

## Research Article

# Socratic Political Heritage - Ethical Challenges and the Role of Dialogue in Contemporary Society

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## Abstract

Western philosophy has failed to find a successor to Socrates in political and ethical thought. Contemporary political ethics and civic engagement debates would still depend on his commitment to questioning, moral inquiry, and civic engagement. This paper portrays Socrates' political heritage in terms of ethical challenges and the dialogue as a means for dealing with the modern sociological predicament. It examines how the works of 20th-century philosophers such as Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, and Hans-Georg Gadamer reveal that the living Socratic principle is as much of a problem to be solved. This research paper evaluates the Socratic dialogue's role in resisting authoritarianism and developing democratic deliberation in contemporary politics. Finally, the paper affirms that Socratic ethics, concentrating on self-examination and critical dialogue, continues to be a strong instrument for working out contemporary political and ethical difficulties.

## Keywords

Socrates, political heritage, ethical challenges, dialogue, democracy, philosophy

## 1. Introduction

Socrates is a central figure not only in discussions of philosophy but in discussions of ethics and political thought. In the contemporary debates on political responsibility, civic engagement, and moral integrity, his philosophical approach with dialectical reasoning and self-examination has continued to influence. In the twentieth century, Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault and Hans-Georg Gadamer revisited Socratic principles to deal with the ethical problems of totalitarian regimes, ideological manipulation, and the attenuation of democratic dialogue. These thinkers realized the effectiveness of Socratic questioning against political oppression and

created a culture of critical inquiry. The ethical relevance of Socratic ethics for modern political thought rests in its characteristic operation of dialogue and self-awareness. For example, in the current times, where there are issues of populism, misinformation, and the ethical question of leadership, Socrates' insistence on questioning authority and morality is critical. His attitude regarding the dialogical method of elenchus, refutation through dialogue, is a model of democratic discourse, promoting individuals to reason through their assumptions and submit themselves to debate. This paper sets out how exploring the applications of Socratic

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**Received:** 02/06/2025; **Accepted:** 06/07/2025; **Published:** 15/08/2025

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dialogue in 20th and 21st-century political thought may bring fresh insights to an inquiry into how Socratic dialogue can contribute to the articulation of ethical dilemmas over changes in governance, law, and civil society.

This study aims to examine how Socrates' ethical framework has been instrumentalised by modern philosophers in their discourse and held as a model for political life, arguing that Socrates has a political heritage. It considers the Socratic dialogue's contribution to democratic participation and moral being and how it is applied to the political process of ethical decision-making. This paper argues that principles of dialogue and ethical inquiry can still help address more contemporary issues in political and moral terms through critically examining 20th-century accounts of Socratic thought.

## 2. Manuscript Formatting

### 2.1. Socrates as a Political and Ethical Figure

To many, Socrates is the philosopher as a thinker who has been bequeathed to questions of metaphysical inquiry and political and ethical thought. In addition to being an intellectual activity, his form of questioning, or the Socratic Method, was a political act. He made his living having public discourse on inconsistencies in reasoning and questioning social norms. His relentless questioning unsettled those in power as it could force people to face the ignorance they did not know they possessed (Al Sheikh, 2021). His trial and death would serve as examples of the political reach of his philosophical efforts, seen as an assault on Athenian stability. For the refusal of Socrates to conform to the state's expectations, he was accused of corrupting the youth and impiety, thereby earning a martyr's death for himself as a free thinker and ethical inquirer.

Many philosophers took Socrates' status as a political agitator and an ethical guide in the 20th century, drawing parallels between his teachings and contemporary moral problems in governance. Scholars of leadership ethics in general and those interested in how leaders obtain and ideally put the power they possess found resonance in his emphasis on self-examination and the pursuit of virtue (Wright, 2023). His critiques of democracy were seen by political theorists and explored his concern about rhetoric and ignorance in decision-making. However, ethical philosophers looked to him for his unflagging adherence to the truth and integrity as a model of moral consistency. His legacy of debate on the nexus of philosophy, politics, and ethics has endured to inspire such debates in contemporary society.

### 2.2. The Socratic Method and Its Political

## Significance

The Socratic Method has been admired for a long time because it helps people think critically and reflect on themselves. Ultimately, it is a process of dialogue organic to the development of contradictions and a deeper understanding of them. This method has been read in political philosophy to encourage talk and democratic participation. The Socratic Method serves to question assumptions and provoke the questioning of individuals' beliefs, which is no less than what a healthy democracy requires (Al Sheikh, 2021). This ensures that the ideas are questioned rather than accepted without question and prevents the assertion of untested ideas. It has become a critical defense against dogma and authoritarian domination during the 20th century. Socratic dialogue has yet to be regarded as a bastion against the abuse of truth, so rational thought in democratic settings remains imperative. Thinkful dialogue helps people recognize and test political deception (Campbell, 2024). Hannah Arendt and Hans-Georg Gadamer noted that this orientation could promote a reflective and engaged citizenry. Their work emphasized the importance of critical inquiry, the essential notion of inquiry that helps preserve democratic ideals and keep political discourse open and responsive.

### 2.3. Socratic Ethics and the Question of Political Responsibility

Socrates has left us with one of his remaining contributions to politics: his commitment to ethical responsibility. His famous 'unexamined life is not worth living' is a moral duty to question and refine one's principles. Just as critical of personal ethics, critical reflection is also seen as necessary and desirable within political responsibility (Vieira, 2022). Its questioning method caused people to justify their beliefs and actions, pushing people into an accountable culture. His philosophy is that for a people to be genuinely involved in the political space, it must not be for exercising rights but to ensure that whatever one exercises, one must be ethical.

Michel Foucault and Paul Tillich, among others, in the 20th century, took up, on an interstitial basis, the matter of Socratic ethics and political responsibility as bearing on, for instance, war and totalitarian rule. However, they said that to avoid returning to an oppressive regime or allow leaders to be held accountable, they need to work out what issues must be addressed and who should be moral with themselves. This will enable people not to be taken advantage of simply because they are manipulated and uphold democratic values. On this very Socratic matter, it is a sad acknowledgement of Socrates' legacy that political engagement calls for participation and willingness to make unwarranted ethical scrutiny a part of one's political endeavor.

## 2.4. Socratic Thought in 20th-Century Political Philosophy

In the 20th century, Socratic thought's political and ethical aspects came to be considered more often again following the two world wars. To help philosophers better understand how Socratic principles could apply to the modern challenges of ideological extremism, political propaganda and ethical lapses in leadership, many doctors, logicians, and others tried to clarify how these challenges could and could not appropriately be treated. The theme of global conflicts leading to devastation by humans gave way for intellectuals to return to a re-examination of the critical inquiry role in maintaining democratic values while fighting off authoritarianism. Socratic dialogue, viewed as a means to check oppressive ideologies and encourage civic responsibility, was favorably considered.

Works of thought by Leo Strauss, Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault examined how Socratic philosophy could underpin political resistance and moral integrity. Overall, they differed in their interpretation of Socrates, but they underlined the importance of his method of dialogue and ethical questioning to meet contemporary political problems (Campbell, 2024). These three essentially took from the Socratic tradition of questioning political norms, revealing how dangerous it could be to be uncritical and conformist, and finally, how power structure could be viewed through the lens of the Socratic critique.

## 2.5. The Role of Dialogue in Contemporary Political Challenges

Socratic dialogue has been widely studied as an ethical conflict resolution in political discourse. The increase of populism, political polarization and misinformation in modern society triggered new ethical problems and required a return to Socratic principles (Robertson, 2024). Socratic dialogue, however, invites open, questionably grounded questioning and critical engagement against manipulation of public opinion, suppression of dissent and otherwise. It demands people to assess their beliefs, think about other points of view, and speak about reason rather than ideology. In an increasingly digital age, Socratic questioning is a relevant and essential practice in spreading misinformation rapidly, especially in promoting informed decisions and intellectual humility.

While the approach remains a subject of ongoing modern political theory, it continues to be explored as a means through which this approach could be more effectively integrated into democratic institutions in order to encourage, if not promote, the most significant involvement and responsible governance from our citizens (Cowen, 2025). Societies can embed

Socratic dialogue in public debates, educational curricula, and policies. A reasoned discourse process helps citizens transcend their partisan divisions and seek common ground based on shared values. Just at a time when the political world is fraught with tension, reviving Socratic dialogue offers a potential way to repair relations among democracy's leaders, rebuild faith in democratic institutions, and generate ethical leadership.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research Approach

The political heritage of Socrates in this research is considered using a qualitative approach for its contemporary ethical challenges and dialogue. A qualitative approach is used due to the nature of Socratic philosophy as an abstract principle and not at empirical data, allowing in-depth exploration of philosophical texts, historical interpretation and contemporary applications. It is a critical analysis, a comparative interpretation and a philosophical argumentation that allows it to construct links between Socratic ethics and contemporary political philosophy, as well as with contemporary democratic discourse.

### 3.2. Sources and Materials

In this research, the classical works include Plato's *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Republic*, firsthand accounts of Socratic thought and its political implications (Cowen, 2025). These texts are analyzed to determine Socrates' basic assumptions concerning civic responsibility, political mechanisms, and the significance of dialogue in a given society. Secondary sources consist of the interpretations by scholars in the twentieth century, including Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, Leo Strauss, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, who analyze the reception and change of Socratic philosophy in modern times. Contemporary political analyses apply Socratic principles to democratic governance, public discourse, and ethical leadership to bring classical philosophy up to modern discourse and political analyses.

### 3.3. Analytical Framework

The study employs a thematic analysis tactic, concentrating on vital philosophical themes linked to Socratic political heritage. These themes comprise:

1. **Ethical Self-Examination and Political Responsibility** – Socratic ethics as a model of moral responsibility in political leadership and civic participation.
2. **Dialogue and Democratic Discourse** – The

Investigation of Socratic dialogue's role in stimulating critical thinking and democratic debate in democratic societies.

### 3. Socratic Resistance to Authoritarianism –

Examines how Socratic questioning has been used in resistance to the oppressive and ideological dogma.

### 4. Contemporary Applications of Socratic Thought –

Modern ethical decision making in politics through philosophical interpretation.

## 3.4. Comparative Analysis of 20th-Century Thinkers

The perspectives of many philosophers of the 20th century who engaged with Socratic thought in both ethical and political situations are compared, and this research is particularly relevant (da Costa, 2024). A comparison is made, for example, between Hannah Arendt's thoughts about resistance to totalitarianism in Socratic dialogue and Michel Foucault's reflections on power structures and self-examination. Further, Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics, dialogue, and their value in contexts opposite to Strauss's above are also considered. This compares approaches to address modern political and ethical issues in the context of Socrates principles.

## 3.5. Limitations of the Study

One of the encounters of this research is the interpretative nature of Socratic philosophy. As Socrates left no written works, his ideas are conveyed mainly in Plato's writings, whose own philosophical bent may influence the presentation of Socratic thought. A reliance on secondary sources has also introduced the subjectivity of scholars in silencing the voices that argued against this position, strategic as it may be, to the extent scholars' debate Plato's dialogues as being merely a vessel to transcribe Plato's philosophical views or to the extent they hold that they are a means of conveying Socrates' actual beliefs. Accurate reconstruction of Socratic philosophy is made more challenging by both intra- and intertextuality variations of translation that echo historical context. If the use of Socratic principles to today's political challenges is to be contextually adapted, it may be underlined by varying interpretations (Robertson, 2024). Drawing parallels between Socratic thought and the current front of governance requires a flexible approach to the complexities of today's political structures and ethical dilemmas. This study tries to keep as close to Socrates' ideals as possible, yet it knows that applying ancient philosophy to changing political scenery is futile. As such, the study considers the plurality of philosophical perspectives and aims to offer an objective view of the ongoing debate regarding the political heritage of Socrates.

## 4. Results/Findings

### 4.1. The Enduring Influence of Socratic Ethics in Political Thought

The findings of this research indicate that Socratic ethics still has a lot to do with modern political thought. The fact that Socrates stressed ethical self-examination as the basis of responsible political leadership has been recognized as a classic source for responsible political leadership. As Socratic philosophy was revisited for its power to help in the political resistance and moral affinities, the 20th century, with totalitarian regimes, ideological conflict, and democratic struggle, worked as a new ground for Socratic philosophy (Lei, 2024). For example, any innovative Arendtian claim worth something (and they all are) takes Socratic dialogue to resist oppressive political systems (da Costa, 2024). She said Socratic questioning encouraged independent thinking because authoritarian regimes could not easily control public opinion. For instance, Foucault's reflection on the "care of the self" echoes Socratic self-examination, clarifying that ethical practice is a significant part of political struggle. These perspectives lend support to the position that Socratic ethics serves to help us to challenge ideological conformity and uphold intellectual freedom.

### 4.2. Socratic Dialogue as a Model for Democratic Discourse

According to the study, the Socratic Method is still viable for encouraging democratic discourse in today's society. An important means of countering political misinformation and developing critical citizens has been identified in Socrates' practice of questioning people without any constraints or particular points they are answering, which would solve inconsistencies in their reasoning (Ghibellini, 2024). The technique promotes suspicion of authority, evaluation of political clichés, and meaningful talk.

Philosophers like Hans-Georg Gadamer and Pierre Hadot have referred to the importance of dialogue for democratic government and have claimed that the work of a Socratic questioner promotes a culture of thoughtfully deliberated dialogue. The findings show that this method can be used in modern political debates, which often involve polarization of ideology and populist rhetoric, leading to rational discussion. Socratic dialogue is a countermeasure against the trend in political culture toward unreasoned assertion rather than the reasoned debate encouraged through engagement in dialogue while reflecting on the questions asked.

### 4.3. The Political Implications of Socratic



## Resistance to Authoritarianism:

Another important finding is that Socratic philosophy has historically acted with resistance to authoritarianism. Socrates' trial and execution exemplify the political risk to a man who challenged social norms, questioned authority, and was, therefore, dangerous. This theme has been thoroughly explored in 20th-century philosophy, especially in that of totalitarian regimes (Ghibellini, 2024).

For example, Leo Strauss suggests that Socratic questioning is a way of philosophical resistance to state-prescribed dogma. His work suggests that the Socratic philosophy offers an intellectually safe way for people to resist oppressive political structures. Jan Patočka's thoughts on the Socratic courage to confront political power mirror this; philosophical inquiry can act as a moral and philosophical counter to tyranny (da Costa, 2024). The findings still indicate the need for a Socratic commitment to truth-seeking and ethical integrity in the contemporary struggle against political oppression and ideological extremism.

### 4.4. Contemporary Applications of Socratic Thought in Political Ethics

The research demonstrates that contemporary Socratic thought is used in practical political ethics beyond the academy and academic philosophy. Socratic principles are being applied to address ethical governance, leadership, and civic engagement dilemmas. For instance, political theorists have argued that Socratic questioning can assist with the ethical decision-making of public policymakers by critically evaluating the consequences of their actions. Likewise, the Socratic model has been used in the legal and educational fields, where it is the basis for ethical reasoning and debate. This result suggested that Socratic ethics is proper for tackling contemporary political problems, including misinformation, political corruption, and civic disengagement. Socratic principles promote empowerment for participating in democracy by creating a sense of moral responsibility and self-examination and encouraging everyone to talk about their feelings in the classroom.

### 4.5. Challenges in Applying Socratic Ethics to Modern Politics

While Socrates' relevance is apparent, the study also demonstrates that applying Socratic ethics to contemporary political worlds faces some obstacles (Iyengar et al., 2019). The greatest obstacle is resistance to self-examination in political leadership. Socratic ethics insist on self-awareness and moral accountability, whereas personalities emphasize power and strategic rhetoric more than ethical reflection. Far from the truth, the findings suggest that the political landscape

can often prevent the kind of honest questioning and intellectual humility Socratic philosophy encourages.

The study finds that when Socratic dialogue is conducted with citizens, it cannot happen in an era of social media, political polarization and superficial conversation (Dano, 2023). Today, as Socrates urged, we cannot foster this kind of reflective questioning because the spread of misinformation and the inclination to remain within an ideological echo chamber ensure it is difficult. These problems reveal that now is the time to once more attempt to put Socratic principles into play in political discussion and as a part of public education.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. The Relevance of Socratic Ethics in Modern Political Thought

The results of this research show the fundamental relevance of Socratic ethics in the problems of modern political philosophy. Socrates stresses that ethical self-examination is fundamental to good political leadership, civic engagement, and a non-interventionist reaction to authoritarian rule (Wright, 2023). In the 20th century, ideology was divided into 'isms' and created mass atrocity, totalitarian regimes, and wars, which made revisiting Socratic principles a model for ethical political conduct a thought. Scholars like Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, and Leo Strauss discuss and affirm that Socratic ethics is the basis of ethics for political dilemmas.

Personal responsibility in political action is one of the central ones in modern political philosophy. Socratic ethics HK require that individuals search critically for the truths they believe to be accurate or exist, their decisions, their actions, and all others instead of unthinkingly following authority and popular opinion (Dano, 2023). This principle is fundamental in contemporary political systems, which are found to be very often in the hands of misinformation, propaganda, ideological manipulation and used for discourse. If individuals self-examine through the Socratic tradition of inquiry, they can become better discerning and resistant to political manipulation and, thereby, stronger democratic governance.

Socratic ethics are becoming more crucial for the current political landscape, especially as all societies grapple with ethical crises like political corruption, violation of human rights, and injustices. It offers an intellectual and ethical foundation to address these issues as a kind of Socrates' method of rigorous questioning and commitment to truth-seeking. Socratic principles can help modern political leaders, activists, and citizens improve transparency and accountability in the political sphere.

### 5.2. The Role of Socratic Dialogue in Democratic

## Governance

Democracy is sustained through Socratic dialogue to provide reason, rational discourse, and informed decision-making (Dano, 2023). The findings show that in the Socratic Method, critical thinking, intellectual humility, and openness can promote a healthy democracy. Famously, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Pierre Hadot point out that Socrates' questioning impels people to overcome ideological and other biases and rationally consider politically important questions. The application of Socratic dialogue in present-day political discourse is around. Social media has taken the development of misinformation, political extremism, and ideological polarization. Instead of being engaged with thoughtfulness in questioning, political discussions are mostly slogans, partisan rhetoric and emotionally charged debates. It undercuts Socratic dialogue principles, emphasizing patience, listening, and changing one's mind according to reasoned argumentation.

There should also be a cultural shift from emotionally compelling measures to rational discourse when implementing Socratic dialogue more seamlessly within modern political governance. Socratic questioning should be built into the curricula of the educational systems to prepare future generations with the required tools to participate in critical politics. Moreover, political leaders should take the public dialogues of Socrates as an example and participate in them, thus encouraging them to be transparent and ethical reflecting.

### 5.3. Socratic Ethics as a Tool for Political Resistance

Another important aspect of the findings is how Socratic ethics can fight against authoritarianism. Over the years, the prevailing politics have been those aimed at stamping out any ideas about independence and forcing ideological conformity. Likewise, Socrates' life challenges the use of intellectual resistance against the state-imposed dogma since he was executed for challenging the Athenian authorities with their orthodoxy. The sentiment of this theme corresponds to the task of 20th-century philosophers like Jan Patočka and Leo Strauss to find ways Socratic ethics might be employed to combat totalitarian regimes.

Since it is a commitment to truth and ethical integrity, the Socratic model serves as a model for political activists, journalists and scholars who oppose authoritarianism (Ding & Yu, 2022). Socratic questioning can expose the inconsistency of oppressive ideology and justify political justice. This approach is evident in many historical settings as people resist party and eventual programs in order to oppose fascist and communist regimes, as well as more recent contestations against political corruption and human rights abuses.

However, Socratic ethics for political resistance is practical and demands courage and persistence. All through history, people in power have been hostile to the questioning Socratics can provoke — the persecution of political dissidents, for instance. While Socrates has been dead for several centuries, the lasting contribution is that he enforced his view that the examination of truth is prevalent in a society that functions justly. The problem becomes the way of guaranteeing that people have the intellectual and moral resources to engage with this type of resistance, even with the risk of reprisal.

### 5.4. Challenges in Applying Socratic Ethics to Contemporary Politics

Socratic ethics provide good insights into contemporary political thinking, yet their application presents problems. Political leaders are likely to face massive resistance in self-examination. Socrates maintained that starting with ignorance is the first step to wisdom. However, in contemporary political culture, certainty, assuredness, and brassy self-confidence are more often rewarded than humility and a lack of self-belief (Dano, 2023). One bone of contention is the challenge of Socratic dialogue in an era under the reign of mass communication and surge information. The philosophical discussions occurred in Socrates' time through direct and face-to-face engagements. Today, the battleground of political discourse occurs in the multivocal digital spaces. Still, it is mainly impersonal and prone to fragmentation and, perhaps not least, a reduction of sustained, reflective dialogue.

### 5.5. Future Prospects for Socratic Ethics in Political Philosophy

Even with these difficulties, Socratic political philosophy can be an excellent ally for us and achieve some salutary effects shortly. We see a not insignificant tendency today to want to revive the Socratic influence in different areas—education, for example—and to express its principles more directly relatable to our current political conditions. This ongoing trend has promising signs (Ding & Yu, 2022). One way to apply Socratic ethics is to train political leaders. Socratic dialogue could also be of some use in efforts to promote a more civic-minded electorate. Deliberative democracy is on the upswing (Dano, 2023). There is a growing recognition—both in our society and abroad—that how we make political decisions is vitally important to the quality of those decisions and our governance.

Reasoned discourse among citizens is at the heart of this promising approach to democratic decision-making. Indeed, the recent federal Election Commission rules governing the public financing of presidential elections make it clear how much new light deliberative democracy can shed on the

American condition. Socratic ethics will remain relevant only if individuals, educators, and political leaders are willing to accept its principles. Despite the existence of considerable contemporary political thought that goes against the grain of Socratic ethics, the penetrative and often subversive quality of Socratic political philosophy—its depth and subversiveness that are suggestive of how the qualities above contribute to Socrates's timeless legacy—guarantees that Socratic political thought will remain a familiar spectre in the intellectual world.

## 6. Conclusions

Socratic ethics is a foundational element in political thought, especially as it relates to shaping ideas about leadership, democracy, and the kind of civic responsibility that resists authoritarianism. Today, as in the past, Socratic principles can serve as a helpful lens through which to view the current political landscape. Their application here, however rigorous, is nonetheless selective and brief, illustrating only some of the many ways in which the events and issues of today can be rendered intelligible by politically insightful, if not socratically ethical, accounts.

The investigation underscores the relevance of Socratic ethics for today's democracies. The pursuit of truth, as well as a form of intellectual humility, are both vital if we are to have anything like responsible governance. However, today, when political life in many parts of the world seems characterized by not just partisanship but open hostility, when many citizens seem more ready to embrace anything but the truth, and when political authority seems too often available to the authoritarian, it looks almost daft to uphold the Socratic as something for today's political leaders to aspire. Even with the application of Socratic ethics in today's political landscape being a challenge, the principles of Socratic ethics still deserve a place in the political discourse of informed citizens, shaping an ethical political system. Despite our many modern ways of solving moral problems, we could still use the appearance of Socratic wisdom in our public conversations.

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