



Stetson's English Department Newsletter

What Would Socrates Think?: Sophistic Logographers, AI, and the Decline of Dialectic

In today's educational landscape, AI tools are transforming how students write and think. While these advancements offer benefits, we should consider how classical philosophers, particularly Socrates, might critique them. Socrates placed great value on speech, dialogue, and living communication in the pursuit of truth. He argued that the written word could never replace the interactive nature of dialectic—philosophical conversations that help people uncover deeper truths through questioning. For Socrates, dialectic was the key to escaping the cave of illusions.

This preference for spoken dialogue, or the "living word," over written texts was shared by Jesus and Buddha, who also emphasized oral teaching. Both believed that living communication was more authentic and effective than written words. In today's AI-driven world, this insight feels especially relevant.

The Concept of Dialectic

Dialectic, in the Socratic tradition, refers to a method of dialogue in which individuals engage in questioning and answering to expose contradictions in thought and arrive at a deeper understanding. This process is exemplified in Plato's dialogues, such as *Phaedrus* and *The Republic*. For Socrates, dialectic wasn't about winning arguments but about discovering truth through the exchange of ideas.

Plato's Allegory of the Cave illustrates this concept. Prisoners see only shadows on the wall of a cave, but through dialectic, they are guided out of the cave toward the light, which represents truth. This process requires active engagement and constant questioning. Simply reading or writing down information—without dialogue—remains like staring at the shadows of ignorance.

RECOMMENDED

READINGS

The Lean Startup

Ries

The Secret History

Tartt

The Lightning Thief

Riordan

Anne of Green Gables

Montgomery

Oliver Twist

Dickens

The Catcher in the Rye

Salinger

In modern terms, dialectic can be seen as a collaborative learning process. Unlike text-based learning, where knowledge is passively absorbed, dialectic encourages active participation. It requires students to think critically and deeply about what they are learning.

Socrates on Writing: Phaedrus and the "Living Voice"

Socrates was skeptical of the written word, famously arguing in Plato's *Phaedrus* that writing is inferior to spoken dialogue because it cannot engage in real-time discussion. He compared writing to a painting: it may look alive, but when questioned, it remains silent. Writing is static, unable to adapt to the needs of its audience or correct misunderstandings.

Socrates emphasized the "living voice"—the spoken word that engages directly with the listener. In a dialectic conversation, the speaker can adjust their argument based on the listener's responses. This dynamic exchange is essential to learning. In contrast, the written word—whether in ancient speeches or AI-generated content—lacks this flexibility.

Jesus and Buddha: A Shared Preference for Oral Teaching

Socrates' critique of writing finds parallels in the teachings of both Jesus and Buddha. Jesus' teachings were passed down orally for decades before being written, and Buddha's lessons were transmitted orally for centuries before they were recorded.

Both emphasized direct, personal interaction in communicating truth. Like Socrates, they believed the spoken word fostered a more meaningful connection to understanding.

Socratic Criticism of Logographers and AI

In *Phaedrus*, Socrates also criticized logographers—speechwriters who composed persuasive speeches for others to deliver. Much like modern AI-generated essays, these speeches were designed to persuade, not to uncover truth. Socrates saw this as dangerous because it encouraged the manipulation of rhetoric without a commitment to justice or truth.

In the modern context, AI tools like ChatGPT can be seen in a similar light. Just as Socrates critiqued logographers for reducing rhetoric to a transactional service, he might view AI tools as creating a distance between the writer and the reflective, truth-seeking process. Students relying on AI might bypass the deep, critical engagement that dialectic requires.

If Socrates were alive today, he would likely be concerned about the rise of AI in education, especially if it replaced dialogue in learning. Just as he critiqued logographers and sophists for using rhetoric to persuade without seeking truth, he might view AI as facilitating superficial learning that undermines deep intellectual inquiry.

WHY BECOME AN ENGLISH MAJOR?

Majoring in English is finding a place among your peers, your idols, and your thoughts to call home. —Sarah Wasser

There is no career in which you will not have writing. Being able to analyze and articulate your own thoughts into words is the most valuable asset of communication and teamwork. It is surprising how poorly some people write and holding a firm grasp of the English language puts you at the skill level above the rest. —Xavier Mulligan

Language itself serves a grand purpose: Communication. As an English major, or minor, one gains a profound understanding for articulation that will aid her the rest of her life, regardless of workplace. —Allison Spaccio

Sigma Tau Delta at Stetson

Sigma Tau Delta is a national Collegiate English Honor Society. If you have immense dedication and a passion for literature, you too can join the 9,000 inducted members since 1924. Once inducted into this prestigious organization, members can publish academic and literary works in the society's annual undergraduate journal, *Sigma Tau Delta Review*.



Stetson University's English Department guides each individual Sigma Tau Delta member



through an educational journey, filled with the totality of enlightenment that the study of English provides.

After completing their undergraduate career, (seen below, left to right) Caroline Williams, Nicole Padgett, Victoria Aldea, and Chyina Powell, proudly wear Sigma Tau Delta's vibrant red graduation stole and medallion.

Currently, we are interested in forming a book-club, and offering an informational session for academically qualified students majoring or minoring in English studies. If you become involved, you will have the opportunity to take charge of the organization and lead current and future students toward English-centered careers.

Our induction ceremony, where new members receive the Society's certificate and pin, is held each fall. Graduating seniors are authorized to wear special regalia at commencement.



English Department Faculty

Chesya Burke, PhD, University of Florida
<https://www.stetson.edu/other/faculty/chesya-burke.php>

Nancy Barber, M.F.A., University of Florida
<http://www.stetson.edu/other/faculty/profiles/nancy-barber.php>

Michael Barnes, Ph.D., University of South Carolina <http://www.stetson.edu/other/faculty/profiles/michael-barnes.php>

Joel Davis, Ph.D., University of Oregon <http://www.stetson.edu/other/faculty/profiles/joel-davis.php>

Nicole Denner, Ph.D., Northwestern University
<http://www.stetson.edu/other/faculty/profiles/nicole-denner.php>

Leigh Ann Dunning, Ph.D., M.F.A., University of Memphis <http://www.stetson.edu/other/faculty/profiles/leigh-ann-dunning.php>

Brendan Bowles, Director of the MFA of Americas Program, MFA, University of Mass., Amherst; MA, University of Toronto

Chris Jimenez, Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania
<http://www.stetson.edu/other/faculty/chris-jimenez.php>

Hannah Markley, Ph.D., Emory University
<https://hannahmarkley.com>

Megan O'Neill, Ph.D., University of New Mexico
<http://www.stetson.edu/other/faculty/profiles/megan-oneill.php>

Michele Randall, M.F.A., New England College
<http://www.stetson.edu/other/faculty/profiles/michele-randall.php>

Ryan Rivas, Coordinator of MFA Publishing and Publisher of Burrow Press

Lori Snook, Ph.D., University of Arizona
<http://www.stetson.edu/other/faculty/profiles/lori-snook.php>

Terri Witek, Ph.D., Vanderbilt University
<http://www.stetson.edu/other/faculty/profiles/therese-witek.php>

Yanhong Zuo, Brown Teacher-Scholar Fellow in Writing Center Studies

Grady Ballenger, Tom Farrell, Mary Pollock, Professors Emeritus/Emerita



Flagler Hall

A Bad Egg from a Bad Bird: The Myth of Corax and Tisias



In ancient Greece, Corax and Tisias are regarded as the founders of rhetoric. Corax, a sophist and Tisias's rhetoric teacher, agreed to hold off on Tisias's tuition payment until he won his first court case. This arrangement was supposed to be a motivating factor for both parties—Tisias would work hard to win a case, and Corax would eventually be paid. However, Tisias manipulated the situation by refusing to take any cases, avoiding payment entirely. This led Corax to sue Tisias for the tuition money.

During the trial, both sides crafted arguments that created a legal paradox. Tisias argued that if he won the case, he shouldn't have to pay, as he had succeeded in his first court case, fulfilling the terms of their agreement. If he lost, he shouldn't have to pay either because it would prove that Corax's teachings were ineffective. Corax, on the other hand, argued that regardless of the outcome, payment was due—if Tisias won, it was because of Corax's instruction, and if he lost, the agreement still stood.

The judge, realizing that any decision would result in an unfair outcome, dismissed both parties, declaring, "A bad egg from a bad bird." The phrase means that both student and teacher were at fault. Tisias learned the art of rhetoric from Corax, and in doing so, he learned how to manipulate situations to his advantage. Corax, as a teacher of rhetoric, specialized in manipulation, so his frustration with Tisias was hypocritical. The central belief of sophists was the subjectivity of morals and ethics, which made Corax's decision to sue his student contradictory.

The judge's ruling reflected the absurdity of the case, where both men used rhetoric to avoid responsibility. This paradox gives rhetoric a poor reputation because it is essentially the backbone of manipulation. The myth of Corax and Tisias shows how rhetoric, when misused, can lead to confusion and injustice. Both the teacher and student had learned to manipulate rather than seek the truth, ultimately resulting in their downfall.

Talk about Talk: Amplification Schemes for the Holidays

In Cicero's "Against Catiline" oration, he uses a rhetorical technique known as amplification to heighten the emotional appeal and clarity of his speech. Cicero builds momentum through repetition and structure, saving the most important meaning of each sentence for the end, encouraging active listening and providing a satisfying sense of closure. In this example from his speech, Cicero questions Catiline's audacity by layering observations about the guards, the senate, and the people's unity:

"When, O Catiline, do you mean to cease abusing our patience? How long is that madness of yours still to mock us? When is there to be an end of that unbridled audacity of yours, swaggering about as it does now? Do not the nightly guards placed on the Palatine Hill—do not the watches posted throughout the city—does not the alarm of the people, and the union of all good men—does not the precaution taken of assembling the senate in this most defensible place—do not the looks and countenances of this venerable body here present, have any effect upon you? Do you not feel that your plans are detected? Do you not see that your conspiracy is already arrested and rendered powerless by the knowledge which every one here possesses of it? What is there that you did last night, what the night before—where is it that you were—who was there that you summoned to meet you—what design was there which was adopted by you, with which you think that any one of us is unacquainted?"

Cicero uses questions that begin with "Do not" and "What is it that you did" to draw listeners in, delaying the full meaning until the end. The listener is kept on edge, paying attention, waiting for the conclusion to make sense of the initial details.

The following examples from students demonstrate similar amplification techniques to evoke the feelings and symbols of various holidays, using questions and lists to build toward a final meaning.

Aiden Butler

Is there any sparkling ornament — is there any wrapped gift — is there any snowy night — that does not remind you of Christmas? What other orange leaf — what other spiced drink — what other hallowed breeze — signifies the coming of Fall? Do not the warm greetings — do not the familial smiles — do not the baked hams — do not the prayers of thanks — embody the soul of Thanksgiving.

Collin Hughley

The chance to dress up in imaginative costumes and roam the neighborhood in search of candy, the way the glow of jack-o'-lanterns and the playful spirit of haunted houses transform ordinary streets into a celebration of fright and fantasy for Halloween, I revel at.

Will J Cornwell

The leaves begin to change and fall, pumpkins are bought and sold, costumes are meticulously planned and chosen, football has begun, the cool air enters, and sweaters are worn — these are the signs of Fall. Snow is packed tightly, scarves are adorned, plows are driven through, lights are strung up, and kids cheer loudly as they walk through neighborhoods — the trees are barren and cold as ice — Christmas joy is upon us, it has become Winter. Allergies begin to attack, the leaves poke out, animals slowly resurface, bugs are an issue, the baseball team begins — winter is gone and now here is Spring.

Barrett H. Kennedy

The final ring of the school bell, the sounds of kids scattering through the streets, the jingle of the ice cream truck rolling into the neighborhood, the splashing of water in the pool, the sizzle of the burgers cooking on the grill — these are the sounds that let you know Summer has arrived. The cracking of the logs in the fireplace, the smell of hot chocolate filling the house, the cold wind blowing against the window, the gingerbread house sitting on the kitchen table, the presents wrapped neatly under the tree — signifies the coming of Christmas. The color of the leaves changing, the back-to-school shopping spree, the air getting cooler, the longer nights, the shorter days, the start of the football season — this is the start of Fall.

Kyle Elphick

Do the afternoon storms — the morning dew — the morning calls of the birds — the rising temperature — not tell you that school is almost over?

Do not the early mornings — the long and tiring football practices — the constant yelling of a coach — indicate that the leaves are turning colors and falling off the trees?

With all of the homework — all of the late nights in the library — all of the classes — all of the tutoring — all of the papers — do they not have any effect on your sleep?

By delaying the meaning until the end, students use amplification to create a powerful sense of progression, much like Cicero's famous oration against Catiline.

Donovan Shepard

The Lean Startup by Eric Ries

Eric Ries' *The Lean Startup* is an excellent recommendation for college students for several reasons. Many students are interested in entrepreneurship or may have ambitions to start their own businesses in the future. *The Lean Startup* provides invaluable insights and strategies for aspiring entrepreneurs, teaching them how to build and grow successful startups in a practical and sustainable way. These principles can be applied not only to business ventures but also to various aspects of academic and personal life, encouraging students to adopt a mindset of continuous learning and improvement.

The methodology emphasizes the importance of identifying and solving real problems faced by customers, encouraging students to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills that are valuable in both entrepreneurship and various career paths. Starting a business can be challenging and unpredictable, but *The Lean Startup* teaches students how to embrace uncertainty, adapt to change, and pivot when necessary. These lessons are invaluable in navigating not only the entrepreneurial world but also the uncertainties of college life and beyond. The book can empower students with valuable skills and strategies that apply to both their academic and personal growth.

Reagan Swayze

The Secret History by Donna Tartt

If there is one book I could recommend to college students, it would be Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*. It's my favorite book, and I'm glad I read it while in college. If you've been on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok, you've probably come across the phrase "dark academia," with its imagery of lonesome Edinburgh streets and leatherbound classic novels. *The Secret History* is one of the pioneers of that genre, published in 1992 and based on Tartt's experiences as a college student in rural Vermont.

Part thriller, part bildungsroman, *The Secret History* spans a single school year as transfer student Richard Pappen becomes entwined in an exclusive Greek classics cohort, leading to an act of violence that changes

everything. With echoes of *Crime and Punishment*, this book blends mystery with an exploration of human psychology, all set against the picturesque backdrop of a college campus. I recommend it to readers who enjoy Homeric references and the morbid humor that comes with the complexities of friendship and betrayal.

Saraya Hodge

The Lightning Thief by Rick Riordan

I consider myself a very active reader, getting through 100 or more books a year, but the one I keep coming back to is the first book in the Percy Jackson series, *The Lightning Thief*. It's a coming-of-age story about a 12-year-old boy who discovers he's the son of Poseidon and is accused of stealing one of Zeus's lightning bolts. To clear his name, he embarks on a quest to retrieve and return it.

This book completely immerses you in its world—you feel as if you're right there with the characters. It's a feel-good read with detailed descriptions of the quest, filled with comedic elements, action scenes, and a heartfelt found-family trope. I recommend *The Lightning Thief* to any college student looking for an entertaining break from their everyday lives.

Emily Mullins

Anne of Green Gables by L.M. Montgomery

It's difficult to find a good book to curl up with for a few hours, especially when you've been in a reading slump. I first read *Anne of Green Gables* in middle school, and even years later, I still think about it occasionally. The story follows 11-year-old orphan Anne Shirley, who is mistakenly sent to a quiet town on Prince Edward Island when the family had actually requested a boy. Despite the mistake, they decide to keep her because of her charm and talkativeness.

The novel focuses on Anne's transition to adulthood and how she adjusts to the expectations of her new, traditional society. Though she makes mistakes along the way, she learns from each one. *Anne of Green Gables* reminds readers that mistakes are a crucial part of growth and character development.

Stuart Rathbun

Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens

I could probably count the number of books I've read from start to finish on both hands. While I don't consider myself an avid reader, I can recognize a good book when I read one. I recommend Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, which, though an older work, remains highly relevant today.

I first read *Oliver Twist* as a boy, and revisiting it recently, I found myself moved and enlightened. Dickens wrote many of his novels as critiques of the upper class in English society, and *Oliver Twist* is no exception. His depiction of class struggles and poverty resonates even today, offering a timeless commentary on economic inequality. This classic novel helps readers reevaluate modern societal structures and conversations about wealth and poverty.

Brysson Stouffer

The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger

At first glance, *The Catcher in the Rye* may not seem like the most exciting book, but it's about relatability. If you're at a crossroads in life as a young adult, I highly recommend reading it. The story of Holden Caulfield, who feels disconnected from his generation, reflects the struggles many of us face.

Holden represents a lot of us in different ways, and as a young adult, I connected with his story deeply. Reading this book challenged my beliefs and caused me to reevaluate how I make decisions. It's a great first read for anyone ready to question their perspectives on life and find new ways of understanding reality.



Hatter Network

Affiliated with *Touchstone*, Uncouth Hour is a weekly open-mic event in which Stetson University's community of artists are afforded the opportunity to share their work with others in an environment conducive to literature and the arts. Uncouth Hour can be found every Thursday night from 9:30-10:30 above the CUB. If your interests lean toward the more artsy side of campus, this may be the place for you.

The Reporter is Florida's oldest collegiate publication. Our job is to keep the Stetson University and the DeLand communities updated on news and events and to give students and faculty alike a voice. You can contact *The Reporter* at reporter@stetson.edu.

Touchstone is Stetson University's annual literary magazine; it functions as a vehicle for student expression, publishing original pieces of fine art, literature, music, digital media and performance art regardless of the author's major, class, standing or academic experience. *Touchstone* prints the best of student submissions, decided by committee; special recognition may be awarded to students whose work in their genre is deemed exceptional by the editing team.



duPont-Ball Library

Calendar & Hours

Hours of Operation

DAYS	HOURS
Monday to Thursday	8 AM -12 AM
Friday	8 AM – 6 PM
Saturday	10 AM – 6 PM
Sunday	11 AM -12 AM

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