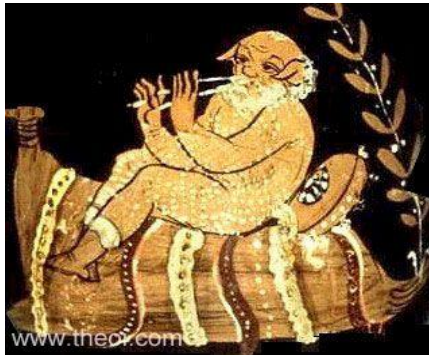


Graham Best

SuperiorTutor.com

Have the Advantage: the best tutor!

What Would Socrates Do?



Yes, I am going to talk about Socrates. But before you get skeptical on me and conclude I have overmuch ego to write about myself in the same blog entry as the freewheeling, forever-barefoot father of Western Thought, please consider that I did study Philosophy at Princeton, and all that deep thinking and diligent application of abstruse formal logic does entitle me somewhat to my share of poetic license and delusions of grandeur.

In that playful light I aspire to imagine that working as a tutor is the ultimate fulfillment of my undergraduate education, because I'm emulating Socrates. Like him I am working with the youth of my civilization to encourage critical thinking, intellectual autonomy, clarity of mind and soul, confidence, genuine perspective, and lasting satisfaction with life and self, all for the sake of a better future, primarily theirs, but by extension, also mine, yours, and everyone's. The only unfortunate aspect of this comparison is that I seldom wear a toga.

Nevertheless, I do strive to apply my own *tailored* version of the Socratic method to my interaction with students. I follow Socrates' example and position them to frame assigned questions for themselves so they really understand what they're answering, often for the first time—an enlightening moment. Then I guide them to arrive at those answers on their own steam—an even more enlightening moment. My students suddenly realize they are able to do and solve what they never thought they would. At that point, they understand I have helped them, since they are successfully helping themselves. Their grades and test scores go up and they are equipped to make this outcome continue.

So, given those results, isn't it okay if now and then I entertain a harmless historical conceit and secretly regard academic iPads as the modern equivalent of stone palimpsest tablets in Ancient Greece, or think to myself (and really mean it): "What would Socrates do?" As a tutor, I get some highly productive answers from that question when I let it gently simmer. For me it's the liberating equivalent of what Socrates was talking about when he made his most famous remark: "All I know is that I know nothing." Really? Fantastic! Because when a person knows nothing, the truth becomes clearest. There isn't so much in its way anymore. When I help a student, I take things out of the way. I may also play the flute.