

SOCRATIC FRUSTRATION

By Jeff Dunne

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CHARACTERS

PLATO	The ancient, Greek philosopher, disciple of Socrates
MIKONOS	A student of Plato
DYLAN	A modern era college student who has somehow stepped into ancient Greece

(It is a chamber in ancient Greece. Plato is sitting with one of his students, just beginning a discussion on the nature of learning.)

PLATO

What I would like to discuss with you today is the approach that my mentor would use with Xenophon and myself when we were under his tutelage – what I have come to call The Socratic Method.

MIKONOS

A way of thinking?

PLATO

In a sense, but foremost a method of teaching. Rather than simply providing an answer to a question, Socrates would have a student explore it themselves by asking carefully considered questions.

MIKONOS

But if the student didn't know about the topic...

PLATO

Socrates believed that through guided exploration, the student would build that knowledge. The questions did not merely direct the student's mind, but provided information as well.

MIKONOS

I see.

PLATO

And by introducing the knowledge as a question, the student would find it less threatening to their current worldview. In time, his understanding would evolve, as new facts demanded a new, more encompassing perspective.

(There is a knock, and Dylan walks in.)

DYLAN

Professor uh... *(looks at a card in his hand)* Play-Dough?

PLATO

Pla-to *(emphasizing the t-sound)*.

DYLAN

Uh, right. *(Almost mocking...)* Pla-to.

And you are...?

PLATO

Dyl-an.

DYLAN

Dill Ann?

PLATO

Yeah. Dylan. As in... Dylan.

DYLAN

An unusual name.

PLATO

Yeah. I think my parents were gonna call me Luke, but then my cousin was named Luke, and—

DYLAN

I see. Is there something I can do for you, Dylan?

PLATO

Says here (*indicating card*) that you're my prof for Intro to Philosophy.

DYLAN

I am?

PLATO

Yeah. (*Becoming aware of Mikonos.*) Hey, dude.

DYLAN

Dude?

MIKONOS

(*Mikonos thinks it is a question, but Dylan just thinks he is replying.*)

DYLAN

Are you in the class too? That's cool.

MIKONOS

Cool?

DYLAN

What?

PLATO

I'm sorry, but I only accept students that I have chosen—

DYLAN

That's total bull! It says right here (*indicating his schedule*) that I'm in the class. Dude, I need this to graduate. I know I'm a few minutes late, but come on. Don't get all cracked out.

MIKONOS

Perhaps Dylan could help with exploring the Socratic Method we were discussing.

(Plato thinks about this for a moment, then nods.)

PLATO

Very well. Come in, Dylan. Have a seat.

DYLAN

(Very glad to be getting his way...)

Alright...

PLATO

Now, Dylan, today we are going to explore the nature of good and evil.

DYLAN

Sure. Whatever.

PLATO

Can you explain the difference?

DYLAN

What difference?

PLATO

The difference between good and evil.

DYLAN

Sorry, dude. Did you just cover that, cuz I kinda phased out there for a minute.

PLATO

I didn't (*awkwardly, imitating*) cover it. I'm asking *you* to explain it.

DYLAN

How would I know if you didn't already cover it?

PLATO

Just try, based on your experiences. Can you do that?

DYLAN

Uh, sure, I guess. Good is, you know, like when something really awesome happens, and you're all, like, (*excited*) whoa, dude! And evil, well, evil's like (*shocked and in disbelief*) whoa, dude.

(Plato and Mikonos share confused looks.)

PLATO

Okay. So tell me, what makes a given thing good?

DYLAN

What?

PLATO

What makes something (*mimicking the first version*) "whoa dude"?

DYLAN

I don't know. It's just what it is.

PLATO

I see. Alright, tell me. When you see or experience something good, what is it about that thing that you immediately recognize?

DYLAN

I don't follow.

PLATO

What kind of trait would tell you that something is good? Or perhaps, what is it that you feel that implies its goodness?

DYLAN

I don't follow.

PLATO

(Ever so slightly losing patience...)

How do you know something's good?

DYLAN

What?

MIKONOS

(To Plato)

May I? *(To Dylan)* How do you know something's good, *dude*?

DYLAN

What?

PLATO

(To Mikonos, with an appreciative nod...)

Worth a try. *(To Dylan...)* Can you explain to me the difference between good and evil?

DYLAN

I'm not following.

PLATO

(Taking a big sigh, and then...)

Alright. Let's take an example. Suppose someone, in the middle of the night, secretly infiltrates his neighbor's lands, and steals some chickens from the roost. Is that good or evil?

DYLAN

Oh, no way! Your neighbor has chickens?! I had a neighbor who had a boa constrictor named Chuckles, and it—

PLATO

Dylan! Dylan! Stay focused. Would that be good or evil?

DYLAN

A lot of people give them a bum rap, but I don't think snakes are bad. They're kin—

PLATO

Not the snake. The chickens. Is someone stealing their neighbor's chickens good, or is it evil?

DYLAN

No way! You have chicke—

PLATO

DYLAN!!

DYLAN

Don't get all huffy, dude.

PLATO

(Calming himself...)

Is it good or evil?

DYLAN

Getting huffy? I don't think it's good or evil. Maybe a little more evil than good, but—

MIKONOS

(Suddenly having an idea, turns to Plato...)

Is this something you planned? Is he some kind of thespian who—

PLATO

I wish. Now Dylan, I want you to listen carefully. Are you listening?

(There is a pause, then...)

DYLAN

I don't hear anything.

PLATO

No. Listen to me. *(Slowly, as if to a complete idiot...)* How do you know if something is good?

DYLAN

I guess I'd look for some kind of label.

MIKONOS

I never understand what he's saying.

PLATO

A label? What do you mean, a label?

DYLAN

Like on a can of soup, where it says "Mmm mmm *good*".

PLATO

A label on a can of soup?

DYLAN

Right.

PLATO

You discern the difference between good and evil by reading it from a can of soup?

DYLAN

Was that the question?

PLATO

You're doing this deliberately, aren't you?

DYLAN

What?

PLATO

Are you at all *trying* to think? Even a little?

DYLAN

Dude, you can't talk to me that way. I have rights! I pay your salary!

PLATO

What on Earth are you talking about?!

DYLAN

You know, my mom and dad both went to this school. They know the provost. They donate a lot of money here.

(There is a long pause. Then...)

PLATO

Out.

DYLAN

What?

PLATO

Out. Get out.

DYLAN

This is discrimination.

PLATO

I said g... What?

DYLAN

It's discrimination!

PLATO

Yes. (*He thinks he finally found a way to reach Dylan.*) Yes it is. Now. Why do you say that?

DYLAN

You're not kicking *him* out. And you keep asking me questions, but you never ask this dude anything. It's total discrimination.

PLATO

And is discrimination a good thing or a bad thing?

DYLAN

What?

PLATO

Discrimination. Is it a good thing or a bad thing?

DYLAN

It's bad!

PLATO

(*Excited, thinking he has finally gotten in...*)

And how do you *know* it's bad?

DYLAN

Everyone knows that.

PLATO

But *how* do you know?

DYLAN

Because that's what everyone says. Discrimination is bad. Diversity's good. There are signs up everywhere, dude. What are you, an idiot?

(*There's a long pause...*)

PLATO

Out.

DYLAN

You can't—

Out! PLATO

But I need to pass this class to graduate! DYLAN

Fine. You pass. Just get out. PLATO

You mean it? I pass? DYLAN

Yes. Pass. Right through the door. PLATO

No way!! DYLAN

(Dylan gathers his stuff and exits, raising himself...)

Passed it in one day! And they said this class was hard...

(After he is gone, Plato and Mikonos just stare at each other for a long moment.)

That was... interesting. MIKONOS

I suppose you could call it that. PLATO

So... about this Socratic Method— MIKONOS

(They pack up and exit over the remaining lines.)

Forget about it. Waste of time. Better off just writing out the answers on a can of soup. PLATO

People can learn that way? MIKONOS

PLATO

Oh, heavens no. It's just faster.

(Lights out)