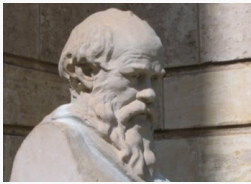


# Socratic questioning


Part of a series on
<b>Socrates</b>
"I know that I know nothing" Social gadfly · Trial of Socrates
<b>Eponymous concepts</b>
Socratic dialogue · Socratic method Socratic questioning Socratic paradox · Socratic problem
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**Socratic questioning** (or **Socratic maieutics**)<sup>[2]</sup> is disciplined questioning that can be used to pursue thought in many directions and for many purposes, including: to explore complex ideas, to get to the truth of things, to open up issues and problems, to uncover assumptions, to analyze concepts, to distinguish what we know from what we don't know, to follow out logical implications of thought or to control the discussion. The key to distinguishing Socratic questioning from questioning *per se* is that Socratic questioning is systematic, disciplined, deep and usually focuses on fundamental concepts, principles, theories, issues or problems.

Socratic questioning is referred to in teaching, and has gained currency as a concept in education particularly in the past two decades.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> Teachers, students or indeed anyone interested in probing thinking at a deep level can and should construct Socratic questions and engage in these questions.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Pedagogy

When teachers use Socratic questioning in teaching, their purpose may be to probe student thinking, to determine the extent of student knowledge on a given topic, issue or subject, to model Socratic questioning for students or to help students analyze a concept or line of reasoning. It is suggested that students should learn the discipline of Socratic questioning so that they begin to use it in reasoning through complex issues, in understanding and assessing the thinking of others and in following-out the implications of what they and others think. In fact, Socrates himself thought that questioning was the only defensible form of teaching.

In teaching, teachers can use Socratic questioning for at least two purposes:

- To deeply probe student thinking, to help students begin to distinguish what they know or understand from what they do not know or understand (and to help them develop intellectual humility in the process).

- To foster students' abilities to ask Socratic questions, to help students acquire the powerful tools of Socratic dialogue, so that they can use these tools in everyday life (in questioning themselves and others). To this end, teachers can model the questioning strategies they want students to emulate and employ. Moreover, teachers need to directly teach students how to construct and ask deep questions. Beyond that, students need practice to improve their questioning abilities.

Socratic questioning illuminates the importance of questioning in learning. It illuminates the difference between systematic and fragmented thinking. It teaches us to dig beneath the surface of our ideas. It teaches us the value of developing questioning minds in cultivating deep learning. Integrating Socratic questions in the following manner in the classroom helps develop active, independent learners:<sup>[4]</sup>Wikipedia:Identifying reliable sources

1. Getting students to **clarify their thinking**

*e.g.*, 'Why do you say that?', 'Could you explain further?'

2. Challenging students about assumptions

*e.g.*, 'Is this always the case?', 'Why do you think that this assumption holds here?'

3. Evidence as a basis for argument

*e.g.*, 'Why do you say that?', 'Is there reason to doubt this evidence?'

4. **Alternative** viewpoints and perspectives

*e.g.*, 'What is the counter argument for?', 'Can/did anyone see this another way?'

5. **Implications and consequences**

*e.g.*, 'But if...happened, what else would result?', 'How does...affect...?'

6. **Question the question**

*e.g.*, 'Why do you think that I asked that question?', 'Why was that question important?', 'Which of your questions turned out to be the most useful?'

The art of Socratic questioning is intimately connected with critical thinking because the art of questioning is important to excellence of thought. What the word "Socratic" adds to the art of questioning is systematicity, depth, and an abiding interest in assessing the truth or plausibility of things.

Critical thinking and Socratic questioning both seek meaning and truth. Critical thinking provides the rational tools to monitor, assess, and perhaps reconstitute or re-direct our thinking and action. Socratic questioning is an explicit focus on framing self-directed, disciplined questions to achieve that goal.

## Psychology

Socratic questioning has also been used in therapy, most notably as a cognitive restructuring technique in cognitive therapy, Logotherapy and Classical Adlerian psychotherapy. The purpose here is to help uncover the assumptions and evidence that underpin people's thoughts in respect of problems. A set of Socratic questions in cognitive therapy to deal with automatic thoughts that distress the patient:

1. Revealing the issue: 'What evidence supports this idea? And what evidence is against its being true?'
2. Conceiving reasonable alternatives: 'What might be another explanation or viewpoint of the situation? Why else did it happen?'
3. Examining various potential consequences: 'What are worst, best, bearable and most realistic outcomes?'
4. Evaluate those consequences: 'What's the effect of thinking or believing this? What could be the effect of thinking differently and no longer holding onto this belief?'
5. Distancing: 'Imagine a specific friend/family member in the same situation or if they viewed the situation this way, what would I tell them?'

Careful use of Socratic questioning enables a therapist to challenge recurring or isolated instances of a person's illogical thinking while maintaining an open position that respects the internal logic to even the most seemingly

illogical thoughts.

## References

- [1] <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Template:Socrates&action=edit>
  - [2] Jacques Brunschwig, Geoffrey Ernest Richard Lloyd (eds), *A Guide to Greek Thought: Major Figures and Trends* (<http://books.google.gr/books?id=AXI9j4n2iP4C&dq=>), Harvard University Press, 2003, p. 233.
  - [3] Paul, R. and Elder, L. (2006). *The Art of Socratic Questioning*. Dillon Beach, CA: Foundation for Critical Thinking.
  - [4] ' Outstanding Teaching (<http://web.archive.org/web/20101024112450/http://osiriseducational.co.uk/outstandingteaching/news/questions-questions-questions/>)'. UK.
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