

## Socrates and the Core of Moral Personhood

What is a person? What gives life value? What is most important? The capacity for abstracting from one's immediate impulses and making choices is the central feature of a human for Socrates. The ability to govern one's life by one's intentions to do what is right, even if we do not know what that is, is central for a moral being. Any choice that can harm ourselves or others is a moral issue. Our capacity to reason is our only avenue for making better choices. Doing this badly is to live a less worthy life according to Socrates. Using reason is the only protection we have against making poor moral choices.

Socrates: The center of value is your rational, moral personhood. Since we are prone to error and to think we know what is best when we don't, then we must be vigilant to protect our virtue. The only path open to pursue this is the examined life, a life in which we always are careful about our choices and actions by subjecting them to reason and testing to see if they do in fact promote justice and virtue.

Ignorance is dangerous to one's virtue and the examined life is the best way available to protect one's integrity or virtue by doing what is most reasonable, i.e., developing the skills to make better choices about justice and the other virtues. In this condition of ignorance, since one does not know, the next best thing is to use one's reason to try to avoid the worst choices.

Attempting to never do wrong/injustice protects one's most valuable possession, one's virtue, from harm. Others may harm my body and my possessions, but only I can harm my own moral personhood by my choices and actions. Therefore, no harm can come to a good person, regardless of their situation, even after death, which we know nothing about. But if there were some condition after death, the same applies: only you can harm your own goodness/virtue. Death is not something to fear, doing wrong is. To allow any fear to motivate us to do wrong is ignorance of what is best for us.

CRITO: Why is no one above the law? Why do we have an obligation to persuade, obey, or leave (before anything goes wrong)? If I only follow the law when I want to, then the law simply becomes an instrument of my own will and is thus no longer the law at all. This undermines any obligation to society that makes human life possible.