

## **Socratic Method & Second Order Questioning**

Critical thinking is the process we use to reflect on, assess and judge the assumptions underlying our own and others ideas and actions. One method of learning this skill is through the Socratic Method.

Socratic Method; the method of inquiry and instruction employed by Socrates(c.470 – 399 BC) especially as represented in the dialogues of Plato and consisting of a series of questionings the object of which is to elicit a clear and consistent expression of something supposed to be implicitly known by all rational beings (merriamwebster.com)

The Socratic Method does not merely call for common sense but examines what common sense is.

The Socratic method asks: Does the common sense of our day offer us the greatest potential for self-understanding and human excellence? Or is the prevailing common sense in fact a roadblock to realizing this potential?

A Socratic dialogue reveals how different our outlooks can be on concepts we use every day. It reveals how different our philosophies are, and often how tenable - or untenable, as the case may be - a range of philosophies can be. Moreover, even the most universally recognized and used concept, when subjected to Socratic scrutiny, might reveal not only that there is not universal agreement, after all, on the meaning of any given concept, but that every single person has a somewhat different take on each and every concept under the sun.

What distinguishes the Socratic method from mere nonsystematic inquiry is the sustained attempt to confront our own dogmatism and explore the ramifications of certain opinions and then offer compelling objections and alternatives.

Socrates' method of examination can indeed be a vital part of existence, but the fulfillment that comes from Socratizing comes only at a price - it could well make us unhappy, more uncertain, more troubled, as well as more fulfilled. It can leave us with a sense that we don't know the answers after all, that we are much further from knowing the answers than we'd ever realized before engaging in Socratic discourse. And this is fulfilling - and exhilarating and humbling and perplexing.

At certain junctures of a Socratic dialogue, the "forcing" that this confrontation entails - the insistence that each participant carefully articulate their singular philosophical perspective - can be upsetting. But that is all to the good. If it never touches any nerves, if it doesn't upset, if it doesn't mentally and spiritually challenge and perplex, in a wonderful and exhilarating way, it is not Socratic dialogue. This "forcing" opens us up to the varieties of experiences of others - whether through direct dialogue, or through other means, like drama or books, or through a work of art or a dance. It compels us to explore alternative perspectives.

## The Socratic method in context:

### ***How can we overcome alienation?***

Challenge the premise of the question at the outset.

You may need to ask:

-Is alienation something we always want to overcome?

For instance, Shakespeare and Goethe may have written their timeless works because they *embraced* their sense of alienation rather than attempting to escape it.

If this was so, then you might want to ask:

-Are there many different types, and degrees, of alienation?

Depending on the context, are there some types that you want to overcome and other types that you do not at all want to overcome but rather want to incorporate into yourself?

And to answer effectively such questions, you first need to ask and answer such questions as:

-What is alienation?

-What does it mean to overcome alienation?

-Why would we ever want to overcome alienation?

-What are some of the many different types of alienation? What are the criteria or traits that link each of these types?

-Is it possible to be completely alienated?

And many more questions besides.

Adapted from: [https://www.philosopher.org/Socratic\\_Method.html](https://www.philosopher.org/Socratic_Method.html)

### **Some sample second-order questions:**

1. What is the difference between analysing and assessing?
2. How does this tie in with what we learned before?
3. How do you know when you're right about something?
4. How would your answer be different if...?
5. What is the counterargument for that?
6. When did you last come across something that changed the way you think?
7. What are some possible implications of this?
8. What do you think caused this to happen?
9. How did you arrive at that answer?
10. What prompted you to ask that question?
11. What evidence supports that claim?
12. What's the reasoning behind your answer?
13. Can you elaborate?
14. How important is it to be right all the time?
15. **Is this always true in all ways?**

Adapted from: <https://www.opencolleges.edu.au/informed/features/socratic-questioning/>