University of Oklahoma Honors College Essay

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Many people when sitting on trial for a crime they either did or did not commit will look for any way out of their sentencing; any redeeming speck of their own humanity that reflects the good in themselves so as to prevent punishment. Whether guilty or not, it makes logical sense that the true nature of man would be to protect himself to the greatest degree possible. However, when on trial in Greece for charges of impiety and corruption of the youth, Socrates diverged from the norm, choosing instead that he be executed rather than to be exiled. In his final statements, he uttered the now famous phrase “The unexamined life is not worth living”, after which he was sentenced to death by poison.

In my personal interpretation of the phrase, I believe it to mean that if one were to live their whole life without accounting for all that they had done during their time alive, the life they had lived would be worthless to them. In a way, this meaning could be stretched to include the idea that everyone learns from their mistakes and successes, and is better off for them. Therefore, Socrates’ phrase is stating that if one doesn’t learn from their past, their life will be devoid of meaning due to never advancing intellectually. Additionally, this theory that one should examine their own life to learn from their past could be taken a step further in that one should not only examine their own life, but the lives of others as well, for the same basic reason: to learn and advance.

This conclusion is clearly illustrated by examining Socrates’ predicament near the end of his life. Here was a well-known philosopher, a man disliked by those he attempted to influence, who was criticized for pushing the boundaries of reason and thought out from the norm into what the Athenians would call blasphemous. Nevertheless, when faced with death he still pleaded to his fellow citizens to look at his life and learn from all that he had done, so that they themselves would be better off in the future[[1]](#footnote-1).

I am a proponent of this theory that one should learn from their past in order to better their future. However, I would not go so far as to say that a life in which you did not reflect on the past would be “not worth living”. Even if one fails to improve on their past failures and successes, they still hold the potential to achieve great things. These achievements may not be as momentous if the proposed had done the aforementioned reviewing of their own and others past experiences, but would be achievements nonetheless.

1. Information found from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_unexamined_life_is_not_worth_living> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)