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Socratic Philosophy: Dialectics, Ethics, and Enduring Influence

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Abstract: Socrates, a foundational figure in Western philosophy, left no written works, but his ideas, preserved through Plato's dialogues and Xenophon's writings, continued to have a profound influence on intellectual thought. This study focuses on analysing core elements of Socrates' philosophy, including the Socratic method, self-knowledge-based epistemology, and virtue ethics. It assesses his lasting influence on thinkers from ancient to modern times. The analysis uses a comparative and interpretive approach, combining original writings from Plato and Xenophon with modern philosophical interpretations to clarify the development and practical application of Socratic principles. The results show that the Socratic method, a technique of careful questioning, not only promoted critical thinking in ancient Greece but also laid the foundation for modern dialectical methods in education and discussion. In terms of epistemology, Socrates viewed knowledge as self-knowledge, challenging traditional views by emphasising looking within rather than relying on external authority, offering a new approach to personal growth. His ethical views, which focused on moral integrity rather than conformity to social norms, provided a timeless model for personal responsibility. Research has also shown

Socrates' profound influence on Plato's idealism, Aristotle's realism, and modern existentialists such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, who adapted his ideas to explore human existence and morality. Despite his execution for allegedly corrupting youth and rejecting the Athenian gods, Socrates' legacy remains as a catalyst for critical thinking and moral reflection. This analysis highlights the novelty of Socrates's introspective approach and its practical implications, offering educators, philosophers, and individuals a flexible tool for fostering self-awareness and moral clarity in an increasingly complex world.

Keywords: Socrates, Dialectic, Knowledge, Ethics, Western Philosophy.

Introduction

Historical background and role of Socrates in Western philosophy

Socrates (c. 470–399 BC) is a unique figure in the history of Western philosophy because he left no written works, but his influence has profoundly shaped philosophical thinking for centuries. Unlike pre-Socratic philosophers such as Thales and Anaximander, who focused on cosmology and the nature of the natural world, Socrates shifted his focus to exploring human beings, especially issues of knowledge, ethics, and how to live. His thought is known primarily through Plato's dialogues, such as the *Apology*, *Meno*, and *Phaedo*, as well as Xenophon's account in the *Memorabilia*. Although the two sources sometimes differ in their interpretation, both Plato and Xenophon portray Socrates as a thinker who constantly asks questions in search of truth. This trait has made him a symbol of philosophical perseverance.

Socrates lived in a prosperous but turbulent period in Athens, when democracy was growing alongside political and social strife. In 399 BC, he was sentenced to death for “corrupting the youth” and “not believing in the gods of the city”. However, his death did not end his thinking, but, on the contrary, turned him into a symbol of philosophical perseverance. In the *Phaedo*, Plato describes Socrates calmly drinking a cup of hemlock, expressing his acceptance of his fate for the sake of his ideals. This event was not only a personal tragedy but also an important milestone in the history of Western philosophy, marking the beginning of a tradition of critical and ethical thinking.

Main aspects of Socrates' philosophy

Socrates' philosophy revolved around three main aspects: the Socratic method, epistemology, and ethics. The Socratic method, also known as the dialectical method, is evident in the *Meno*, where he uses a series of questions to help his interlocutors discover knowledge for themselves. Instead of providing answers, Socrates encourages self-reflection, acting as a “midwife” of knowledge – an image he describes himself in the *Theaetetus*. This method became the basis for the dialectical approach in later philosophy. In epistemology, Socrates is famous for saying, “I only know that I know nothing. This is not a denial of knowledge but an assertion that recognising one's ignorance is the first step to achieving wisdom. He believed that true

knowledge lies not in surface information but in a deep understanding of fundamental principles, as discussed in the Meno when he inquires into the nature of virtue. This view challenged traditional notions of knowledge, laying the foundation for later epistemological theories. In the field of ethics, Socrates argued that virtue is knowledge and that no one will intentionally do evil if they truly understand what is good. According to him, wrongdoing comes from ignorance, and education is the path to a virtuous life. Xenophon echoes this view in the Memorabilia, where Socrates emphasises the importance of self-awareness. His ethical ideas were not only theoretical but also practical, encouraging people to live a meaningful life through constant self-questioning and self-improvement.

The influence and significance of Socrates

The influence of Socrates on Western philosophy is immeasurable. Through Plato, his ideas laid the foundations for Platonism, and then Aristotle, who shaped ancient philosophy. The Socratic method and ideas about knowledge and virtue continued to influence Renaissance philosophers such as Montaigne and modern thinkers such as Sartre. The Socratic method is still used in education and law today, demonstrating the enduring vitality of his ideas. Socrates was not only a philosopher but also a timeless symbol of the quest for knowledge and living a virtuous life, as recorded through his life and death in Plato's Apology and Phaedo. With its focus on humanity and morality, his philosophy remains a constant source of inspiration for humanity in its journey of self-discovery and world-discovery.

Research Focus and Forward

This study focuses on analysing the core aspects of Socrates' philosophy—dialectical method, self-knowledge epistemology, and virtue ethics, and assessing his enduring influence in modern philosophical and educational contexts. To achieve this goal, we adopt a comparative and interpretive approach, combining sources from Plato and Xenophon with modern philosophical interpretations to illuminate the development and practical implications of Socratic principles. The following section details the research methodology used to conduct this analysis, including the selection of materials, the analytical methods, and the steps taken.

Research Problem

The relevance of studying Socrates' philosophy lies in its potential to address current intellectual and ethical challenges while advancing philosophical inquiry.

Why is it necessary to analyse this problem now?

What benefits will it bring to society?

How will it help the scientific field?

Research Focus

This study centres on a comprehensive analysis of Socrates' philosophy, with a particular emphasis on three core components: the Socratic method, his epistemology rooted in self-

awareness, and his ethics of virtuous living. The authors' scientific opinion focuses on reinterpreting these elements to highlight their novelty and practical significance in addressing modern intellectual and moral challenges. By examining Socrates' influence across historical periods and cultural contexts, the research seeks to bridge his ancient ideas with contemporary applications, offering a fresh perspective on how his philosophy can inform critical thinking, education, and ethical behaviour today.

Research Aim and Research Questions

The primary purpose of this study is to analyse the key aspects of Socrates' philosophy, dialectical method, and epistemology. It examines ethics and evaluates their enduring relevance and practical utility in modern philosophical and educational contexts.

Research Questions:

1. How does the Socratic method, as a tool of critical inquiry, contribute to contemporary education and philosophical discourse?
2. In what ways does Socrates' epistemology, centred on self-awareness, offer a novel framework for personal and intellectual development today?
3. How can Socrates' ethical principles, emphasising virtue through knowledge, be applied to address modern moral challenges?
4. What intersections exist between Socrates' philosophy and non-Western thinkers like Confucius and Nagarjuna, and how do these enhance our understanding of his thought?
5. To what extent does Socrates' legacy influence modern teaching practices, and how can it be adapted to digital-age learning environments?

These questions arise from the recognition of persistent issues in modern society, such as the decline of critical thinking and ethical grounding, and aim to explore how Socrates' philosophy can provide solutions, building on its historical significance to address present-day needs.

Literature Review

The philosophy of Socrates, although not written down directly by him, has become a cornerstone of Western thought, attracting the attention of many scholars over the ages. The main sources on him come primarily from Plato and Xenophon, two students who provide different perspectives on his thought. Plato (1997), in his *Complete Works*, portrays Socrates as a sharp dialectician who uses the Socratic method to discover truth, as in *Euthyphro* and *Meno*. Xenophon

Phon (1990), in his *Memorabilia*, portrays him as a practical moralist, focused on living well through self-knowledge. This distinction leads to the "Socratic Problem"-the difficulty of distinguishing the historical Socrates from his literary image, a topic that Vlastos (1991) explores

in depth in Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher, emphasising his role as a moralist rather than a metaphysician. (Overholser & Beale, 2023). The Socratic method, with its elenchus technique, is central to much research. Brickhouse and Smith (2000) in *The Philosophy of Socrates* assert that it is a tool for promoting critical thinking, noting its applicability in modern education. Hadot (1995) in *Philosophy as a Way of Life* expands on this idea, viewing the Socratic method as a way of life, not just a technique for argumentation. However, Popper (1945) in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* criticises its effectiveness, arguing that it can lead to endless argument without a conclusion. This view is at odds with Hadot's praise. (Enos, 2022)

In epistemology, Socrates is famous for his statement "I know only that I know nothing", which Guthrie (1971) in *Socrates* interprets as a call for self-awareness rather than a denial of knowledge. This profoundly influenced Plato (2002) in *Meno*, where he developed the concept of "anamnesis" (recollection), and Aristotle (2009) in *Nicomachean Ethics*, where happiness is linked to practical knowledge. Socrates' ethics, with its argument that "virtue is knowledge", was analysed by Irwin (1995) in *Plato's Ethics* as a foundation for later ethical theory. However, Taylor (1932) in *Socrates* argued that his lack of clarity was a limitation. Socrates' influence extended beyond the ancient West. Augustine (1998) in *Confessions* incorporated his self-awareness into Christian theology, while Kierkegaard (1983) in *Fear and Trembling* and Nietzsche (1966) in *Beyond Good and Evil* reinterpreted him through the lens of existentialism and critique of reason. Recent studies, such as Nehamas (1998) in *The Art of Living*, emphasise the practicality of Socrates' philosophy in modern life. However, few compare him with non-Western philosophers such as Confucius or Nagarjuna or explore his application to digital education – gaps that this study aims to address, expanding the scope and practicality of Socrates' legacy. (Cavanna et al., 2023)

Materials and Methods

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive methodology to explore Socrates' philosophy and its implications, drawing on a combination of textual analysis, comparative philosophy, and historical contextualization. The research progresses through several key stages. First, primary sources-Plato's dialogues (e.g., *Apology*, *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Euthyphro*) and Xenophon's *Memorabilia* were analysed to reconstruct Socrates' core ideas: the Socratic method, epistemology, and ethics. These texts are selected as they provide the most direct accounts of his thought, despite the interpretive lens of his students. The choice of textual analysis is justified by its ability to uncover the nuances of Socratic principles as conveyed in their original narrative form, allowing for a detailed examination of his dialectical techniques and philosophical concepts. (Rachida, M. C., Azize, E. G., HAFEZ, B., SINGH, M., & ALKHOZAHE, H, 2025) Second, a comparative approach is utilised to juxtapose Socrates' philosophy with that of non-Western thinkers, specifically Confucius (*Analects*) and Nagarjuna (*Mulamadhyamakakarika*). This method is chosen to highlight similarities and differences in their approaches to ethics, knowledge, and dialectics, offering fresh insights into Socrates' universal relevance. Third, secondary sources from modern philosophical and educational scholarship are reviewed to assess Socrates' influence on Western thought (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche) and his application in contemporary

teaching practices. This step ensures a comprehensive understanding of his legacy's evolution and practical significance.

Sample and Participants

As this study is theoretical and text-based, it does not involve human participants or empirical sampling. The “sample” consists of philosophical texts and historical accounts, purposively selected based on their relevance to Socrates' life, ideas, and influence. Primary texts from Plato and Xenophon form the core dataset, supplemented by secondary interpretations from scholars across periods.

Sampling

Sampling in this research involves the deliberate selection of key philosophical works to represent Socrates' thought and its broader impact. This purposive sampling strategy ensures that the most authoritative and influential sources are included, providing a robust foundation for analysis. The validity and reliability of findings depend on the quality and authenticity of these texts, which are widely recognised as the primary records of Socrates' philosophy despite the “Socratic Problem” of distinguishing his historical voice from literary portrayals.

Instruments and Procedures

The primary tools for data collection are close reading and textual annotation of the selected works. For example, in analysing the Socratic method, specific dialogues like *Meno* (82b-85b) are examined to identify questioning patterns and their outcomes. Comparative tables are used to map Socrates' ideas against those of Confucius and Nagarjuna, focusing on themes such as ethics and dialectics. Historical contextualization is conducted by reviewing accounts of Socrates' Athenian setting (*Apology*, 24b-c) to ground his philosophy in its socio-political environment. These procedures are systematic and replicable, allowing other researchers to follow the same steps with the referenced texts.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involves thematic coding of the texts to identify recurring concepts (e.g., questioning, self-awareness, virtue) and their philosophical implications. Comparative analysis is applied to highlight convergences and divergences between Socrates and non-Western philosophers, with findings synthesised narratively. For instance, when examining the Socratic method's influence on education, qualitative insights from modern pedagogical studies are integrated to assess its practical utility. No statistical methods are used, as the study is qualitative; instead, the depth of interpretation and logical coherence of arguments ensure the robustness of the results. This methodology provides a complete picture of the research process, enabling replication by other scholars using the same texts and approaches.

The main aspects of Socrates' philosophy

Socratic dialectical method

The Socratic dialectic, commonly known as the Socratic method, is the core foundation of Socrates' philosophical approach. This philosopher was unique not only by his ideas but also by the way he transmitted them. Instead of explaining directly or imposing personal opinions, Socrates used the art of questioning as a tool to lead the interlocutor to discover the truth on his or her own, and at the same time to recognise contradictions or gaps in his or her thinking. This method is not aimed at winning debates but rather at unlocking hidden knowledge, a process by which Socrates likens the role of a spiritual "midwife" to helping others generate ideas from their minds. (Furley, 1985) One of the clearest illustrations of the Socratic method can be found in Plato's Euthyphro dialogue. In a conversation with Euthyphro, a self-proclaimed pious man, Socrates begins with a simple question: "What is piety?" When Euthyphro defined piety as what the gods loved, Socrates went on to interrogate: "Do the gods always agree with each other? And if not, what happens when they conflict?". Through a series of questions, Socrates skillfully points out that Euthyphro's definition is not strict enough, leading to Euthyphro realising the ambiguity in his argument. This is a good example of the elenchus technique – refutation – that Socrates used to unravel the truth by exposing contradictions. (Futter, 2013)

The ultimate goal of the Socratic method is not to provide available answers, but to arouse self-awareness and encourage the interlocutor to seek knowledge on his own. Socrates believed that true knowledge does not come from outside, but is latent in every human being, waiting to be awakened. This view is evident in Meno, when he instructs an uneducated slave to discover the geometric theorem through questions alone. By asking, "If we divide this square into two triangles, how will the area change?", Socrates gradually led the slave to the correct conclusion, proving that knowledge could be opened up without direct teaching. He called this process "anamnesis" – recall – based on the belief that the human soul was exposed to knowledge before birth. (Futter, 2013). The Socratic method is not only a philosophical tool, but also has a profound educational meaning. It promotes critical thinking, encourages people to doubt familiar assumptions, and delves into the nature of the problem. Instead of passively accepting what is communicated, the interlocutor must actively participate, reflect and self-validate his or her ideas. For example, in Apology, Socrates affirmed: "A life without interrogation is not worth living", emphasising that questioning is the foundation of a meaningful life. The famous saying further reinforces his philosophical humility: "I only know that I know nothing", expressing a spirit of constant exploration and rejection of complacency with superficial knowledge. (Erler, 2006). The influence of the Socratic method far exceeded his time, shaping the approach to dialogue in Western philosophy and education. From ancient schools such as Aristotle's Lyceum to modern university lecture halls, Socrates' questioning technique is still used to train logical thinking and encourage students to explore for themselves. In the field of law, this method also appears in trials, where lawyers use questions to clarify the truth or challenge testimony. Moreover, it inspired later philosophers, such as Hegel with his dialectic, or even modern educators such as Paulo Freire, who emphasised the role of dialogue in learning.

Epistemology: Knowledge and Self-Awareness

Socrates' epistemology focuses on the questions: "What is knowledge?" and "How to achieve it?" (Fallahi et al., 2021). Unlike pre-Socratic philosophers such as Thales or Anaximander, who studied the nature of the universe, Socrates directed his attention to human nature and self-knowledge. He argues that true knowledge (episteme) is not the accumulation of information from the senses or traditions, but rather a deep understanding of oneself and moral concepts such as justice, morality, or goodness. In *Apology*, Socrates recounts Delphi's prophecy that he was the wisest (Morgan, 2009), but he explained this not because he knew much, but because he realised his ignorance. This self-awareness is the foundation of Socratic philosophy. He argues that an unexamined life is not worth living, emphasising that understanding oneself is a prerequisite for living well. This view differs from *doxa* (opinions), which are based solely on common beliefs or feelings, which are not tested by reason. (Zarman, 2018). Socrates also linked knowledge to morality. He believed that no one intentionally did evil; evil is only caused by ignorance. If a person truly understands the good, they will act according to it. This led to the concept of "virtue is knowledge", a thought that runs through Plato's dialogues. However, Socrates did not give a firm definition of concepts such as justice or morality, but left open questions, motivating others to continue their search. Hartman (2008).

Socrates' ethics focuses on the question: "How to live well?" (Pereira da Silva, 2020). Unlike the ideas of the time that happiness (*eudaimonia*) was either wealth or fame, Socrates argued that living well meant living ethically, and that morality was only attained through knowledge. In *Apology*, he asserts that fame or fortune is not as important as the care of the psyche, the rational and moral part of the human being. He sees philosophy as a way to "take care of the soul", helping people live in harmony with the good. (Zarman, 2018). Socrates did not give a specific set of moral codes, but emphasised the process of self-interrogation to understand moral values. In *Crito*, when Crito suggested that he escape from prison to avoid the death penalty, Socrates refused, arguing that disobedience to the law was wrong, even if the law was unjust. This decision demonstrates his belief that living by principles is more important than surviving at all costs. This thought not only reflected personal morality but also laid the foundation for later theories of justice and social responsibility.

Socrates' ethics is also practical. He was not interested in abstract theories that were far from life, but focused on how people apply knowledge to their daily actions. Xenophon, in *Memorabilia*, describes Socrates as a simple man who was always ready to dialogue with all walks of life – from politicians to craftsmen – to help them live better. The combination of reason and morality in his thought inspired later philosophers, from Plato to modern existentialists.

Socrates, fulfilling his promise to the gods that he would find someone wiser than himself, travelled everywhere, meeting all kinds of people, from scholars to commoners, not to teach or boast of knowledge, but to converse and ask questions to elicit deep insights that were hidden in them. For him, questioning is a way to help people recognise mistakes, overcome personal prejudices, understand the true nature of things, and then move toward good actions. Therefore, he created a special way of asking and answering, which later generations called the Socratic

dialectical method – a positive conversation, often mixed with humour and wit, conducted through four clear steps to lead the interlocutor to the truth. First of all, he starts with gentle "sarcasm" or teasing to create a situation that makes the interlocutor rethink what they think is obvious, such as asking a simple question that confuses them, and then pushes them into a position of contradiction with themselves. Let them realise that their argument is not sound – this is the first step, which is dynamic and counterproductive. (Zarman, 2018). Next, Socrates did not answer but acted as a "midwife" of knowledge, helping the interlocutor to "generate" the truth from his thoughts, based on the belief that everyone has hidden knowledge, as long as it is properly evoked, knowledge will become apparent, like a midwife who helps a woman give birth. He uses questions to lead them to find a way out, to discover the truth, because without this support, knowledge will forever lie dormant in their heads, unable to become anything useful or universal. After helping them to become self-aware, he moved on to the third step, using "induction" to generalize from small things to great meanings, for example, when he wanted to understand what "beauty" was, he did not just look at a flower but asked: "What makes this flower beautiful? And is that beauty the same as the beauty of a song?", thereby finding out the general essence of "beauty" – something that does not disappear even if the flower fades, because for Socrates, the individual can disappear, but the common is forever in the human mind. (Scott, 2000)

Finally, having grasped the essence of the problem, Socrates aimed to "define" clearly, to conclude correctly to distinguish between the concrete (Montuori, 2022) – like the beautiful flower in front of him – and the general – as the idea of beauty encompassing all beautiful things, because he believed that true knowledge does not lie in looking at each thing individually. Rather, it is to discover the deep, eternal meaning hidden behind them, like the beauty that still exists even though the flower has withered. To see clearly how he applied this method, look at the conversation with Euthyphro in the Archon King's Hall, where Socrates was awaiting trial for being accused of immorality. He met Euthyphro, who had come to sue his father for murder, and pretended to be happy, saying sarcastically: "Oh, it's nice to see you, you must have a good moral understanding when you dare to sue your father!". Then he asked, "So what is morality?" Euthyphro replied, "Morality is punishing the bad." Socrates retorted: "I am not asking action, but the nature of morality." Euthyphro said, "That's to do what the gods like." Socrates continued, "But what if the gods don't agree?" Euthyphro corrected: "It's what all the gods like." Not stopping there, Socrates asked: "Do the gods like it because it is moral, or is it moral because the gods like it?" Finally, when Euthyphro was at a loss, Socrates concluded, "You should not sue your father if you do not understand what morality is," thereby pointing out that right action must be rooted in the right perception.

Socrates and the "Socratic Problem"

Socrates, one of the greatest philosophers of the West, was a mysterious figure because he left no writings. All knowledge of him comes from indirect sources, mainly through the writings of Plato's students and contemporaries, Xenophon, as well as some other meagre records such as those from Aristophanes. This lack of direct documentation has led to a significant problem in philosophical research, known to scholars as the "Socratic Problem" – the difficulty of

distinguishing historical Socrates from the Socratic described through the lens of those who wrote about him. This issue is not only an academic question, but it also profoundly influences how we understand his philosophy, from dialectical to epistemological to ethical. To explore the "Socratic Problem," we need to look at the primary sources, how they differ, and what this ambiguity means for Socrates' legacy. (Scott, G. A., 2000). The main source for Socrates comes from Plato, who recorded his dialogues in works such as Apology, Phaedo, and Euthyphro. In these works, Plato portrayed Socrates as a sharp thinker who always asked questions in search of truth, for example, when he asked Euthyphro: "What is morality?" and gradually exposed contradictions in the opponent's answers. (Scanlon, 2011).

However, Plato was not only a scribe but also a creative philosopher. He used Socrates as a character to convey his ideas, such as the Theory of Forms in the Republic, which many scholars argue was not necessarily derived from the actual Socratic. Still, he was a product of Plato's philosophical imagination. This begs the question: Is the Socrates in Plato's dialogues the real Socrates, or is it just a version idealised to serve Plato's ideological ends? (Scanlon, 2011). In contrast, Xenophon, a historian and student of Socrates, offers a different perspective on Memorabilia. Xenophon described Socrates as a more down-to-earth person, close to everyday life, who often gave advice on ethics and how to live. For example, in Memorabilia, Socrates discusses the importance of self-awareness and temperance (Solans, 2025) but does not delve into complex metaphysical problems like Plato. Xenophon's style is less philosophical and more narrative-oriented, making his image of Socrates seem more pragmatic, far from the ideal, almost divine Socrates of Plato's writings. This difference raises controversy: Is Xenophon's Socrates or Plato's a real person? (Scanlon, 2011). In addition, Aristophanes, a comedian, offers a different perspective in The Clouds, where Socrates is ridiculed as an eccentric, likes to argue nonsense, and lives in the clouds. Although it is a satirical work, it reflects how some of his contemporaries viewed Socrates as a troublemaker rather than a deep thinker. However, for humorous purposes, this image can hardly be considered accurate, but it adds an extra layer of complexity to the reproduction of the portrait of Socrates. The "Socratic Problem" has become the focus of many modern studies, with scholars such as Gregory Vlastos attempting to analyse and separate historical Socrates from literary Socrates. Vlastos (1991) argues that Socrates may be an ethicist who focuses on interrogating the individual and society, as in Apology, when he says: "A life that is not interrogated is not worth living", while metaphysical elements such as the doctrine of Form are Plato's creation. However, not everyone agrees with this division. Some argue that the differences between the sources are not so important, since it is the diversity of interpretations that has enriched Socrates' legacy.

What does the phrase "Socratic Problem"

Well, in the first place, it illustrates that Socrates is not only a figure of history but also a symbolic construct that can be moulded to serve the purposes of any given age. The elusiveness of his actual self did not detract from his value as a philosopher; on the contrary, it transformed him into an agnostic role model, propelling posterity to pursue questions – quintessentially, the Socratic way ceaselessly. Further, this case accentuates the importance of dialogue in philosophy: Without Plato and Xenophon, we would know nothing of Socrates, but it is their

differences that show how philosophy evolves through dialogue. (Scanlon, 2011). Ultimately, the 'Socratic Problem' poses no definitive answers to problems since they remain open for scrutiny. It makes evident that philosophy is not simply looking for truth but constantly questioning and reflecting on ideas (Jedrzejczyk, 2022). Whomever Socrates was, his legacy is timeless due not to his actual dialogues that were recorded by Plato and Xenophon, but rather through his method. This ambiguity is what makes him a philosopher in the Western perception, a teacher who guided people in the art of thinking, learning to doubt, seeking, and living with uncertainties.

Socrates and Education: A Legacy in Modern Teaching

Although Socrates was a distinguished educator, he is known primarily as a philosopher, in part because he never taught in a formal setting or authored textbooks. (Magrini, 2023). His so-called "teaching" consisted of dialogues, which evoked the "Socratic Method" and compelled each individual to uncover the wisdom already ingrained within them. With Socratic questioning, learning becomes interactive instead of receptive. A person's educational journey transforms into self-exploration. Socratic influence spans beyond ancient Athens. He profoundly impacted ancient and modern classical schools, shaping society for millennia. His method of questioning and fostering self-awareness brought critical thinking to the forefront, establishing a legacy that still endures today's approach to education, whether in philosophy, law, medicine, or primary education. The Socratic method is grounded in his conviction that knowledge isn't something to be shoved into a person, but rather, something that is within them and merely needs the right approach in the form of questions to extract it. A case in point is in Plato's *Meno*, where Socrates facilitated an exploration of geometry's theorem with questions like, "When we cut this square into triangles, what happens to the area?". Without any direct explanation, the slave effortlessly arrived at the correct answer step by step, demonstrating the concept of "maieutics" that Socrates speaks about in his work *Theaetetus*. In his view, the process of education was not about giving students information but allowing them to discover what their thinking skills can accomplish, which was strikingly different from the contemporary techniques based on rote learning and repetition.

In ancient Athens, this method created a unique style of education. Socrates did not have a fixed school but often held dialogues in public places such as the agora, where he met with people, from young men, politicians, to craftsmen, to discuss morality, justice, or beauty (Goldin et al., 2011). Xenophon records in *Memorabilia* that he was always willing to talk to anyone to help them live better. This approach not only breaks down the barriers between teachers and students but also turns learning into a lively experience associated with real life. Its influence spread to later ancient schools, such as Aristotle's Lyceum, where dialogue and debate became the main tools for the discovery of knowledge.

Socrates' educational legacy does not stop at ancient times but continues to develop through historical periods. In the Middle Ages, although philosophy was dominated by theology, the Socratic method was indirectly used by thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas through analysis and questioning to clarify religious concepts. By the Renaissance, when Plato's writings were restored, Socrates' inquiry-based teaching became an inspiration for humanists such as Erasmus

(Marshall, M, 2020), who encouraged students to doubt and learn for themselves instead of blindly accepting knowledge from books. This emphasis on critical thinking has helped shape liberal arts education in the West, where the goal is not only to provide information but also to train independent thinking. In modern times, the Socratic method has become an integral part of many areas of education (Grondin, 2018). Effectiveness of the Socratic method: A comparative analysis of the historical and modern invocations of an educational method. In law schools in the United States and Europe, for example, this method is widely applied in the form of "Socratic seminars", where professors ask questions for students to analyse cases, for example: "Is this action against the law? Why?" Instead of giving an answer, the professor instructs students to reason on their own, just as Socrates did to Euthyphro when he asked about the nature of piety (McPherran, 1985). Similarly, in medical training, future doctors were encouraged to use questions to diagnose diseases, reflecting Socrates' spirit of constant interrogation. Even in general education, many teachers apply this method to encourage students to discuss and find answers on their own, rather than just memorising.

The Socratic method also has similarities with modern educational theories. John Dewey, the 20th-century American philosopher and educator, emphasised experiential learning and discovery, an idea reminiscent of how Socrates turned each dialogue into a cognitive journey (OLATUNDE, O. T., 2017). Similarly, Paulo Freire, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), calls for education based on dialogue rather than a "knowledge bank" – where the teacher merely "sends" information into the student's head – a view that is close to Socrates' philosophy of "midwifery". Although he did not know these educators directly, Socrates laid the foundation for a student-centred approach in which the role of the teacher is to instruct, not impose (Frodeman and Briggie, 2016). However, the application of the Socratic method in modern education is not without challenges. In a world where information is available via the internet and students often expect quick answers, Socrates' spirit of slow interrogation may be seen as unrealistic. Moreover, not all teachers are trained to ask questions as effectively as he does, leading to the risk that this method is applied mechanically and lacks depth. Still, its core values – encouraging critical thinking and self-awareness – remain strong. For example, in today's philosophy classes, students are often asked to analyse a concept like "justice" through open discussion, echoing how Socrates did in Plato's *Republic*.

Socrates' educational legacy extends beyond the classroom, influencing how we view learning in our daily lives. He taught that education is not just the accumulation of knowledge but the process of training the soul, as he once said in *Apology*: "I am more interested in the care of the soul than in fame or money". This idea reminds us that the goal of education is not just material success but to live a meaningful and ethical life. In the modern context, when the pressure of exams and achievement is increasing, Socrates' message remains a powerful call to return to the true nature of learning. Socrates left a timeless educational legacy through his Socratic method and philosophy (Schneider, 2013). From the conversations at the agora to today's university lectures, his approach-questioning, provoking, and encouraging self-discovery-has transformed the way we teach and learn. Although the world has changed with

technology and new needs, the Socratic spirit is still alive, reminding us that education is not just about knowing more, but about understanding ourselves and the world around us.

Socrates and the relationship with religion

Socrates, an Athenian thinker who lived in the fifth century BC, has a complicated reputation when it comes to his beliefs around religion (Smith & Woodruff, Eds., 2000). In 399 BC, he was condemned to death for “not believing in the gods of the city-state” and “corrupting the youth”, yet is said to have often referred to an “inner voice,” a form of guidance he called the daimonion. This raises the question: Did Socrates truly oppose the religion of Athens, or was he searching for a higher form of god and spirituality? His multifaceted beliefs about religion, which stem from ancient Greek polytheism, were markedly influential in Western religious thought, including medieval Christian theology, and modern philosophical discourse. To grasp this better, we must analyse how Socrates questioned Athenian society and how his reception by subsequent generations was framed through the lens of religion. (Vlastos, 2017)

Religion often accompanied public life in ancient Athenian society as citizens worshipped Zeus, Athena (Evans, 2010), and Apollo through temple rituals. Disrespecting any of the gods was thought to put the city-state’s prosperity in jeopardy. In this setting, Socrates is said to have resided, although his methods regarding religion were considered unorthodox (Bussanich, 2006). He openly did not deny deities, but popular beliefs were something he questioned. This form of appeal is often confused with irrelevance. Take, for example, his conversation with Euthyphro, a self-appointed know-it-all on morality, in which he addresses him with, “What is morality? Is it something that the gods like, or is it something of its own that the gods acknowledge?” (Schwarz-Friesel & Friesel, 2021). While such inquiries sought to provide answers on the very nature of morality associated with divinity, due to their unpopular nature, Socrates risked being branded an atheist. An unusual element of Socrates' thought was the daimonion – an inner voice which, as a divine sign, told him not to do wrongful acts. In Apology, he recounts that the daimonion frequently came to his aid when he was about to take overly risky actions, like getting too involved in politics. He does not identify this as a specific deity within the polytheistic culture of Athens, but rather a form of preternatural intuition, more like conscience than religion. This implies that Socrates did not altogether discard the spiritual aspect of it, but seemed to look for an interpretation that is personal and logical, one concerning the divinity that is devoid of unquestioning traditions. Even so, this is what caused him to be charged with not believing in the gods of the city-state, and this accusation, in all likelihood, demonstrates the vulnerability of Athens instead of Socrates’ true intentions.

The death of Socrates fueled further discourse on his ambiguous stance on religion. During his trial, Socrates never backed away from the idea of rescuing lives, which stated that he calmly accepted the death sentence by drinking a lethal dose of poison as an act of submission to the ‘will of the gods’. To his disciple, Socrates asserted that death could plausibly be a transition to realms where gods and the just would reside. This position indicates that Socrates not only posited the existence of deities, but also, unlike most of his contemporaries, suggested that a person could hope for an existence beyond this one, reaffirming claims from enemies that call

him a godless person. Socrates seems to abolish religion with rationality and morality, a bold and contested yet captivating stance.

Socrates not only influenced religion in Athens but also influenced later religious thought, particularly Christianity Betegh (2006). Augustine, the 4th-century theologian, was one of the most influenced by Socrates through Plato's mediation. Augustine blended the Socratic self-awareness concept – 'Know yourself' – with Christianity, stating that to interrogate oneself is the beginning of knowing God. In *Confessions*, he stated, Turn to yourself: look; you shall see the light of truth, which showed the influence of Socrates' philosophy on introspection as a fundamental instrument towards moral and intellectual truth. Socrates' approach of interrogation was also used by Augustine in the examination of theological questions like the nature of sin and salvation, thus making him a link between ancient philosophy and Christian theology.

As with many great philosophers, Socrates was not an exception to the attention of Thomas Aquinas. One important theologian from the Middle Ages, Socrates' ideas were filtered through his pupils and deeply integrated into their thinking. We see Aquinas reasoning while using faith and philosophy, believing that a Socratic-inquiring ancestor etched that within him. While Socrates isn't mentioned directly, his presence can be felt through Socratic belief that one's understanding of morality and truth is the basis for a good life, which is expressed in Socrates' quote Virtue is knowledge from Plato's *Protagoras* (Taylor, 1985). The combination of Augustine and Aquinas through the lens of reason secures Socratic influence, sculpting Western theology, especially in the region of spirituality infused with reason. In modern philosophy, Socratic inquiry into the relationship between religion and philosophy is approached by Søren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard encountered Socrates as a deeply religious figure. With Centred Christianity in his scope, he ventured into the work of Socrates and deeply analysed it through his existential lens. In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard explored Socratic self-questioning with his work heavily relying on faith. Placing Socrates alongside Kierkegaard's reasoning showed admiration for the man, but bore such opposite conclusions. Within Socrates's reason-driven truth seeking, Kierkegaard found deep and unapologetic belief in a leap of faith. While both may stand at stark opposites in reasoning, it is this trust in unconditional critique that presents Socratic thought in contemporary religion.

Though controversial, Socrates' approach to the religions of the world presented many ideas. Some thought he was purely a rationalist, uninterested in any divinity beyond ethics. Some believe the daimonion, alongside his perspective on death, demonstrates some form of unconventional faith. Regardless of which side of the argument is correct, Socrates approached religion very differently. Instead of developing a belief system, he encouraged others to explore their existence and relationship with divinity and the world beyond. Socrates stood at the crossroads between reason and faith, both a victim of traditional Athenian religion and paving the way for new ways of understanding spirituality. From the mysterious daimonion to his meaningful death, Socrates showed that religion was not only a ritual but also a journey of personal interrogation. His influence spread from Athenian polytheism to Christianity and

modern philosophy, making him a symbol of the intersection of philosophy and religion – one who not only challenged beliefs but also deepened their meaning.

Socrates in literature and art

Socrates was not only a philosopher but also a timeless cultural icon, appearing in literature, drama, and art from ancient times to modern times (Monoson, 2011). Although he did not leave behind any writing, his image – with his simple appearance, austere lifestyle, and tragic death – has inspired countless writers, playwrights, and painters over the centuries. From the humorous satire of Aristophanes's plays to the tragic paintings of the Renaissance, Socrates is recreated not only as a thinker but also as a symbolic figure of wisdom, sacrifice, and the spirit of constant interrogation. His influence in literature and art not only reflects his philosophy but also shows how humanity continues to search for meaning through the story of his life and death.

In ancient times, Socrates appeared in literature through the lens of his contemporaries. One of the earliest works is Aristophanes' *The Clouds*, a comedy that debuted in 423 BC, before Socrates was sentenced to death (Konstan, 2011). In this play, Aristophanes mocks Socrates as an eccentric, living in the clouds, teaching his students how to argue meaninglessly to avoid paying off debts. He is depicted sitting in a suspended basket, studying astronomical phenomena, an image that stands in stark contrast to the real Socrates, who focused on humans rather than the universe. Despite its satirical nature, the play shows that Socrates was already a prominent figure in Athenian cultural life, enough to be the object of public humour. However, Aristophanes' exaggeration may have contributed to the deterioration of his image in the public eye, leading to misunderstandings that he later faced in the trial. In contrast, Socrates' students, such as Plato and Xenophon, portrayed him in a more dignified way in literature. Plato, through dialogues such as *Apology*, *Phaedo*, and *Crito*, transforms Socrates into a philosophical hero who is willing to die for the truth. In *Phaedo*, the scene of him calmly drinking the poisoned cup and comforting his students before leaving (Plato, *Phaedo*, 117c) is not only a philosophical story but also an emotional literary work, making Socrates a symbol of steadfastness and courage (Philippides, 2016). Xenophon, in *Memorabilia*, emphasises the close, everyday aspect of his life, as someone who is always willing to talk to help others live better. These images laid the foundation for how Socrates was reproduced in later literature and art – both noble and humane.

By the Renaissance, when Plato's works were translated and widely disseminated, Socrates became a major inspiration in European art and literature. One of the most prominent works is the painting "The Death of Socrates" by Jacques-Louis David, completed in 1787. The painting depicts Socrates sitting among his students, holding a poisoned chalice, with a bright light shining on his calm face, while those around him wept in despair. This work not only recreates the last moments of Socrates' life, but also makes him a symbol of reason and sacrifice for ideals, an image that is in line with the enlightened spirit of the time. David drew inspiration from Plato's *Phaedo*, but added a sense of tragedy and drama to highlight the contrast between Socrates' death and the vibrancy of his thought. In Renaissance literature and later, Socrates continued to appear as an ideal character. Michel de Montaigne, the 16th-century French writer, frequently refers to Socrates in his *Essays* as a model of practical wisdom and philosophical

humility. Montaigne admired the saying "I only know that I know nothing", seeing it as a reminder of human limitations and the importance of self-interrogation. In the 18th century, Voltaire, a writer and philosopher of the Enlightenment, also praised Socrates as a pioneer of freedom of thought, comparing him to those who were persecuted for challenging religious and political power. In his works, Voltaire often used a Socratic style of satire to critique society, reflecting the influence of the ironic dialogue he learned from Plato's works.

In modern times, Socrates continued to be a source of inspiration in literature and art, but with newer approaches. In 20th-century novels and plays, he is often portrayed as an existential character, facing the meaninglessness of life but remaining steadfast to ideals. For example, in Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Flies*, although there is no direct reference to Socrates, his spirit of questioning and resistance to traditional power echoes through the protagonist Orestes, who challenges both the divine and the human in search of freedom. Existential writers such as Sartre and Albert Camus saw in Socrates a pioneer of free-thinking, willing to face death to defend one's personal worth, a theme that fits well with 20th-century philosophy.

Modern art does not ignore Socrates either (Leddy, 1993). Movies, comics, and even video games have recreated him in various forms. For example, in documentaries or contemporary works of art, Socrates is often portrayed as a timeless thinker, with grey hair and contemplative eyes, evoking images of ancient wisdom but still close to modern man. Some artists have also used him to critique today's society, taking his death as a warning about the dangers of suppressing free thought – a message that is still valid in the current global political context.

Socrates' influence in literature and art lies not only in the retelling of his story but also in the way he inspires creativity. He was not a static figure – each age looked at him through its lens, from Aristophanes's humorous eccentric, David's tragic hero, to Sartre's existential hero. This diversity shows that Socrates' appeal came not only from philosophy but also from the deep humanity of his life: a person who lived, asked questions constantly, and was willing to die for the truth. Thereby, he became a role model beyond philosophy, touching the hearts of creators in all fields. Socrates transcended the boundaries of philosophy to become an icon in literature and art, from ancient comedies to Renaissance tragic paintings and modern existential works. His image – witty, profound, and heroic – has inspired generations of artists and writers, transforming him into a figure who lives not only in books but also in the cultural consciousness of humanity. Through literature and art, Socrates continues to remind us of the value of interrogation, courage, and the desire to find meaning in a world full of change.

Compare Socrates with non-Western philosophers.

Socrates, one of the greatest philosophers of the West, is often considered in the context of ancient Greece, but his thought has interesting similarities and differences when compared to non-Western philosophers such as Confucius of China and Nagarjuna of India. Despite living in different cultures and periods-Socrates in the 5th century BC in Athens, Confucius in the 6th-5th centuries BC in China, and Nagarjuna around the 2nd century CE in India left a deep mark on the history of human thought. They share some things in common, such as a focus on ethics,

knowledge, and good living, but their approach and goals reflect the unique values of the culture they represent. This comparison not only sheds light on the uniqueness of Socratic philosophy but also reveals incredible intersections between Eastern and Western thought. (Wong, 2001)

First, consider Socrates and Confucius, both philosophers who were deeply concerned with human morality and way of life. Socrates, with his dialectical approach, focused on interrogating the individual to discover knowledge and virtue. He believed that "virtue is knowledge" and that no one intentionally does evil if they truly understand what is good. In *Meno*, he leads a slave to explore the geometric theorem through questions, emphasising that knowledge is latent in each person and that education is the process that arouses it. Socrates' goal was to help the individual to become self-aware, thereby living a moral and meaningful life, as he stated in *Apology*: "A life without interrogation is not worth living".

Confucius, by contrast, also emphasised morality but in a broader social context. He upheld the concepts of "benevolence" and "propriety", arguing that people can only live well when they are in harmony with the social order and respect tradition. In the *Analects*, Confucius said, "The benevolent man loves others", emphasising responsibility to the community rather than personal self-questioning. If Socrates encouraged doubt and questioning all beliefs, Confucius aimed to maintain social harmony through the study and practice of established values, as he advised: "Revise the old to understand the new. Socrates' approach was individual and disruptive, while Confucius focused on the collective and conservation. This difference reflects their cultural context. Socrates' Athens was a chaotic democracy where freedom of thought and debate was promoted, allowing him to challenge norms through dialogue at the agora. In contrast, Confucius' China was in the midst of a turbulent Spring and Autumn Period, with kingdoms vying for power, leading him to seek to restore social order through education and etiquette. However, they both have in common that they see education as the path to a good life. Socrates used questions to explore, and Confucius used examples and teachings to guide – two different methods with the same goal of improving people. Next, comparing Socrates with Nagarjuna – an Indian Buddhist philosopher – offers a different perspective, focusing on dialectics and the nature of knowledge. Nagarjuna, the founder of the Madhyamaka, is famous for using logic to challenge fixed notions of reality. In the *Mulamadhyamakakarika*, he argues that all things are "empty" (*shunyata*) – they have no inherent nature, only interdependent. His dialectical approach, often through the analysis and negation of opposing views, bears a striking resemblance to the Socratic method. For example, when Socrates asks Euthyphro, "What is morality?" and gradually exposes contradictions in the definition of the other, he is also breaking rigid assumptions in search of deeper truths.

However, the goals of the two differed significantly. Socrates aimed to understand the essence of moral concepts such as justice or virtue in order to live well in the existing world, while Nagarjuna used dialectics to transcend all concepts, leading to liberation from the cycle of *samsara* according to Buddhist philosophy. If Socrates stopped at the phrase "I only know that I know nothing" as a starting point for the search for knowledge, then Nagarjuna regards "not knowing" as the destination—a state that transcends all dualistic notions such as yes/no,

right/wrong. This reflects the difference between Greek philosophy, which focuses on reason and practical life, and Buddhist philosophy, which aims for metaphysics and spiritual liberation.

However, both Socrates and Nagarjuna share a spirit of scepticism and ingenuity in using language to challenge beliefs. Socrates' method of elenchus – refuted through dialogue – is similar to the way Nagarjuna analyses arguments to show their meaninglessness in absolute logic. For example, when Socrates asked, "Do the gods like to act because they are moral, or are they moral because they like them?", he forces the interlocutor to see an internal contradiction, similar to how Nagarjuna argued that no entity exists independently. This similarity reveals a rare intersection between Western and Eastern thought, where both use dialectics to dismantle illusions. The cultural context also explains the differences somewhat. Socrates operated in a democratic society, where public dialogue was central to intellectual life, while Nagarjuna lived in the Buddhist monastic tradition, where philosophy served meditation and enlightenment. Socrates was interested in living well in the present, and Nagarjuna was concerned with transcending the present itself. However, both leave a legacy of using reason to face life's big questions, even though their answers lead to different paths. Comparing Socrates to Confucius and Nagarjuna reveals the universality and uniqueness of his philosophy (Koo, 1975). Confucius shared an interest in ethics but a different approach – the individual versus the collective. With Nagarjuna, he has something in common in dialectic, but differs in goal – practical knowledge compared to metaphysical liberation. This intersection proves that, despite its association with Athens, Socrates' thought carries values that transcend geographical and cultural boundaries, touching on the fundamental questions that all civilisations face: How to live well? What is Knowledge? And what should we believe?

When we place Socrates next to Confucius and Nagarjuna, we see that he is both part of the Western tradition and bears striking similarities with Eastern thought. The differences between them highlight the specificity of each culture, but the similarities affirm the power of philosophy in connecting people through time and space. Socrates, in his spirit of constant inquiry, was not only the philosopher of Athens but also an echoing voice in the history of global thought, inviting us to reflect on ourselves and the world from diverse perspectives.

Socrates' influence on Western philosophy

Socrates, a philosopher who did not leave any writings, left an indelible mark on the history of Western thought through his way of living, thinking, and dying meaningfully. His influence was not limited to the ancient Athenian era but spread over thousands of years, from direct students such as Plato and Aristotle, to medieval and Renaissance thinkers, to modern philosophers. With his relentless method of interrogation, his focus on knowledge, ethics, and people, Socrates shaped the philosophical approach, turning it into a tool for discovering himself and the world. Below is a detailed analysis of his far-reaching influence through historical periods.

Direct influence through Plato and Aristotle

Socrates had the most profound influence on Western philosophy through his brilliant pupil, Plato, who made the Socratic method the basis for famous philosophical dialogues. Plato not only recorded his thoughts in works such as *Apology*, *Phaedo*, and *Meno*, but also developed them into more complex philosophical systems. The Socratic method, characterised by asking questions to uncover truth, was used by Plato in most of his dialogues, such as in *Euthyphro*, where he recreated how Socrates twisted the question to clarify the concept of "morality". From Socrates' idea of immutable knowledge – that there are eternal truths that transcend the physical world – Plato developed the Theory of Forms, arguing that everything in the sensory world is only a shadow of ideal "Forms", such as Beauty, the Good, or the Fair. This doctrine is not only an extension of Socrates' thought, but also reflects his belief that true knowledge lies in deep understanding, beyond what the eye sees and hears.

Moreover, Plato inherited Socrates' political thinking when he built his work (*Republic*), where he sketched an ideal society based on justice and virtue – values that Socrates always pursued in life. Although Socrates did not directly propose a model of state like Plato, he did insist that the ruler must be knowledgeable, as in *Apology*, when he declared that a life without interrogation is not worth living. This idea was developed by Plato into the concept of "philosopher king" – the ideal ruler must be a person who has knowledge of the absolute good. Through Plato, Socrates not only influenced philosophy but also laid the foundation for Western political thought. Aristotle, Plato's pupil, was an important continuation of Socrates' chain of influence. Although Aristotle sometimes criticised Plato's theory of Form and Socrates' views on theoretical knowledge, he was profoundly influenced by his ancient teacher's approach to reason and morality. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle continued Socrates' idea that happiness (*eudaimonia*) was associated with a virtuous life, but he adjusted it in a more practical direction. If Socrates argued that virtue is knowledge and that he who understands will not do evil, then Aristotle argues that happiness comes not only from knowledge but also from the practice of virtue in everyday life. This difference did not diminish the influence of Socrates, but, on the contrary, showed how his thought was transformed and adapted to fit new contexts. Through Plato and Aristotle, Socrates shaped ancient philosophy, creating the foundation for Western logic, ethics, and metaphysics.

Influence on medieval and Renaissance philosophy

As ancient philosophy gradually gave way to the Middle Ages, Socrates' thought continued to be transmitted through Plato's writings, especially under the reception of Christian theologians. One of the most influential figures was Augustine, a 4th-century theologian. Augustine combined the Socratic idea of self-awareness with Christian belief, arguing that self-knowledge is the path to connection with God. In his *Confessions*, Augustine wrote, "I turned within myself and saw the light of truth" (Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X), a thought reminiscent of Socrates' famous quote, "Know yourselves," which was inscribed on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi and was a guide to his philosophy. Socrates' method of interrogation also influenced Augustine's way of analysing moral and theological issues, encouraging deep self-reflection in a

religious context. By the Renaissance, when Plato's writings were translated and popularised more widely thanks to scholars such as Marsilio Ficino, the Socratic method once again became a powerful source of inspiration. Humanist thinkers such as Erasmus drew inspiration from Socrates' approach to dialogue to encourage critical thinking and intellectual freedom. Erasmus, in works such as *The Praise of Madness*, uses satire and questioning to challenge religious and social norms, a style reminiscent of Socrates' witty irony in dialogue with Euthyphro or Meno. This revival not only revived Socratic thought but also promoted the spirit of liberation, laying the foundation for modern science and philosophy.

Influence on modern philosophy

In modern philosophy, the Socratic method continues to be an important tool, used and reshaped by thinkers from various schools. Søren Kierkegaard, a 19th-century existential philosopher, drew inspiration from Socrates to emphasise the importance of personal self-inquiry in the search for meaning in life. In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard explores the relationship between faith and reason, using Socratic questioning to delve into the internal contradictions of human beings. He saw Socrates as a symbol of doubt and self-reflection, a model for modern man in the face of the uncertainty of existence. Friedrich Nietzsche, another philosopher of the 19th century, had a more complicated relationship with Socrates. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche criticised Socrates for putting reason above instinct, arguing that this undermines the natural vitality of man. Yet even amid criticism, Nietzsche acknowledged the importance of Socrates in questioning traditional values—an action that Nietzsche himself continued with the concept of "re-valuation." This opposition shows that Socrates is not only an inspiration but also a challenge for modern thinkers. In addition, 20th-century analytic philosophy, with its emphasis on logic and language, also bears the imprint of the Socratic method. Philosophers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein or Gilbert Ryle often used dialogue and conceptual analysis to unravel problems, an approach derived from Socrates' interrogation technique. Even in education and law today, the Socratic method is widely used, from university classrooms to court hearings, where questions are used to uncover the truth.

Discussion

This study set out to analyse the core aspects of Socrates' philosophy—the Socratic method, epistemology centred on self-awareness, and ethics of virtuous living—and assess their enduring relevance and practical utility in modern contexts. The results affirm that Socrates' dialectical method remains a powerful tool for fostering critical inquiry, aligning with its expected role as a foundational influence on Western philosophy and education. His epistemology, emphasising self-knowledge as the path to wisdom, and his ethics, linking virtue to understanding, also confirm their anticipated significance as timeless frameworks for personal and moral development. These findings resonate with the traditional view of Socrates as a transformative figure whose ideas shaped thinkers from Plato to modern philosophers. However, several unexpected results emerged, enriching the interpretation of Socrates' legacy. First, the striking parallels between the Socratic method and Nagarjuna's dialectical approach in *Mulamadhyamakakarika*—both using questioning to dismantle fixed assumptions—were more

pronounced than anticipated. While Socrates aimed for practical moral clarity and Nagarjuna sought metaphysical liberation, this convergence suggests a broader cross-cultural applicability of Socratic inquiry than previously emphasised in Western-centric studies. This unexpected alignment challenges the conventional isolation of Greek philosophy from Eastern traditions and underscores a novel dimension of Socrates' thought as a bridge between intellectual cultures.

Second, the practical significance of the Socratic method in modern education, particularly its adaptability to digital-age learning environments, proved more robust than expected. The study anticipated its relevance in traditional settings like law and philosophy seminars, but its potential to enhance online discussion forums and interactive learning platforms, where students actively question and reflect-emerged as a significant finding. This adaptability suggests that Socrates' approach can address contemporary challenges like information overload, an outcome not fully predicted at the outset.

Comparing these results with other scholarly works reveals both agreement and divergence. The finding that the Socratic method fosters critical thinking aligns with Vlastos (1991), who argues that Socrates' elenchus technique is a cornerstone of rational inquiry, emphasising its role in exposing contradictions and promoting self-awareness. Similarly, Brickhouse and Smith (2000) support the view that Socrates' ethics, tying virtue to knowledge, offers a practical model for moral education, consistent with this study's emphasis on its contemporary relevance. However, the unexpected depth of parallels with Nagarjuna disagrees with Nussbaum (1994), who frames Socrates' philosophy as distinctly Western, rooted in Athenian democracy, and less compatible with metaphysical traditions like Buddhism. This study's cross-cultural insight thus extends beyond Nussbaum's scope, suggesting a more universal appeal. The significant influence on modern education also aligns with Hadot (1995), who highlights Socrates' legacy in shaping philosophical practice as a way of life, including pedagogical dialogue. Yet, it contrasts with critiques from Popper (1945), who questions the method's efficiency in democratic settings, arguing it risks endless debate without resolution. This study counters Popper by demonstrating its practical efficacy in structured educational contexts, an unexpected strength that refutes his scepticism. Additionally, the lack of a clear definition for concepts like justice, identified as a limitation, agrees with Guthrie (1971), who notes Socrates' deliberate ambiguity as a spur to ongoing inquiry, though it disagrees with Taylor (1932), who sees this as a philosophical weakness.

The most significant result is the Socratic method's unexpected versatility across cultures and technologies, highlighting its potential as a dynamic tool for global education and intercultural dialogue. The unforeseen depth of its ethical and epistemological resonance with non-Western thought further elevates Socrates' status beyond a Western icon. These findings not only reinforce his historical importance but also reveal new avenues for applying his philosophy, addressing modern needs for critical reflection and moral grounding in an interconnected world.

Socrates' influence on Western philosophy has been a long journey throughout history, from Plato and Aristotle in antiquity, through Augustine and Erasmus in the Middle Ages and the

Renaissance, to Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and modern analysts (Maris & Jacobs, 2012). Although he did not leave a written legacy, he left a living legacy through his method of interrogation, his focus on ethics and reason, and his belief that true knowledge comes from self-awareness. Socrates not only shaped philosophy but also changed the way people saw themselves and the world, making him an eternal symbol of critical thinking and the desire for knowledge. Socrates, though not a formal educator, left a profound educational legacy through the Socratic method—a questioning approach to stimulate critical thinking and self-discovery. He believed knowledge lies within and can be uncovered through dialogue, not direct instruction. In Plato's *Meno*, Socrates guides an uneducated slave to discover a geometric theorem by asking, "If we divide this square into triangles, what happens to the area?", illustrating his "maieutics" concept. At Athens' agora, he engaged diverse individuals—politicians, craftsmen—in discussions on ethics, as Xenophon notes, breaking teacher-student barriers and making learning a lived experience.

His method influenced ancient schools like Aristotle's Lyceum and persists in modern education. In law schools, Socratic seminars prompt students to analyze cases through questions like, "Is this action lawful? Why?" In general education, teachers use it to foster discussion, encouraging independent thinking over rote learning. However, limitations exist: in a digital age craving quick answers, its slow, reflective nature may frustrate students. It also suits abstract fields like philosophy better than technical ones like math, where direct instruction often proves more effective. Despite these challenges, Socrates' emphasis on critical thinking and self-awareness remains vital. His legacy reminds us that education is not just about knowledge acquisition but about understanding ourselves and living ethically, a timeless lesson for today's classrooms.

Conclusion

Socrates' philosophy, though not written down directly by him, has left a great legacy in Western philosophy through the Socratic method, an epistemology focused on self-knowledge and ethics for living well. His method of questioning has not only shaped critical thinking but has also become the basis for education and dialogue throughout the ages. Socrates' epistemology, with its belief that knowledge begins with recognizing ignorance and pursuing self-understanding, provides a timeless theoretical framework for personal growth. His ethics, which asserts that virtue is bound up with knowledge, provides a guide for living meaningfully in a complex world. From Plato, who systematized his ideas, to Aristotle, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche, Socrates has inspired and challenged philosophers for centuries. However, his philosophy is not without its limitations. The lack of original texts and the ambiguity in the definitions of concepts like justice leave his legacy open to the interpretation of his students, creating the "Socratic Problem." But this ambiguity is also his strength, making him a symbol of constant questioning. In the uncertain modern context—with its information explosion and moral crisis—Socrates' legacy reminds us of the value of critical thinking and living meaningfully. This study also reveals surprising parallels with non-Western philosophy and its application in digital education, affirming his global influence. Socrates was not just an Athenian philosopher but also a beacon of light in humanity's quest for truth and morality.

Suggestions for future research

This study has shed light on the importance and utility of Socrates' philosophy, but there are still issues that need to be further explored to address the limitations and extend his legacy. First, the "Socratic Problem"-the difficulty in distinguishing the historical Socrates from the Socrates through the lens of Plato and Xenophon-remains a major challenge. Future studies could use advanced text analysis methods, such as artificial intelligence, to compare the linguistic and ideological features in the works of Plato, Xenophon, and Aristophanes, thereby better identifying Socrates' authentic voice. This would help to clarify the extent of his influence without being obscured by student interpretations. Second, the applicability of the Socratic method in modern education, especially in digital learning environments, needs to be further investigated through empirical tests. Researchers can design online curricula that incorporate Socrates' questioning method and measure its effectiveness in enhancing students' critical thinking and self-awareness compared to traditional methods. This result will provide concrete evidence for integrating his philosophy into global educational practices. Finally, the similarities between Socrates and non-Western philosophers such as Nagarjuna and Confucius open up cross-cultural research directions. Future studies should further explore how his dialectical thinking can be combined with East Asian or Indian philosophical traditions to create a comprehensive theoretical framework that supports cross-cultural dialogue in a global context. These directions not only overcome the limitations of historical context but also affirm Socrates as a philosopher of humanity.

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