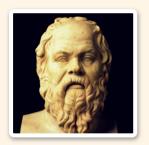
the examined life



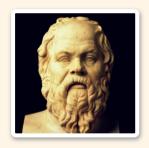
Jacques-Louis David "The Death of Socrates"

George Matthews, Pennsylvania College of Technology 2020



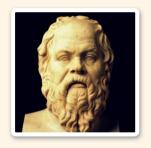
Socrates 470-399 BCE

"The unexamined life is not worth living."



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Socrates 470-399 BCE

 One of the founders of Western philosophy, Socrates spent his life encouraging others to critically examine their fundamental values and assumptions.

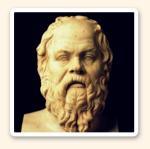
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Why did people find Socrates' questions so threatening that they killed an old man who would likely soon pass away anyway?

The word "philosophy" comes from the Greek words for "love" (*philos*) and "wisdom" (*sophia*) and might be literally translated as "the love or pursuit of wisdom."

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- It draws out basic assumptions, by asking questions with all of the wonder of a child.
- And it subjects them to careful analysis with all of the precision of a lawyer.
- **?** What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge? Can one know things without being wise or the other way around?

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- If you are wrong in science your predictions fail, or you accidentally blow up the lab.
- If you are wrong in philosophy, your principles and most general beliefs conflict with each other and so your mind is at odds with itself.
- Failure to clarify one's life philosophically may seem unimportant, yet for Socrates not doing so is to lead an "unexamined life" and miss out on what is most valuable and unique about being human.

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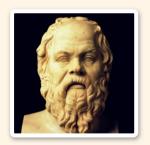
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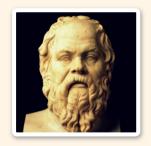
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- Philosophy is fundamentally "humanistic" since it trusts our ability to figure things out, while religion often appeals to faith, emphasizing the limits of our ability to comprehend things.



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- This is not a question about how we do in fact live but of how we should live.
- 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.





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- Can the ends ever justify the means, or should some things just never be done?
- 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?



Rene Descartes 1596-1650

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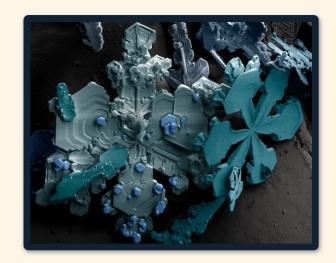




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- What counts as evidence, proof, or disproof and how does logical reasoning work?
- What is science and how do we distinguish it from pretenders to science?
- What is truth and is it singular or plural?



Martin Heidegger 1889-1976

"Why is there something and not just nothing at all?"



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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 this.
- This is a question in the sub-field of philosophy called metaphysics or ontology which seeks an account of the basic nature of reality.





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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 human freedom even possible in a world where everything that happens seems to be caused by external forces?
- Does God exist, and how might we be able to tell?



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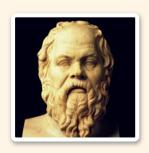
- Explicitly state our assumptions -- this can be a challenge since they *are* assumptions after all.
- Draw out their logical implications -- do these assumptions fit well with each other and do they clash with other ideas we have?
- Make lots of distinctions. (Philosophers have a bad reputation for "splitting hairs," but we think it is important to be precise in our use of language.)

 As an example of how philosophical analysis proceeds, consider the following dialogue between Socrates and Thrasymachus, a contemporary of Socrates who held that philosophical questioning was irrelevant.

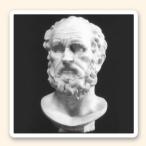
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- As an example of how philosophical analysis proceeds, consider the following dialogue between Socrates and Thrasymachus, a contemporary of Socrates who held that philosophical questioning was irrelevant.
- For Thrasymachus, might makes right in the 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 logical reasoning lead the way.

What is Justice anyway? It seems to me that Justice requires wisdom.

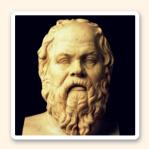


Socrates 470-399 BCE

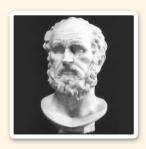


Thrasymachus 4th century BCE

Nonsense. Justice is defined as whatever people with power say it is. Might makes right!

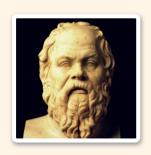


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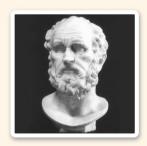


Thrasymachus 4th century BCE

But can't powerful people be mistaken about what is in their own best interests?

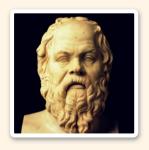


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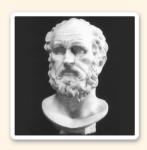


Thrasymachus 4th century BCE

Yes and what are you getting at?

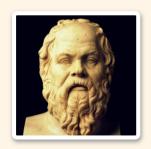


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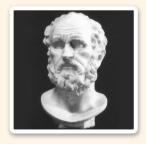


Thrasymachus 4th century BCE

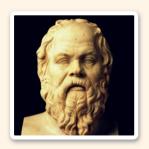
Well if powerful people can be wrong about what they want and need, how can they figure out what is best for them?



Socrates 470-399 BCE

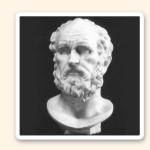


Thrasymachus 4th century BCE



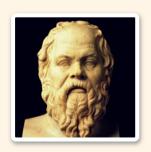
Socrates 470-399 BCE

I don't know.

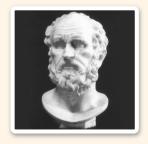


Thrasymachus 4th century BCE

By discovering the truth and letting *it* be their guide! So might doesn't really make right after all.



Socrates 470-399 BCE



Thrasymachus 4th century BCE

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- So we may as well figure out what is really true and that is what philosophy is all about.
- Reality does have the last word after all...

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.

What is Philosophy?: The Crash Course is a series of short, entertaining and informative videos produced by the Green bothers John and Hank. Here Hank Green gives his take on what philosophy is.

How to Argue: the second video in the Crash Course Philosophy series outlines the basics of philosophical reasoning and argumentation.



Rembrandt "Anatomy Lesson"

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