



Askesis II - THE SOCRATIC TEST® Master Your Thoughts & Emotions

Background: Managing your *psycho-physiological state*, is no easy task, especially when there are deep seated fears and insecurities. The application of a ‘filtering system’, representative of Ethos, Pathos and Logos, for dealing with unwanted, disturbing thoughts, is very useful, as this anecdotal story with Socrates demonstrates.



A long time ago in ancient Athens, the great philosopher is said to have come upon an acquaintance, who ran up to him excitedly and said, “Socrates, do you know what I just heard about one of your students?”

“Wait a moment,” Socrates replied. “Before you tell me, I’d like you to pass a little test. It’s called the Test of Three.”

“Test of Three?”

“Yes,” Socrates continued. “Before you talk to me about my student let’s take a moment to test what you’re going to say. The first test is **Truth**. Have you made absolutely sure that what you are about to tell me is true?”

“No.” the man replied, “Actually I just heard about it.”

“All right,” said Socrates. *“So you don’t really know if it’s true or not. Now let’s try the second test, the test of **Kindness**. Is what you are about to tell me about my student something good?”*

“No, on the contrary...”

“So,” Socrates continued, *“you want to tell me something bad about him, even though you’re not certain it’s true?”*

The man shrugged, a little embarrassed.

Socrates continued, *“You may still pass though because there is a third test – the test of **Usefulness**. Is what you want to tell me about my student going to be useful to me?”*

“No, not really...”

“Well.” concluded Socrates, “If what you want to tell me, is neither true nor good nor even useful, then why tell it to me at all?”

As this story reveals, there are three filters we must pass our thoughts and beliefs through before allowing them to dwell in our minds:

1. **Is it True?**

Represents **Ethos** (Consider: Integrity, Credibility, Accuracy)

2. **Is it Kind?**

Represents **Pathos** (Consider: Feelings, Emotions, Compassion, Kindness, Empathy)

3. **Is it Useful?**

Represents **Logos** (Consider: Reason, Practicality, Applicability, Utility, Facts, Strategies)

Now try it for yourself:

Name: “THE SOCRATIC TEST”®

Purpose: Using three ‘filters’ to overcome distressing, frustrating, angering, fear-filled thoughts and beliefs you may presently hold, and keep your mind lean and efficient.

Instructions: Bring to mind a particular thought or belief that worries, distresses or angers you, regarding your personal or professional life. It can be a large or small thing.

The best way to do this is to ‘visit the scene’ as if you are watching it on a TV screen:

If the frustrating, angering or frightening event happened in the past, revisit and relive the scene to review it and connect with your fear. For example:

The year is 1989. I’m in the living room of my parents’ home. I’m having (the usual) argument with my father... about me wanting to leave my job at the bank.

The belief that worries, stresses, frustrated me down deep inside:

“If I ever leave my job. He’ll be so disappointed in me. I’ll lose his love and admiration. He won’t forgive me.”

Now it’s your turn; prepare yourself to write down the exact frustrating/angering/frightening thought or belief (in one or two sentences), exactly as it is formulated when you think it. It’s a belief that you presently hold about yourself, another person or a situation. Try not to analyse it. State it simply. It could be something like this:

“Down deep inside....I’m afraid that.....”



Write down the thought or belief that worries, stresses, frustrates or angers you. (It should be 1-3 sentences long, not more.)

Now ask yourself:

1. Is it 100% true, or am I distorting the facts by:

- *Dramatizing* the situation and overblowing its importance
- *Generalizing* and assuming things that are not 100% true

- *Over-Personalizing* and taking offence at things that are not really related to me.

Now ask yourself again, is my thought or belief 100% true?

⇒ YES or ⇐ NO

If you consider it true, to what degree is it true? 100%, 75%, 50%, 25%. Giving a general statement that something is true, may be misleading, if it is only 50% true or occasionally, but not always true.

We often give ‘truths’ a larger power (%) than they are due. If we can demystify it, even for a moment, we loosen the ground upon which it stands. Sometimes, it takes one small doubt, to make the wall start tumbling down.

If your answer is ‘Yes’, try to ‘process’ it, to gauge it’s actual importance relative to your overall goals.

Imagine: Who could you be if you didn’t have that thought? What sort of thoughts would you have instead?

2. Is it kind?

Is your thought of belief kind towards **you**? Are you putting yourself down, being too critical? Self reflection is good, but many times we judge ourselves too harshly. We’re all human and we make mistakes; the point is to learn from them, not to let them drain our energy and confidence. (You may find that you can trace back this harsh criticism to your mother or your father’s way of disciplining you when you were a child).

Also, is it kind towards the **other(s)**? Look at it from the perspective of the others who are involved. How does the situation look from their perspective? People are not perfect and sometimes they don’t realize it. Have you judged them correctly or are you overblowing it? Remember that the goal is to protect *your* mind. The kindness serves *you*, by ridding you of poisonous thoughts.



Write your thoughts down..

This diagram may assist you in this process by showing how perspective affects our view of truth: What do you see here, an old lady (facing forward), or a young lady (facing to the back). (Image W.E.Hill 1915)



3. Is it useful?

Although fear can sometimes be beneficial, alerting you to real dangers, too much fear and pessimism can poison your mind with self-defeating doubt and paralyze you with indecision. It may also be concealing your deeper desire, or an opportunity. You have to therefore, become a ‘witness’ to your thought-streams and encourage yourself to think thoughts which are *useful*, in order to keep it healthy and productive.

Consider your thought or belief. What is the benefit of allowing it to run around in your mind? Does it help you in any way? Who would you be if you didn’t have it? What would your life look like, if it did not exist?

Thoughts that don’t pass the test of three should not be taking space in your mind. A ship does not sink from the water around it, but from the water entering it.

And even if the thought is true. Consider; how can you **rephrase, change or modify** it so that it is more Truthful, Kind and Useful, so that it becomes clearer, more positive and more specific?



Write down this new, re-phrased statement in positive terms and read it out loud.



In psychoanalysis, the Greek myth of the Medusa represents our fears and how we can overcome them through using a “mirror” of self-reflection, in order to get the prizes of *freedom and power*.