consciousness to bargain about the option we call **death**.