

## Humility Is The Character Trait I Most Admire

I am a very vocal advocate for the superiority of the classical liberal arts education, despite its diminished popularity in today's technical world. Although I've apologized to Mr. Reyneke <*another contributor*> for lacking the intellectual stamina in my pre-dotage to adequately discuss his U-K postings, I've expressed my appreciation, to both he and Mr. Mulville <*ditto*>, for the philosophical bent to their writings. I've also mentioned another philosopher who greatly influenced me, St. Anselm and his proof of God's existence, in private discussions with both atheists and the fervent faithful of this site. However, the philosopher that has influenced me the most, he that is the focus of this post, is Socrates.

As minimal preface, I would tell you that Socrates was Greek and is most known for the Socratic Method of teaching. Socrates asked his students questions to which he did not profess to know the answers, but would lead them to the truth using skepticism and empirical rhetoric. Our only knowledge of Socrates comes not from his words, but by the documentation of others, most famously, Plato.

In his Apology, Plato relates of Socrates' trial by the elders of Athens on charges of impiety and the corruption of Athenian youth. I recommend the story to any reader – it can be enjoyed on a surface level for his witty ripostes and does not require a deep understand to be great entertainment. My enlightenment came from his answer when questioned about the Oracle at Delphi's proclamation that Socrates was the wisest man in the realm.

The Oracle was known for answering in riddles. Perhaps her most famous was after a king's request to predict the result of a planned invasion, to which she said, "A great kingdom will be destroyed". Taking that to mean success would be forthcoming, the king attacked – and failed. His kingdom was then destroyed and the prophecy realized. Socrates' response recognizes that puzzling nature of the Oracle.

Socrates expressed puzzlement at the proclamation. He humbly noted the great minds of the day – mathematicians, astronomers, etc. – and wondered why they were not considered smarter than he. Nevertheless, he surmised, if the Oracle proclaimed him so, it must be because he was the only one who knew how stupid he was. While those great minds would, if asked, declare themselves smart, Socrates knew himself to be stupid.

I know myself to be stupid. I've met many smart people, but none believed themselves as smart as I've heard some of the most ignorant declare themselves. In fact, almost without exception, I have found that a high school diploma results in more self-righteousness than every post graduate degree ever conferred.

I tell those who'll listen that the most important thing I learned from college and

law school is that I am stupid. I tell my children that every day represents another opportunity to learn, but there are never enough days in a life to become smart. Humility is the character trait I most admire.

The paradox of my life is that I am often accused of arrogance despite the certainty of my belief otherwise. My critics confuse being "right" with being "arrogant." I do have a strident need to be "right," however I don't care how I arrive there. If my ideas are proven wrong, I am instantly the biggest supporter of what I have now been shown to be right. If not proven wrong however, no amount of blustering will change my opinion. Like Socrates, I would rather take a fatal drink of hemlock than betray my integrity.