

THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN HAPPINESS IN PLATO'S *GORGIAS*
(PLATONIC "CARE FOR THE SOUL")

by

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ABSTRACT: Plato in the *Gorgias* discusses the subject of human happiness in the context of people's moral condition and the ethical ideals professed by them. The discussion is conducted by Socrates with young sophists. Sophists take a relativistic view of morality by reducing it to cultural and social values. Socrates is convinced that moral ideas such as righteousness and justice have greater power than do culture and human institutions. Contrary to young Sophists who reduce human nature to biological and social instincts, he also sees an immortal soul in man. The innate quality of the soul is moral sensitivity, which makes man conscious of and focused on moral magnitude. Plato made human happiness dependent on awakening moral sensitivity, giving it a clear ethical meaning. Happiness is derived from, first of all, the moral condition of man and particularly his sense of justice and his sensitivity to another man's ill-fortune. The greatest unhappiness man can experience, according to Plato, is to disgrace himself by harming someone. It is expressed by Plato's principle of "not doing harm".

The question of happiness (the personal happiness of man) is undoubtedly one of the key issues in ancient Greek philosophy. One can even say, without much exaggeration, that ancient Greek philosophy is imbued with a kind of eudaemonism that sets happiness in the highest position among all the values human beings aim at. Even such a great rationalist as Aristotle considered it a crucial and fundamental issue of his ethics (and politics)¹. Regardless of its typical, commonly experienced meanings, this is one of the most important philosophical issues in general. This question is highly pertinent as it is in fact a question concerning the mystery of human nature and human existence. Its prominence increases when it is raised by such a philosopher as Plato, who always inquires into final matters and expects to be given definite answers.

This last question (the question of the meaning of human existence) introduces the first one (the question of human happiness) into the realm of the most profound mystery (or rather enigma, the term applied by G. COLLI²) enshrouding

¹ Arist. *Eht. Nic.* 1095a, 19.

² COLLI 1991: 52–78.