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Greek Ethics.Week 1 Questions.

Think about as many of the questions in section B as you can, and try to sketch an answer to the questions on one of the passages in section A.

(Note: These questions are meant to stimulate your thinking and help you to read the text critically. I'm not expecting you to write out answers to every one. That would take much too long.)

We shall discuss these questions at the beginning of the next lecture.

If you want to, you can give me a written answer to the questions on one of the two passages in part A. If you do this, your answer should be no more than 200 words long. If you email me this, or leave it for me at the philosophy department by Tuesday evening of next week, I shall return it to you in class on Friday. (This is not a requirement of the course.)

Also, remember that you are welcome to email me (or leave a message in the department for me) with questions arising from this lecture or from your reading.

PART A: Questions on a passage of text.

Passage I

Socrates asks Meletus "Who improves the young?" Meletus answers that everybody improves the young except Socrates.

Soc: All the Athenians, it seems, make the young into fine good men, except me, and I alone corrupt them. Is that what you mean?

Mel: That is most definitely what I mean.

Soc: You condemn me to a great misfortune. Tell me: does this also apply to horses do you think? That all men improve them and one individual corrupts them? Or is quite the contrary true, one individual is able to improve them, or very few, namely the horsebreeders, whereas the majority, if they have horses and use them, corrupt them? Is that not the case, Meletus, both with horses and all other animals? Of course it is, whether you and Anytus say so or not. It would be a very happy state of affairs if only one person corrupted our youth, while the others improved them. (25b)

Questions:

Socrates' point here relies on an implicit analogy between training horses and bringing up people. What is the analogy? Is it a good one?

What more general point is Socrates trying to make about the ability to teach?

Meletus supports the democracy. Can you see any link between Meletus' view about who improves the young and his commitment to democracy?

Passage II

Later, Meletus says that he thinks Socrates corrupts the young deliberately. Socrates responds:

Are you so much wiser at your age than I am at mine that you understand that wicked people always do some harm to their closest neighbours while good people do them good, whereas I have reached such a pitch of ignorance that I do not realize this, namely that if I make one of my associates wicked I run the risk of being harmed by him, so that I do such a great evil deliberately, as you say? I do not believe you, Meletus, and I do not think anyone else will. Either I do not corrupt the young, or, if I do, it is unwillingly. (25d-e)

Questions:

Socrates argues in this passage, that if he has corrupted the young, he must have done so unwillingly.

Can you state his argument in your own words?

What are the assumptions of this argument? Do you find the argument convincing? If not why not? If you were Meletus, what would you say in reply?

PART B: More general questions to think about when reading the Apology.

(Of these, questions (1) and (6) might be used as tutorial essay questions. The others are asking for shorter answers.)

(1) Socrates thinks that when he goes round cross-examining people, he is doing a public service. In what ways does Socrates think that he benefits the people he cross-examines? And how can he do this without having knowledge?

(2) Why does Socrates carry on cross-examining people, even after he has worked out what the oracle means?

(3) Is Socrates defending free speech?

(4) If you been a member of the jury and had heard Socrates give this speech, would you have found him guilty? Why or why not?

(5) Can you find a place in the Apology where you think Socrates is being ironic?

(6) (a) Identify the passages in the Apology where Socrates denies that he has knowledge or wisdom.

(b) Can you find any things that Socrates, in the Apology, claims that he does know?

(c) Are Socrates' confident moral assertions consistent with what he says in the passages you identified

in (a)?

PART C: New reading for next time - The Meno up to 79e.

Question: In the Meno, Socrates thinks that a definition must satisfy certain conditions. What are those conditions? Why do you think Socrates is looking for a definition of this sort?