

# *What is Philosophy?*

*an introduction*



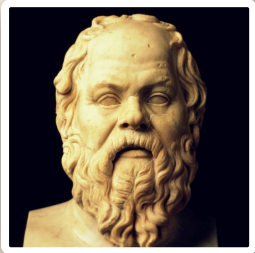
George Matthews, Pennsylvania College of Technology

2020

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*What is philosophy?*

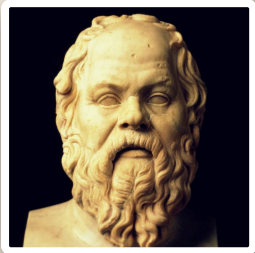
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470-399 BCE

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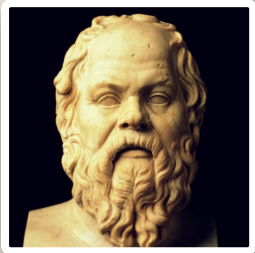
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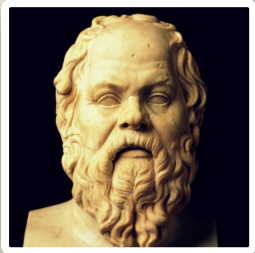


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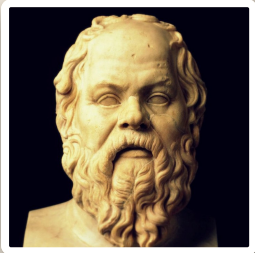


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?

*Why did people find Socrates' questions so threatening that they killed an old man who would likely soon pass away anyway?*

*philo-sophia*



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- It draws out basic assumptions, by asking questions with all of the wonder of children.
- And it subjects them to careful analysis with all of the precision of a lawyer.

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- If you are wrong in science your predictions fail, or you blow up the lab.
- If you are wrong in philosophy, your principles and most general beliefs conflict with each other and your mind is at odds with itself.
- Failure to clarify one's life philosophically may seem unimportant, yet for Socrates such an un-examined life misses what is most valuable about being human.



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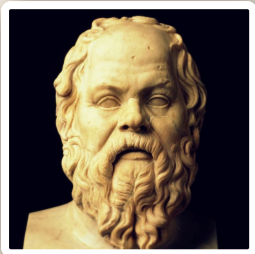


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- Religion emerges from the spontaneous ways we make meaning in our lives. It often embraces mythical and magical thinking which places us at the center of life's drama.
- Philosophy seeks clarification and justification and asks how we might find meaning in a world even where it might not be all about us.

# *Philosophical questions*

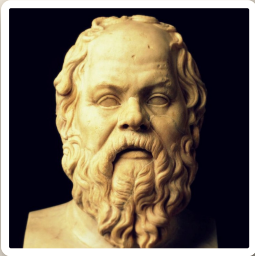
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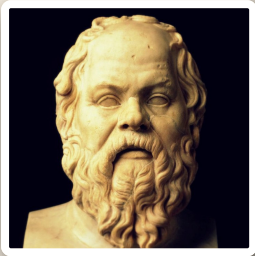
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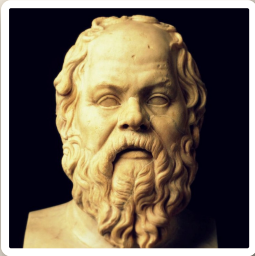


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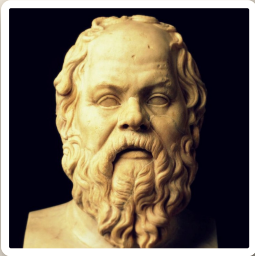
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- Such *normative* questions challenge us to give an account of ourselves, our values and our assumptions.
- Socrates' question is a question in the sub-field of philosophy called **value theory** or **axiology**.

*More value theory  
questions...*



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- Is morality in the eye of the beholder or are some things *really* right or wrong?

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- What would a just society look like and how might we get there from here?
- What is the value of art and should artists care about who their work might offend?

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1596-1650

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- Answering it requires clarifying the nature of knowledge and its varieties.
- This is a question in the sub-field of philosophy called **epistemology** or **theory of knowledge**.

*More epistemological  
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- What is truth and is it singular or plural?



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Martin  
Heidegger:  
1889-1976

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- Philosophical questions are often much more general than questions we normally encounter.
- Science seeks answers to particular questions about the regularities in the world of our experience and shrinks away from such general questions as being unanswerable.
- This is a question in the sub-field of philosophy called **metaphysics** or **ontology** which seeks an account of the basic nature of reality.

*More metaphysical  
questions...*



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- What sorts of things exist -- only matter, or minds/souls/disembodied spirits as well?

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- What is the relationship between minds and brains, and can we build an artificial brain that actually has a mind?
- How is freedom even possible in a world where everything that happens seems to have a cause outside of itself?
- Does God exist? This question is related to epistemological questions about religion (How can we know for sure?), and value theory questions (What does it matter?) as well.

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- Explicitly state our assumptions -- this can be a challenge since they *are* assumptions.
- Draw out their logical implications -- do theses fit well with each other or do they clash with other ideas we have?
- Make lots of distinctions. (Also the reason for the bad reputation of philosophers! Splitting hairs, or distinguishing real differences? It can be hard to tell.)



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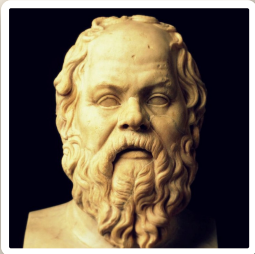
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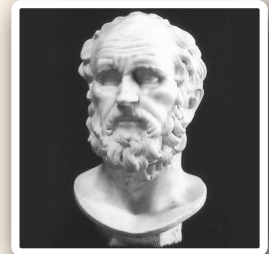
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- For Thrasymachus, might makes right in the sense that the powerful get to define what key ideas like "justice" really mean.
- Socrates, on the other hand highlights how true wisdom alone can guide us and so we must let logic lead the way.

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What is Justice?



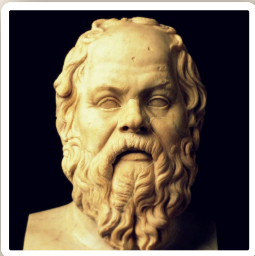
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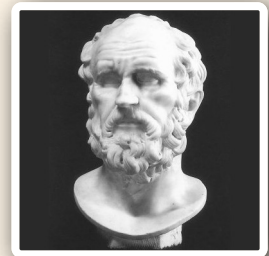
Thrasymachus:  
4th century BCE

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Whatever the powerful say it is?



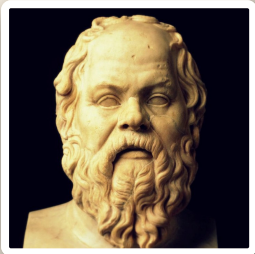
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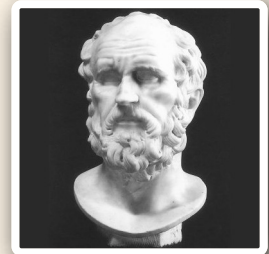
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So you say that might makes right? But even the powerful makes mistakes, right?



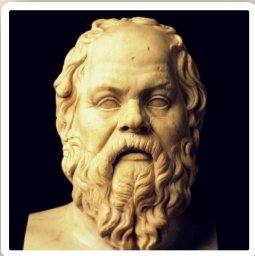
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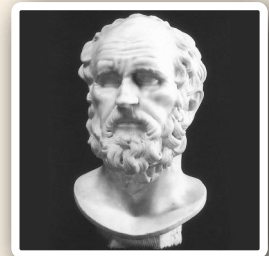
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Yes and what are you getting at?



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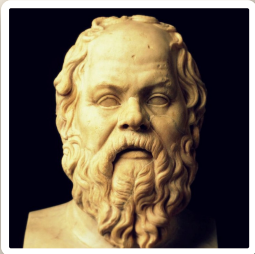


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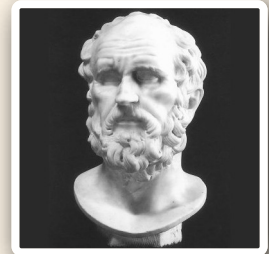


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Well even the powerful rely on something more powerful than them, what is truly in their best interests.



Socrates:  
470-399 BCE



Thrasymachus:  
4th century BCE

## *Find out more*

**Socrates on self-confidence** and questioning others about their values. A great video outlining the motivation for doing philosophy in the first place.



### Credits

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