

Socrates Meets Jesus

A Brief Summary

Introduction

Who Needs Philosophy?

- Many Christians resist philosophy because...
 - It has often been used to promote a humanistic agenda; and
 - They erroneously think the Bible condemns philosophy.
- In fact, logic and reason are gifts of God.
- Due to our own egoistic tendencies, we need an accurate mental map of reality to help guide us along the road of life and guardrails to channel our thoughts and actions.
 - C. S. Lewis: “Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered.”

Origins of Greek Philosophy.

- (1) **Cosmology:** The nature of the physical/material world.
 - Rejection of traditional pagan mythological/superstitious religion.
 - An emphasis on rational and natural explanations for the mysteries of the universe.
 - Thales, Heraclitus, Anaximander, Empedocles, Democritus, et al.
- (2) **Metaphysics:** Moral, ethical, and theological issues.
 - The True, the Good, and the Beautiful.
 - The perennial issues of life.
 - Sophists.
 - Basic tenets of sophism:
 - Humanism;
 - Skepticism;
 - Relativism;
 - Individualism;
 - Pragmatism.

Socrates (469-399 B.C.).

- Moral philosopher.
- The “eternal law” (a.k.a. “natural law”).
- The Socratic Method.
- Critique of traditional Greek religion.
- Socrates’ *daimonion*.
- Socratic theology.
- A “proto-Christian”?

Plato: The Apology of Socrates

Socrates’ Defense:

- My accusers are eloquent, but “they have hardly spoken a word of truth.”
 - It is untrue that I am a corrupter of the youth and an inventor of new deities of my own.
 - “I do believe that there are gods, and in a far higher sense than that in which any of my accusers believe in them. And to you and to God I commit my cause....”

- I will speak honestly and plainly, and “Let the outcome be as God wills.”
- I conclude that I am the wisest man in Greece because only I realize my own ignorance.
 - “Well, although I do not suppose that either of us knows anything really beautiful and good, I am better off than he is; for he knows nothing, and thinks that he knows, while I neither know nor think that I know.”
- “But the truth is, O men of Athens, that only God is wise.”
- Because I have been true to my calling, “I am in utter poverty by reason of my devotion to the god.”
- “Men of Athens, I honor and love you; but I shall obey God rather than you, and while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy....
 - “For this is the command of God, as I would have you know. And I believe that to this day no greater good has ever happened in the state than my service to the God. For I do nothing but go about persuading you all, old and young alike, not to take thought for your body and your property, but first and chiefly to care about the greatest improvement of your soul.... Therefore, O men of Athens, I say to you: Either acquit me or not. But whatever you do, know that I shall never alter my ways, not even if I have to die many times.”
- “The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our separate ways: I to die, and you to live. Which is better, God only knows.”

Dialogue #1: Socrates on Moral Relativism

Preliminary Principles.

- (1) The first rule of dialogue: Seek clarity before agreement.
 - Clearly define any vague or ambiguous terms and concepts.
- (2) Objectivity: Something is real (or true) regardless of whether we acknowledge it, experience it, or agree with it – i.e., it is independent of human thought or actions.
- (3) Subjectivity: Something is real (or true) only if we acknowledge it, experience it, or agree with it – i.e., it is dependent on human thought or actions.

Seven Arguments for Moral Relativism – and Seven Responses.

- 1. Morality is subjective because different individuals and cultures have different values.**
 - In fact, different cultures generally agree on moral principles, although they differ in the application of those principles. This is similar to the relation between meaning and expression.
 - In the past, societies absolutized relativities; our society attempts to relativize absolutes.
- 2. Morality can't be objective because we are conditioned by our society and culture.**
 - Conditioning does not mean determining; conditioning allows for free will.
- 3. Subjectivism leads to tolerance; objectivism leads to dogmatism, intolerance, and attempts to force your values on others.**
 - Natural law values are not “my values” – they are universal and absolute values.
 - If truth were only subjective, why would we even care about anything? Why would it matter?
 - “Tolerance” has no meaning outside of objective truth; what we tolerate is error.
- 4. Morality is a matter of motives, which are subjective.**
 - Although motives are important, they are only one component of morality; morality also requires proper deeds or actions.
- 5. Morality is situational, which is relative.**
 - Situations are objectively real, so even if morality were determined by situations, it is still objective.

- ▶ Aquinas's moral trinity: (1)The act itself; (2)The motive behind the act; and (3)The situation.
- 6. Morality is in our subjective motives, not in objective facts. Acts cannot be evil.**
 - ▶ See #5 above: Aquinas's moral trinity.
- 7. Objective values would mean that we are not free moral creatures.**
 - ▶ See #2 and #3 above.
 - ▶ Our lives are not strictly determined, and God does not violate our free will.
 - ▶ Objective values align with reality – they are moral laws.

Dialogue #2: Socrates on Comparative Religions On Open-mindedness.

- The purpose of being open-minded is in order to seek the truth.

What Is Truth?

- Truth is that which corresponds to reality.

The Differences in Religions.

- Is there one God or many?
 - ▶ Monotheism: One God (Judaism, Christianity, Islam).
 - ▶ Polytheism: Many gods (Paganism, Hinduism, Shintoism).
- Is God personal?
 - ▶ Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Yes.
 - ▶ Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism: No, or don't know.
- Was Jesus Christ the divine Savior of humanity?
 - ▶ Christianity: Yes.
 - ▶ All others: No.

Are All Religions Equally Valid?

- If all religions were man-made, they would not necessarily be equally valid, but none would be The (absolute) Truth.
- But if one religion were not man-made but divinely-revealed, it would be The (absolute) Truth and therefore superior to all others.
- Socrates: How would we know that all religions are paths to the mountaintop unless we had a perspective from the top?
- Socrates: "If religion is God's invention rather than ours, then it would make sense that there would be only one road, the one made by God....
"If God made a road – a path to the summit – it is not arrogance but humility to accept this one road to God."

The Claims of Christ.

- Jesus claimed to be "the (exclusive) Way, the Truth, and the Life," and that "no one comes to God the Father except through me."
- This is exceedingly arrogant – unless....

Love and Truth.

- Christianity is a religion of love, but it is also a religion of truth – the two are inseparable.

On Sincerity.

- Sincerity is absolutely essential... but it's not sufficient.
 - ▶ We can be sincerely wrong.
- Different spiritual paths can lead to two different destinations: either to God or away from God.
- Socrates: "True sincerity yearns to know the truth."

Dialogue #3: Socrates on Christology

The Uniqueness of Christ.

- Why is all of history dated from the time of Christ?
- The uniqueness of Christ is not due to...
 - His teachings on love;
 - The fact that he died for his beliefs;
 - His great influence;
 - The fact that he lived what he taught;
 - The fact that he liberated people from ignorance and superstition; or
 - The fact that he was a great prophet.
- The unique thing about Jesus is that his followers believed he was God.
 - All the Jesus' early followers, all of the primary historical sources, and all of the earliest secondary sources were unanimous that Jesus was divine.
- Jesus declared unequivocally that he was divine and the Savior of humanity.
- Jesus was either insane, evil, or legitimate.

The Historical/Literary Context.

- When Jesus referred to God, he was speaking as a Jew in a Jewish context.
- There is a basic difference between the superstitious and the supernatural.
- The only sure way to know what Jesus meant is to read the Jewish Scriptures.

Dialogue #4: Socrates Discovers YHWH

The Basic Issue:

- What did Jesus mean when he claimed to be divine?
- What are the characteristics of God?

The Philosophical Orientation.

- Socrates: Philosophy is “simply the methodical search for truth using the rules of logic and sound reasoning.”
- A philosopher must believe that (1) truth exists, (2) it can be known, and (3) we do not already know it perfectly.
- A philosopher is neither...
 - A skeptic who does not believe in truth or that we can know truth.
 - A dogmatist who believes that he knows and understands the truth perfectly.
- Truth is objectively real regardless of whether we realize or accept it or not.
- For truth to do us any good, we must experience it personally and “allow it to shape and form our thoughts, our behavior, our lifestyle, and our worldview.”

The God of the Hebrew Scriptures.

- There is only one God (monotheism), and he is perfectly good.
- God is omniscient (all-knowing).
- God is personal.
- God is the God of all humanity – not just the “chosen people” (the Jews).
- God loves his creation with a perfect and pure love (*agape*).
- God is the source of all righteousness, and he demands perfection from those he created.
 - Socrates: “The pious people of my day usually believed that we owed the deities sacrifices and ceremonies. I, on the other hand, believed that the true sacrifice was to live according to the moral law. My society tended to separate religion and ethics, the God and the good. I tried to unite them.... I identified true piety with justice, goodness, and charity.”

Socrates’ “Greatest Surprise.”

- “I AM WHO I AM” expresses God’s own essential being.
- God is the “infinite and eternal *I*” – the ultimate Subject or Doer or Knower.

The Uniqueness of Biblical Revelation.

- Socrates: “All other religions have been man’s search for God. But the Bible is different – it is God’s search for man.”
- Moses did not conceive of this idea of God – it was revealed to him.

The Summa:

- Socrates: “I now think I understand what Jesus meant when he claimed to be God.”

Dialogue #5: Socrates Meets Jesus

The Great Encounter.

- In reading – and believing – the New Testament, Socrates has experienced a life-changing encounter with the living Christ.
 - Socrates: “It is... like a new life – a new spiritual life.”

The Meaning of Jesus’ Life, Death and Resurrection.

- The message of the NT is that “the supreme Creator-God became a man so that men and women could become gods – ‘partakers of the divine nature.’”
- Isn’t Jesus merely an archetype?
 - Jesus *is* an archetype, but he’s also *more* than an archetype: he actually existed historically and did what is attributed to him!
- The resurrection is more than a symbolic metaphor for the union of goodness and power.
 - Socrates: “If Jesus did not really conquer death, it follows that goodness does not really have power. In that case, the metaphorical meaning is no longer valid.”

Christ and Mythology.

- There is some truth in ancient mythology, but the Christian message is qualitatively different:
 - Jesus was more than a mythological character – he actually lived.
 - Socrates: “[The Jesus story] may be a myth, but it is a myth become fact.”
- How does one know if a myth was “divinely inspired” or a Satanic deception?
 - Socrates: “Myths are imaginative stories constructed around core principles. If the core principles are erroneous – for instance, the glorification of war, raw power, greed, or sexual exploitation – then they obviously were not divinely-inspired.”

The Centrality of the Resurrection.

- Death is a real physical and existential problem.
 - A purely metaphorical resurrection does one no real good.
- Certainly, Jesus’ disciples believed he had risen physically from the dead.
 - This faith is what inspired and empowered them to spread the Gospel and change the world.
- No naturalistic explanations for the disciples’ belief in the resurrection are plausible:
 - Socrates: “...If the miracle of the resurrection did not happen, then an even more incredible miracle happened.... That twelve Jewish peasants invented the world’s most fantastic and successful lie for no reason at all, and then proceeded to suffer and die for it as willing, joyful, and faithful martyrs.”

The Summa.

- Socrates: “What I found in the Gospels was absolute Truth – only it turned out not to be a principle but a person. And it is to that Person – that living Reality – that I will devote my life.”