

by Brian G. Daigle

Research: Fine morning, isn't it, Socrates?

Socrates: I don't believe we've met. Have we met?

Research: You probably don't know me, but I know you. Well, I don't know you, but I remember meeting you once.

Socrates: Did you attend my school in Athens?

Research: No, that was well before my time.

Socrates: Were you at my trial? That was a strange day, so I may have met you then and forgotten.

Research: I wasn't there either, but I've heard the stories.

Socrates: I must have met you in passing the last time I met with Augustine.

Research: That must have been it. You two seemed deep in thought.

Socrates: Yes, that's what learning requires. Well, I'm sorry I don't remember clearly when we met.

Research: I have seen you in a few classes around here, but it's been a while. Plus, we eventually had to take different directions because of our concentrations.

Socrates: What are you studying?

Research: I study a little bit of everything, but I am mostly in the science and education departments. That's where I concentrated my efforts after my freshman year.

Socrates: Well, I had much to say about science and even more to say about education. Why wouldn't they put us in some of the same classes? It seems we could have a lot to discuss.

Research: That's part of the confusion, I guess. You're old; I'm new. You're dead; I'm alive. I have skills and tools you never had.

Socrates: I can agree with the old and new part, but that doesn't seem to answer my question about why you would be more relevant than I am. I would also contend whether or not I'm dead, and if you want to continue this conversation, you should probably reconsider that too. But on skills and tools, you may have a point there. What kinds of skills and tools do you have?

Research: Well, for one, I am well versed in critical thinking.

Socrates: What's that?

Research: Critical thinking is "the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. In its exemplary form, it is based on universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness."

Socrates: Do you mean you are skilled in the art and science of thinking? That would be called logic. If you are skilled in logic, I'd love to learn from you.

Research: Not quite. I'm more skilled in the science of data management. And I wouldn't call it an art. Thinking, so I've heard, requires judgments and arguments, and that's just not my thing. I try to keep the peace.

Socrates: What's peace?

Research: I should have seen that one coming.

Socrates: Yes, you should have. But we'll table that for now. What other skills and tools do you have?

Research: I'm good with computers. I know a lot about gender differences. And I heard I am the most quoted source for modern scholars. Someone else told me I was also the most misquoted.

Socrates: Have you thought critically about whether data management, gender differences, and source of quotes and misquotes are skills and tools? And is it more of a tool to be quoted or misquoted?

Research: I can't say I have thought about that. I just know these are my best qualities, and that my best qualities are also my most popular quotes.

Socrates: And what good are these qualities to know?

Research: I've never before thought about that either.

Socrates: You mean you have not been critical and you have not thought about whether or not your own skills and tools are in fact skills and tools at all?

Research: I have not, but isn't that what you philosophers are for?

Socrates: It seems to me that every man is a philosopher. Every man not only asks questions but seeks to answer those questions. Every man has ideas by which they live and judge.

Research: Yes, that's what I do. I help men answer their questions.

Socrates: And how do you help men answer their questions?

Research: By the skills and tools I have.

Socrates: And what were those? And have you yet determined since we last brought them up whether or not they are skills and tools?

Research: I guess we will have to agree to disagree.

Socrates: Spoken like a true educator. We really are worlds apart.

Research: Can we move on? I'm not one for conflict. Remember, I like to keep the peace. The real reason I wanted to talk with you is because I heard you were once a great orator. I could really use your help for my speech tomorrow.

Socrates: What kind of speech is it?

Research: I was recently made valedictorian of my class, and I am supposed to give the commencement speech. Will you be there?

Socrates: I didn't plan to be there. Modern speeches make my head hurt.

Research: Well, help me with mine and maybe we can fix that problem.

Socrates: We can try. But I'm not so sure it's my problem to fix. What do you have so far?

Research: Well, the hot topic of the day is the new President, Donald Trump.

Socrates: What would you want to say about Donald Trump?

Research: I don't quite know. I have many ideas and angles I could take.

Socrates: Name one.

Research: Well, in many of his remarks, Trump has been unkind to immigrants and foreigners. Our school prizes diversity, so maybe I could start there, on the importance of maintaining diversity in our classrooms and on our campus.

Socrates: But if your school prizes diversity, wouldn't talking about Trump make you just another person talking about the same topic as everyone else? That doesn't sound very diverse.

Research: I guess you're right.

Socrates: Well, what else have you thought of?

Research: Technology is all the buzz. Autonomous cars. New and improved cell phones. Nanotechnology. There is a lot of data to prove that the more we support the technology industry, the better our country will be.

Socrates: Didn't you say that Trump, though popular, isn't well liked these days? And isn't his slogan about making America great again?

Research: I guess you're right. I should probably stay away from that bandwagon.

Socrates: Didn't you say this speech is happening at your graduation ceremony?

Research: Yes. Tomorrow.

Socrates: And what do you think is more important for education, data or wisdom?

Research: Sometimes I think it's data and sometimes I think it's wisdom.

Socrates: You appear to change your mind too much. What do you think is more important today?

Research: I don't know. What do you think?

Socrates: Wouldn't you say education is a kind of formation of the person, as opposed to the input of data into a person's mind?

Research: I suppose. I've heard that before.

Socrates: And if education is forming the person, we must then form them to the truth as opposed to forming them to what is false, right?

Research: Even I know someone isn't educated if they've learned only falsities or lies.

Socrates: So if education is a kind of formation of the person, and we want to form the person to what is true instead of what is false, won't we then say that the greatest truth a person can know is who they are and how they differ from every other being?

Research: Because I have spent so much time in science and education departments, I'm a little fuzzy on philosophy.

Socrates: That's too bad. You really should read more.

Research: So, tell me more about what you think a person is and how they differ.

Socrates: What makes a man more different than animals than his soul, and what is the greatest pursuit of the soul than toward virtue?

Research: This sounds like an ancient idea. It seems a bit outdated.

Socrates: It most certainly is an ancient idea, but what makes you think there's anything wrong with it because of its age?

Research: I guess nothing, only that not too many people abide by old ideas anymore. Especially the crowd I'm speaking to tomorrow, made up mostly of my classmates.

Socrates: Wouldn't you say then that's all the more reason why you should consider speaking on something wise and virtuous for your speech? I think you would find that old ideas, if you were more acquainted with them, can be some of the best ideas, and some of the most important ideas for your peers to hear and know. Actually, it is only in knowing old ideas that we may affirm or deny new ideas.

Research: That seems right enough, but, again, we are now into all that philosophy stuff.

Socrates: Precisely, and that gets me back to my original question. What do you think is more important for education, data or wisdom?

Research: If you are right that education is the formation of the soul to virtue, then I don't see how data can fulfill this purpose. I do, however, see how wisdom can help with this pursuit.

Socrates: And that's what philosophy is, the pursuit of wisdom.

Research: Ah, yes, now I remember hearing that once. It's hard sometimes to keep all those different ideas clear in my head.

Socrates: Which is precisely why you need philosophy.

Research: I guess I do. Do you think I can audit a philosophy course sometime?

Socrates: It depends on the professor.

Research: I'll look into it.

Socrates: I'm sure you will.

Research: Well, I better be going. I have a presentation next hour in the college President's office. The topic is job placement for our graduates, and I'm first up to speak. Thanks for your help. It was good running into you.

Socrates: I'm afraid that's all it was. Until next time. Good luck on your talk.

Research: I'll take all the luck I can get.