

Know Thyself

The significance of self-knowledge has been recognised long ago in ancient Greece, as we can read in the following parts of the famous dialogue between Socrates and his friend Euthydemus:

Socrates: Tell me, Euthydemus, have you ever visited the Oracle at Delphi?

Euthydemus: Yes, indeed, Socrates. Twice. I always seek the best advice when I have an important decision to make.

Socrates: Did you notice the inscription above the entrance, the one you can't miss as you enter the temple?

Euthydemus: Which one is that, Socrates?

Socrates: It says *KNOW THYSELF*.

Euthydemus: Oh, yes! But I guess I didn't pay it too much attention. They hurry you so much to get in and out, I never stopped to think about that.

Socrates: But what about later, Euthydemus? Did you think it was worth thinking about, if you were making an important decision?

Euthydemus: No, I never have, Socrates. By the time I left, I'd gotten the oracle's advice, and I didn't think that further thought was necessary. But I also just assumed that I knew myself, I mean, how could I not. I'm really not that complicated, Socrates.

Socrates: Well, only you can decide about that, Euthydemus. But let's approach this from another angle. Yesterday I saw you at Aristides' sizing up the horses. Were you thinking of buying one?

Euthydemus: Yes, Socrates, I'm going down there now to close the deal.

Socrates: And did you spend much time examining the horse, to determine its strength or weakness, its health and age and temperament?

Euthydemus: Well, of course, Socrates. I've hung around the paddock and the stable for several hours on different days.

Socrates: And did you have in mind how you would want to use the horse and how you would need it to perform?

Euthydemus: That was uppermost in my mind, Socrates.

Socrates: And did you weigh what you learned about examining the horse against the uses you would be putting it to?

Euthydemus: Exactly, Socrates

Socrates: But, Euthydemus, you didn't go to a soothsayer or priest for advice one way or the other, did you?

Euthydemus: Why no, Socrates. Why should I? I could examine the horse myself, and it became apparent what is good for.

Socrates: Yet when you have a decision to make that will affect your whole life and those you care about, you accept what the oracle says rather than following the advice to *know thyself*...

Euthydemus: I see your point, Socrates. I could examine myself at least as well as I examine my horse.

Socrates: Indeed, Euthydemus. And do you think that people may choose more wisely when they understand their own strengths and weaknesses?

Euthydemus: That makes sense, Socrates. Wasn't our friend Podocles complaining bitterly yesterday about how he hates his work as a potter and wished he'd gone into something that made better use of his talents?

Socrates: Yes, I recall that dialogue. That's why I wanted to have this conversation with you. I thought you might want to consider that those who know themselves know what is appropriate for them and can distinguish what they can and cannot do. By doing what they understand, they both supply their needs and enjoy success. By refraining from doing things that they don't understand, they avoid making mistakes and escape misfortune.....

Source: *Socrates' Way: Seven Keys to Using Your Mind to the Utmost* (Google eBook) by Ronald Gross

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