

BOOK PROPOSAL

IN CONVERSATIONS WITH THE GREAT PHILOSOPHERS

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Overview

In *Conversations with the Great Philosophers* is a nonfiction work of approximately 168,000 words that recreates conversations with 63 of history's greatest philosophers, psychologists, and thinkers—bringing their ideas, methods, and voices to life for the general reader.

Unlike traditional introductions to philosophy, which explain what philosophers believed, this book brings the philosophers into the reader's room. Rather than presenting them as distant historical figures to be studied, it invites readers into living conversations with them. Each chapter introduces the thinker and their achievements, explains their philosophy in plain English, and shows how those ideas can be applied to everyday life through Practical Philosophy. It also explores the thinker's Method—not only what they thought, but how they thought.

Then the philosopher and the author sit down together. The author asks questions. The philosopher answers. Then the roles reverse, and the philosopher questions the author. Every chapter also contains the same set of Timeless Questions, posed to every thinker in turn, allowing readers to compare how Socrates, Nietzsche, Marcus Aurelius, Simone de Beauvoir, and dozens of others approach the same enduring questions about happiness, failure, freedom, death—and even artificial intelligence and social media. The result is not simply a history of philosophy, but a way for readers to use these radically different minds to examine the puzzles of their own lives.

The manuscript took seven years to research and write. Every conversation was **written to remain faithful** to each philosopher's actual writings, personality, and historical record, rather than inventing positions for them.

The Hook

I am the reader I wrote this book for. I left school at fourteen and spent much of my life believing philosophy belonged only to academics. I thought I was not smart enough. After building a successful career in fashion and later teaching entrepreneurship at New York University for nearly three decades, I discovered that the questions the great philosophers asked were not reserved for specialists. They belonged to all of us.

This is the introduction to philosophy I wish someone had placed in my hands when I first became curious enough to open a philosophy book. In other words: philosophy, demystified.

Comparable Titles

In Conversations with the Great Philosophers will appeal to readers of Nigel Warburton's *A Little History of Philosophy*, which makes the history and ideas of philosophy accessible to general

readers, and Alain de Botton's *The Consolations of Philosophy*, which connects philosophical ideas to the problems of everyday life.

Like these books, *In Conversations with the Great Philosophers* makes complex ideas approachable without requiring an academic background. Its distinctive contribution is its conversational format: rather than simply explaining what philosophers believed, it brings 63 philosophers, psychologists, and thinkers into direct conversation with the author and reader. Its recurring Timeless Questions also allow readers to compare how radically different thinkers across centuries approach the same fundamental questions of life.

About the Author

Roger Kuperways was born in hiding during the Holocaust in Voiron, near Grenoble, in 1944, and raised in Paris. Surrounded in childhood by pastries, fabric scraps, and the quiet poetry of everyday life, he developed an early sensitivity to craft and beauty. He left school at fourteen, later earned a scholarship sponsored by the École des Beaux-Arts, and apprenticed in the Paris couture world.

At seventeen, he immigrated to the United States with twelve dollars, two old handmade suits his uncle no longer wanted, **and not a word of English**.

Beginning as a sewing machine operator in a Chinatown sweatshop, he went on to build a successful fashion label in New York's Garment District. His designs were carried nationwide by many of America's leading department stores, including Saks Fifth Avenue, Bergdorf Goodman, Bloomingdale's, Neiman Marcus, Nordstrom, and Lord & Taylor.

When the American garment industry declined as manufacturing moved overseas, Kuperways reinvented himself once again. He entered academia and taught entrepreneurship and philosophy at New York University for nearly three decades. His course, *Starting Your Own Business on a Shoestring*, drew in part from his own experience of arriving in America with almost nothing and building a business from the ground up.

Kuperways spent much of his life believing philosophy belonged to academics. When he first tried to read the great philosophers, he often felt he was simply not smart enough to understand them. Over time, he discovered that the problem was not the questions themselves, but the intimidating way philosophy was often presented. The great questions—about happiness, failure, freedom, meaning, and how to live—belonged to everyone. That realization became the foundation of *In Conversations with the Great Philosophers*.

Philosophy, demystified.

Now Professor Emeritus, Kuperways continues to write, mentor, lecture, and teach Argentine tango. He is also the author of the memoir *From Chocolate to Philosopher* and is developing a volume of short reflections, *ON: Reflections on Meaning, Time, Love, and a Life Well Lived*.

Target Audience

The primary audience is general readers curious about philosophy but intimidated by traditional academic texts—the same readers who buy Nigel Warburton's *A Little History of Philosophy* and Alain de Botton's *The Consolations of Philosophy*. This includes adults seeking personal growth and practical wisdom, readers of popular psychology and self-help, and lifelong learners drawn to big-idea nonfiction.

A secondary audience is educators and students. Readers of sample chapters, including several teachers, have noted the book's potential for classroom use, particularly its accessible structure and side-by-side comparison of how different philosophers approach the same questions.

Marketing & Platform

- Nearly three decades teaching entrepreneurship and philosophy at New York University; now Professor Emeritus, with an extensive network of former students, colleagues, and alumni.
- Founder of a professional networking group of approximately 36,000 members.
- *From Chocolate to Philosopher*, a forthcoming memoir being developed for publication with MindMend Publishing, expanding the author's public profile.
- ON: Reflections on Meaning, Time, Love, and a Life Well Lived, a volume of short reflections currently in development, offering further cross-promotional opportunities.
- Early sample chapters shared with readers, including educators, generated strong interest and useful feedback that helped refine the manuscript.

Author website, currently featuring his memoir *From Chocolate to Philosopher*:
www.rogerkuperways.com/author.html.

Chapter Outline

The book contains 63 chapters, each devoted to a different philosopher, psychologist, or thinker and following a consistent structure designed to move from introduction and understanding to practical application and direct conversation. I first introduce the thinker and explain who they were and what they did; then they introduce themselves in their own voice. Next comes a short list of their main achievements, their philosophy explained in plain English, and Practical Philosophy—showing how their ideas can be applied to everyday life. We then examine the philosopher's Method and the Point of the Method, again in plain English.

The conversation follows: I question the philosopher, and then the roles reverse and the philosopher questions me. Each chapter then presents the Timeless Questions, followed by After My Conversation—what I took away from our encounter—Why I Wrote This, A Wink, and One Final Thought.

There are, in a sense, three people in every conversation:

The philosopher, the author, and the reader. Although the dialogue takes place between the philosopher and me, the questions are meant to reach beyond us. The reader is invited to consider how they would answer, where they agree or disagree, and what the philosopher's ideas might mean in their own life. The reader is not simply observing the conversation; they are being invited into it.

The Timeless Questions are the same questions posed to every philosopher in the book, creating a unique conversation across centuries. Readers can discover, for example, how Socrates, the Buddha, Nietzsche, Simone de Beauvoir, and Marcus Aurelius would each approach the same question about happiness; how Frankl, Schopenhauer, and Camus confront suffering and failure; or how thinkers who lived centuries before the digital age might respond to artificial intelligence and social media.

Their answers often disagree—and that is part of the point. The book does not tell readers which philosopher is right. Instead, it places 63 radically different minds before the same enduring questions, allowing readers to compare their answers, consider which ideas speak to them, and perhaps find wisdom that helps them solve some of the puzzles of their own lives.

1. **In Conversation with Socrates** — The examined life and the discipline of asking better questions.
2. **In Conversation with Bertrand Russell** — Clear thinking, skepticism, and the search for a rational, good life.
3. **In Conversation with Parmenides** — The nature of being, and the limits of change and illusion.
4. **In Conversation with Plato** — The Theory of Forms and the pursuit of ideal truth and justice.
5. **In Conversation with Hypatia** — Reason, mathematics, and intellectual courage in a hostile world.
6. **In Conversation with St. Augustine** — Faith, free will, and the restless search for meaning.
7. **In Conversation with Thomas Aquinas** — Reconciling faith and reason through natural law.
8. **In Conversation with Michel de Montaigne** — Self-knowledge, doubt, and the art of living, explored through the essay.
9. **In Conversation with Baruch Spinoza** — Reason, nature, and freedom found through understanding necessity.
10. **In Conversation with Mary Wollstonecraft** — Reason, education, and the rights of women.
11. **In Conversation with Karl Marx** — Labor, class struggle, and the critique of capitalism.
12. **In Conversation with Niccolò Machiavelli** — Power, pragmatism, and the realities of leadership.
13. **In Conversation with Søren Kierkegaard** — Anxiety, faith, and the leap into authentic existence.
14. **In Conversation with Blaise Pascal** — Reason's limits, faith, and the wager on meaning.
15. **In Conversation with Heraclitus** — Change, flux, and the unity of opposites.
16. **In Conversation with Maimonides** — Reconciling reason and faith through philosophy.
17. **In Conversation with René Descartes** — Doubt, certainty, and the foundations of knowledge.
18. **In Conversation with Pythagoras** — Number, harmony, and the order underlying the universe.
19. **In Conversation with Francis Bacon** — Empirical method and the power of knowledge.

20. **In Conversation with Aristotle** — Virtue, purpose, and the practical path to happiness.
21. **In Conversation with Epicurus** — Simple pleasures, friendship, and freedom from fear.
22. **In Conversation with Omar Khayyam** — Wine, wonder, and the fleeting beauty of life.
23. **In Conversation with Diogenes** — Radical honesty and freedom from convention.
24. **In Conversation with Arthur Schopenhauer** — Desire, suffering, and the will to live.
25. **In Conversation with Nietzsche** — Self-overcoming, the will to power, and creating one's own values.
26. **In Conversation with Camus** — Absurdity, rebellion, and finding meaning without illusion.
27. **In Conversation with Martin Buber** — Genuine relationship and the I-Thou encounter.
28. **In Conversation with Leo Tolstoy** — Simplicity, moral conviction, and the search for a meaningful life.
29. **In Conversation with Viktor Frankl** — Meaning found even in suffering.
30. **In Conversation with Erich Fromm** — Love, freedom, and the fear of authentic living.
31. **In Conversation with Alfred Adler** — Overcoming inferiority through purpose and community.
32. **In Conversation with Carl Gustav Jung** — The unconscious, archetypes, and individuation.
33. **In Conversation with Sigmund Freud** — The unconscious mind and the roots of human behavior.
34. **In Conversation with William James** — Pragmatism and the practical value of belief.
35. **In Conversation with Hannah Arendt** — Thinking, judgment, and the dangers of thoughtlessness.
36. **In Conversation with Frantz Fanon** — Identity, colonization, and the fight for dignity.
37. **In Conversation with Confucius** — Virtue, harmony, and duty within relationships.
38. **In Conversation with Marcus Aurelius** — Stoic discipline and inner peace amid hardship.
39. **In Conversation with Sartre** — Radical freedom and the responsibility of choice.
40. **In Conversation with Philippa Foot** — Virtue ethics and moral responsibility.
41. **In Conversation with Iris Murdoch** — Attention, love, and moral perception.
42. **In Conversation with Simone de Beauvoir** — Freedom, gender, and the project of becoming oneself.
43. **In Conversation with Simone Weil** — Attention, affliction, and spiritual truth.
44. **In Conversation with Immanuel Kant** — Duty, reason, and the moral law within.
45. **In Conversation with Lao Tzu** — Simplicity, balance, and living in harmony with the Tao.

46. **In Conversation with Émilie du Châtelet** — Reason, science, and intellectual independence.
47. **In Conversation with David Hume** — Skepticism, experience, and the limits of reason.
48. **In Conversation with George Sand** — Freedom, passion, and living against convention.
49. **In Conversation with John Stuart Mill** — Liberty, utility, and the greatest good.
50. **In Conversation with John Dewey** — Experience, education, and democratic living.
51. **In Conversation with Ralph Waldo Emerson** — Self-reliance and the inner voice.
52. **In Conversation with Henry David Thoreau** — Simplicity, nature, and civil disobedience.
53. **In Conversation with John Locke** — Natural rights, liberty, and government by consent.
54. **In Conversation with Voltaire** — Reason, tolerance, and the courage to question authority.
55. **In Conversation with Jean-Jacques Rousseau** — Nature, freedom, and the social contract.
56. **In Conversation with the Buddha** — Suffering, attachment, and the path to inner peace.
57. **In Conversation with Fyodor Dostoevsky** — Suffering, faith, and moral freedom.
58. **In Conversation with Thomas Hobbes** — Order, security, and the social contract.
59. **In Conversation with Hegel** — History, struggle, and the unfolding of freedom.
60. **In Conversation with Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz** — Optimism, reason, and the best of all possible worlds.
61. **In Conversation with Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu)** — Spontaneity, relativity, and effortless living.
62. **In Conversation with Michel Serres** — Connection, translation, and the philosophy of communication.
63. **In Conversation with Roger Kuperways** — The format reverses: the philosophers close the book by questioning the author on the life he has built from their ideas.

Concluding Sections

Finding the Philosopher You Need — A practical guide directing readers to philosophers whose ideas speak to particular questions and challenges in their own lives.

Appendix — For Those Who Want to Explore Further

The Appendix is designed for readers whose conversations with the philosophers have left them curious and who want to explore further. As the manuscript itself says, readers do not need the Appendix to understand the conversations; it offers them “a few more questions to explore.”

The Great Branches of Philosophy — Introduces the major branches of philosophical inquiry.

Philosophy Begins with Wonder — Explores curiosity and questioning as the beginning of philosophy.

Where Were the Women Philosophers? — Explores why women’s voices were so often excluded from the traditional philosophical canon.

A Short History of Philosophy — Traces the development of philosophical thought and the enduring questions that have carried the conversation across centuries.

Philosophers by Tradition or School — Groups the thinkers by their major philosophical traditions, movements, and schools.

Philosophy and Religion — Explores the relationship between reason, faith, belief, and philosophical inquiry.

Eastern and Western Philosophy — Compares different traditions and approaches to fundamental questions of life and thought.

Philosophy in Everyday Life — Brings philosophical thinking into ordinary choices, relationships, problems, and experiences.

Learning to Disagree — Explores questioning, listening, reasoning, and the possibility of disagreement without hostility.

The Courage to Change Your Mind — Examines the willingness to reconsider what we believe when thought, experience, or evidence challenges us.

The Philosopher’s Toolbox — Gives readers practical ways of questioning assumptions, examining arguments, and thinking more clearly.

Philosophers’ Methods — Allows readers to compare the distinctive ways the philosophers think and approach problems—not simply **what** they thought, but **how** they thought.

Coda: “An Evening with the Philosophers” — The book’s central idea comes fully to life as philosophers from different centuries and traditions gather in the same room for one final conversation—and the reader is invited to join them. The philosophers question, challenge, disagree with, and occasionally surprise one another, while also turning their questions directly toward the reader. By the end, even a guest who admits he knows almost nothing about philosophy is welcomed into the conversation, reinforcing the book’s central message: philosophy does not belong only to philosophers. It belongs to anyone willing to ask a question, pull up a chair, and join the conversation.

Sample Chapter: In Conversation with Socrates

In Conversation with Socrates

“The unexamined life is not worth living.” — Socrates

I’d Like You to Meet Socrates

The man who changed the way I think.
His name is Socrates.

I first discovered him as a young apprentice in Paris. During my lunch breaks at the Chanel atelier, I wandered through bookstores looking for something I couldn't quite name. I wasn't searching for philosophy. In fact, I wasn't even sure what philosophy was. Then I met Socrates. Not in person, of course, but through the pages of a book. What surprised me wasn't that he had answers. It was that he seemed far more interested in asking questions. Simple questions. Who am I? What is a good life? What is justice? Why do I believe what I believe? Those questions followed me long after I closed the book. They followed me through fashion... through business... through teaching... through success... through failure... and into old age. The older I became, the more I realized that Socrates had been teaching me something extraordinary. A good question can change a life. He claimed to know nothing. Yet few people have taught humanity more. More than 2,400 years later, he is still inviting us to stop... to think... and to examine the life we are living. I hope you'll enjoy meeting him as much as I did.

Who Was Socrates?

Socrates (c. 470–399 BC) is often called the father of Western philosophy. He lived in Athens more than 2,400 years ago, but many of the questions he asked are exactly the same ones we continue to ask ourselves today. Unlike many philosophers, Socrates wasn't interested in explaining the stars or the movement of the planets. He wanted to understand people. The Oracle at Delphi once declared that no one in Athens was wiser than Socrates. Socrates didn't believe it. So he went looking for someone wiser, questioning politicians, poets, and craftsmen thought to possess great wisdom. He gradually discovered that they often believed they knew what they did not know. Socrates knew only one thing... how much he still had to learn. Perhaps that was the wisdom the Oracle meant. Athens, meanwhile, was a wounded city. It had lost the Peloponnesian War and endured a brutal coup. Fear and suspicion had taken hold.

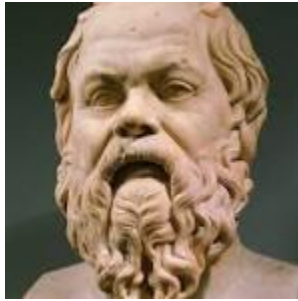
The playwright Aristophanes had already made Socrates a figure of ridicule in his comedy *The Clouds*.

Caricatures have a strange way of becoming reality in the public mind.

Everything we know about Socrates comes from the writings of those who knew him, especially Plato and Xenophon.

His ideas have influenced nearly every major philosopher who came after him.

Allow Me to Introduce Myself...



My name is Socrates.

I was born in Athens around 470 BC.

My father was a stonemason.

My mother was a midwife.

For a time, I also worked as a stonemason.

But before I became known as a philosopher, I served Athens as a soldier.

In one battle, I helped save the life of a young soldier named Alcibiades.

Years later, people spoke of my courage.

I simply did what the moment required.

I wore the same coarse cloak in summer and winter and often walked barefoot, even in the cold.

I wrote no books.

Some people find that surprising.

But I never believed philosophy belonged on a shelf.

I spoke with merchants...

soldiers...

politicians...

craftsmen...

poets...

and anyone else willing to stop for a conversation.

Unlike the Sophists, I never charged anyone for these conversations.

My method was simple.

I asked questions.

Then I asked another.

And another.

Slowly, contradictions appeared.

Sometimes the person standing before me finally admitted:

"I don't know."

But I will tell you more about that later...

when Roger begins asking me questions.

Young Athenians often gathered to listen to my conversations.

Among them was a brilliant young man named Plato.

The young men were amused by my questions.

The powerful men were not.

Some came to hate me.

I was accused of corrupting the young and disrespecting the city's gods.

I stood before a jury of 501 citizens.
I refused to beg for mercy.
I refused to flatter the jury.
I refused to promise that I would stop questioning people.
When asked what punishment I deserved, I suggested free meals for life in the public hall.
The jury did not find this amusing.
I was found guilty.
I was sentenced to death.
My friends urged me to escape.
I could have left.
I stayed.
People often ask whether I was afraid to die.
Of course.
But I believed that living honestly was more important than merely living longer.

Socrates's Achievements

- **Changed the Focus of Philosophy** — bringing philosophy down from the heavens to everyday questions about virtue, justice, courage, and how to live well.
- **Developed the Socratic Method** — teaching through questions that challenge assumptions and encourage people to think for themselves.
- **Inspired Plato and Aristotle** — influencing the two philosophers who would shape much of Western philosophy.
- **Lived His Philosophy** — choosing death rather than abandoning the principles he believed were true.
- **Made Questioning a Way of Life** — showing that wisdom begins with recognizing how much we still have to learn.

Socrates' Philosophy in Plain English

Socrates believed that the most important thing any of us can do is question what we think we already know. He never claimed to have answers—only better questions. By examining our beliefs honestly, admitting what we don't know, and refusing to accept ideas simply because they are common, we begin to think for ourselves. For Socrates, an unexamined life was hardly a life at all.

Practical Philosophy

Before repeating an opinion you've always held—about success, love, politics, religion, or right and wrong—stop and ask yourself:

“Why do I actually believe this?”

Did I arrive at this belief through careful thought?

Or did I inherit it from my parents, my education, my culture, my friends, or the world around me?
Socrates did not ask us to doubt everything simply for the sake of doubting.
He asked us to examine our beliefs so that we could distinguish what we truly understand from
what we have merely accepted.
That requires something more difficult than intelligence.
It requires humility.
The willingness to say:
“Perhaps I am wrong.”

The Socratic Method

Begin by asking the other person to explain what they mean.
Listen carefully to the answer.

Then question it.

- What do you mean by that?
- Why do you believe that?
- What are you assuming?
- Is that always true?
- Can you think of an example where it would not be true?
- Does that answer contradict something else you believe?

Each answer leads to another question.

Do not tell the other person what to think. **Use questions to help them examine what they think they know.**

The purpose is not to win an argument.

It is to help both of you move closer to the truth.

***The Point of the Method:** Question → clarify → question again → understand.*

The Conversation

Roger: You told people, “Know yourself.”

How does someone begin?

Socrates: By becoming suspicious of certainty.

Most people spend their lives examining everyone except themselves.

They notice the faults of their neighbors...

while remaining strangers to their own souls.

To know yourself...

you must first become willing to discover that you are mistaken.

Humility is the doorway to self-knowledge.

Roger: If you walked through our world today, what question would you ask first?

Socrates: I would ask the same question I asked in Athens.

“What do you mean?”

People still use words like freedom...

justice...

success...
love...
without first asking what those words truly mean.
The centuries have changed.
Human nature has not.

Roger: What is the greatest illusion people live under?

Socrates: That being busy is the same as living well.
Many people fill every hour...
yet never examine a single day.

Roger: What is the difference between intelligence and wisdom?

Socrates: Intelligence discovers better answers.
Wisdom discovers better questions.
The intelligent person impresses others.
The wise person transforms himself.

Roger: Socrates, people call you the father of Western philosophy. Did you think of yourself that way?

Socrates: (laughing)

Certainly not.

I never claimed to be wise.

Ironically, people considered me wise because I was one of the few willing to admit how little I truly knew.

Roger: Yet people came from all over Athens to hear you speak.

Socrates: They came because I asked questions.
Most people enjoy hearing their opinions confirmed.
I had the unfortunate habit of examining them instead.

Roger: Where did this method come from?

Why questions?

Socrates: My mother was a midwife.

I watched her comfort frightened women as they brought new life into the world.

Years later, I realized I wanted to do something similar.

Not with children...

but with ideas.

She helped people give birth to babies.

I tried to help people give birth to their own thoughts.

Wisdom cannot be given.

It must be discovered.

One question at a time.

Roger: But why questions instead of answers?

Socrates: Because answers can be borrowed.

Discoveries belong to the person who makes them.

Most of us inherit our opinions from our parents, our teachers, our neighbors, or simply from the time in which we live.

We seldom stop to ask whether they are true.

We ask:

“What does everyone believe?”

instead of:

“What is true?”

My questions were never meant to display my wisdom.

They were meant to awaken yours.

Roger: One of your most famous sayings is, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” What did you mean?

Socrates: Many people spend their lives pursuing wealth, reputation, or power without ever asking why.

They inherit ambitions just as they inherit opinions.

A life guided by unexamined assumptions is lived by chance rather than by choice.

Roger: I’m not sure I completely agree.

I have met people who have never studied philosophy...

yet they have lived remarkably good and decent lives.

Socrates: And I would never deny it.

Philosophy does not make a person virtuous.

But every virtuous person examines, at least from time to time, the life he is living.

He may never call it philosophy.

I would.

Roger: Did you intend to embarrass people?

Socrates: Never.

Embarrassment was only a by-product.

My purpose was understanding.

When people discover that an idea they have believed for years cannot survive a few honest questions, they often feel embarrassed.

But it is not the embarrassment that matters.

It is the discovery.

Roger: You were condemned to death for corrupting the youth of Athens.

Socrates: If asking young people to think for themselves is corruption, then I suppose I was guilty.

But I never asked them to agree with me.

Quite the opposite.

I asked them to question me as well.

Philosophy is not about creating followers.

It is about creating thinkers.

Roger: You could have escaped.

Socrates: I could have.

My friends had arranged everything.

They loved me enough to risk their own lives.

But I asked myself a simple question:

What would my escape teach them?

I had spent my life arguing that we must live according to our principles, not our convenience.

If I abandoned those principles when they became costly, then my philosophy would have been nothing more than clever words.

A philosopher’s greatest argument is not what he says.

It is how he lives.

Roger: What happened, in the end?

Socrates: My friends gathered around me.

Some wept.

We spoke about the soul...

and whether something of us continues after the body is gone.

Even then...

there were still questions.

Then I drank the hemlock.

Roger: Socrates, I'm not sure I agree with you.

Socrates: About what?

Roger: You never wrote anything.

Some people have even claimed you couldn't write—that you were illiterate.

Socrates: (smiles)

They also claimed I corrupted the youth of Athens.

Not everything people say deserves to be believed.

Roger: Then why didn't you write?

Socrates: Because philosophy is not a speech.

It is a conversation between minds.

Just like the conversation you and I are having now.

A written page cannot answer your next question.

Roger: So perhaps philosophy is not about giving people better answers.

Socrates: It is about helping them ask better questions.

Socrates Questions Roger

Until now, I had been asking the questions. Then Socrates smiled, and, as he had done with so many Athenians before me, he quietly took over the conversation.

Socrates: Roger, when did your formal education end?

Roger: When I was fourteen.

My family could no longer afford to keep me in school.

I had to learn a trade.

So I left school and began an apprenticeship.

From that day on...

I learned by working.

By reading.

By observing.

By making mistakes.

And by asking questions.

Socrates: Yet you later became a university professor.

How curious.

Who educated you?

Roger: Life.

Books.

Teachers.

Lectures.

Failure.

Curiosity.
The people I met.
And the questions I could not stop asking.

Socrates:

Then perhaps your formal education ended at fourteen.
Perhaps that was the day your real education became your responsibility.

Roger: I never thought of it that way.

Socrates: Most people believe education is something teachers give.

I believed it begins when a person decides,

“I want to understand.”

The classroom can help.

But curiosity is the true teacher.

Socrates: Roger, what is success?

Roger: Achieving the goals we set for ourselves.

Socrates: Then if a thief achieves his goal, is he successful?

Roger: Not in the sense I meant.

Socrates: Then perhaps we should first ask what makes a goal worth pursuing.

Roger: Is there a name for this way of asking questions?

Socrates: Not in my lifetime.

I simply asked questions until we discovered whether our beliefs could withstand careful examination.

Later generations chose to call it the Socratic Method.

Roger: Then perhaps you should continue.

Socrates: Gladly.

Socrates: You have spent much of your life writing books. Tell me, why do you write?

Roger: To understand life... and perhaps to help others understand it a little better.

Socrates: Then writing is not your goal?

Roger: No.

Socrates: It is merely the means?

Roger: Yes.

Socrates: Then what is the goal?

Roger: To become wiser.

Socrates: Ah... and what is wisdom?

Roger: Knowing how to live well.

Socrates: How do you know that you are living well?

Roger: I don't suppose I know with certainty.

Socrates: Then perhaps wisdom begins when we admit what we do not know.

Socrates: You have known success in business. Was success a good thing?

Roger: At the time, I believed it was.

Socrates: And today?

Roger: Today I believe success is valuable only if it helps us become better human beings.

Socrates: Then success itself is neither good nor bad?

Roger: No.

Socrates: It depends upon how we use it?

Roger: I believe so.

Socrates: You have taught many students. Tell me, what is education?

Roger: Helping people learn.

Socrates: Learn what?

Roger: Knowledge.

Socrates: Is knowledge enough?

Roger: No.

Socrates: Then what is missing?

Roger: Judgment.

Socrates: And how does one acquire judgment?

Roger: Experience... reflection... and sometimes failure.

Socrates: Then perhaps education is not filling the mind...
but teaching it to examine itself.

Socrates: Roger, what is the good life?

Roger: A life filled with love, curiosity, purpose, and kindness.

Socrates: Are those four separate things...
or are they different names for the same thing?

Roger: I have never thought about that.

I'm not sure those are really one thing.

Love and curiosity sometimes lead us in different directions.

Socrates: Do they?

Can genuine curiosity exist without kindness?

Can lasting love exist without understanding?

Perhaps they are not four companions...

but four faces of the same friend.

I paused.

Roger: I never thought of it that way.

Roger: So this is the Socratic Method.

You've been doing it to me all along.

Socrates: (smiling)

You noticed.

Roger: I love it.

Socrates: May I leave you with one final question?

Roger: Please.

Socrates: Every morning you ask yourself what you must do.

How often do you ask yourself...

who you ought to become?

I have found...

that the second question is far more important than the first.

Socrates: After a lifetime of reading philosophers, what have you learned?

Roger: That philosophy is not about having better answers.

It is about asking better questions.

In the end, I have come to believe that it is not the answer that matters most...

it is the quality of the question.

Socrates: You have known success and failure, wealth and hardship, illness and recovery. Which taught you the most? **Roger:** Failure.

Success rewarded me.

Failure transformed me.

Timeless Questions

The eight questions below are the same for every philosopher in this book. Their answers reveal how each thinker approached life's most enduring questions—and how their wisdom still speaks to us today.

Socrates believed that philosophy begins with asking good questions. He was less interested in giving people answers than in helping them discover the truth for themselves. As you read his responses, remember that every answer is also an invitation to think more deeply.

Roger: What is your secret to happiness?

Socrates: A happy life begins with a good soul. Seek virtue before wealth, character before reputation, and wisdom before certainty. Happiness is rarely something we find. More often, it is the companion of a life well lived.

Roger: How do you deal with failure?

Socrates: By asking what it has to teach me. Failure is not the opposite of learning—it is often its beginning. The only true failure is refusing to examine ourselves.

Roger: What is your greatest fear?

Socrates: Not death. My greatest fear is living without integrity. Better to suffer injustice than to commit it.

Roger: How can I become a better person?

Socrates: Never stop examining yourself. Ask not only, "Am I successful?" but, "Am I becoming wiser? Kinder? More just?" A better life begins with honest self-examination.

Roger: What is the purpose of life?

Socrates: To care for your soul. Wealth, power, and reputation come and go. The person you become is your greatest achievement.

Roger: How can I overcome my fear of death?

Socrates: Remember that none of us truly knows what death is. It may be a peaceful sleep, or the beginning of another journey. Fear often comes from pretending to know what we cannot know. Live well, and death will trouble you less.

Roger: How do we avoid making big mistakes?

Socrates: By asking questions before we act. Too often, we are certain when we should be curious. Examine your assumptions carefully, for an unexamined decision often becomes a regretted one.

Roger: What do you think about artificial intelligence and social media?

Socrates: Artificial intelligence may answer your questions. It cannot teach you to ask better ones. Every age invents powerful tools; wisdom lies in how they are used. Whether in the Athenian marketplace or on social media, I would ask the same questions: "What do you mean?" "How do you know?" "What evidence persuaded you?" Intelligence is valuable. Wisdom remains indispensable

After My Conversation with Socrates

After speaking with Socrates, I realized how patient he must have been.

I kept asking questions.

He kept answering them with more questions.

And somehow, by the end of our conversation, I understood more than I did when we began.

Perhaps that was his genius.

He did not tell me what to think.

He made me want to think.

Why I Wrote This

Many philosophers have offered answers.

Socrates taught us how to ask better questions.

For years, I thought philosophy was about finding the right answers...

Then I discovered that a good question can change a life.

His conversations reminded me that certainty is often the enemy of wisdom, and that growth begins the moment we become willing to say:

"Perhaps I don't know."

Whether we are discussing love, success, fear, happiness, or meaning, the first step is always the same:

Ask a better question.

That simple lesson has influenced almost everything I have written.

A Wink

Socrates never wrote a book.

Perhaps he knew...

*the best ideas don't belong on a page.
They belong in a conversation.*

One Final Thought