



# SOCRATES ON THE RADIO

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It's eleven o'clock on *Tendencies Radio*. It's time to hand it over to George Waddle for his program "Open Mind." Hello George.

Hello, Armanda. Hello all. Welcome to this new edition of "Open Mind," along with Claudine Idiotintown. Good morning, Claudine. How are you this morning?

Good morning, George. That's a beautiful shirt you're wearing!

Isn't it? Today we welcome the philosopher, Socrates. Good morning, Socrates.

Socrates greets kindly.

"He's really ugly." Claudine whispers in the host's ear. "Thank God we're not on TV."

Hello, Socrates. Hello...!

Why doesn't the clown answer? thinks Waddle. But like the good professional he is, he continues.

So, Socrates, you are a famous philosopher. You have written a lot.

No, by Zeus, I have not written anything.

You haven't written anything?

Not one line.

But, but, OK. Well, I really want to ask you your opinion on something that concerns us all. Yesterday, as you certainly know, the prestigious site Manip-Media published a damning report about the minister, Constant Waffler. Let's recall what happened. The young Waffler stole three or maybe it was four marbles from Stephanie Gasbag when both were in kindergarten and, when latter complained, Waffler

replied, "Girls don't know how to play marbles!" The association Stop Girlphobia immediately denounced this slip of the tongue and demanded the head of the minister, and the leader of the opposition followed suit. In short, here we are in the middle of Wafflergate. What do you think, Socrates?

I don't know. I am not able to answer that question.

But come on, Socrates, such a violation of equality, of justice!

What justice are you talking about?

Well, justice, you know, justice!

But isn't justice a difficult question?

Yes... no.... And you Socrates, what is your definition of justice?

I don't know. Justice is lived rather than defined. I talked about it with Thrasymachus and we agreed that injustice is a vice and justice a virtue.

Thrasymachus, Thrasymachus, who is this weirdo? But then Waddle said to himself that he had found a good angle of attack and continued.

A vice, a virtue. Those words sound a lot like what a reactionary would say. You wouldn't be a reactionary, would you, Socrates?

I don't know. What do you mean by reactionary?

You know, those narrow-minded people, those backward-looking people, those populists.

You know, the only thing I know is that I know nothing. I wouldn't be able to answer that.

Well, then would you be on the side of the populists?

I don't know. What do you mean by populist?

This guy's impossible, thought Waddle. But bravely he continued

You know, Socrates, these people who criticize the elites, these narrow-minded, these reactionaries.

No, I don't know.

Well, finally, to which side do you belong?

Which sides are you talking about?

But Socrates, did you just crawl out under a rock? I'm talking about the opposition between people of progress, the people of the Enlightenment and the conservatives, the retrogrades. And Socrates, will you stop answering my questions with questions?

Why? Is it forbidden to ask questions?

No, but the rule is that the journalist asks questions and the guest answers

Yes, but is that a good rule?

Oh, that's not the point, Socrates.

I mean, why don't journalists want to be asked questions?

Because that's how an interview should be. But tell me, Socrates, aren't you one of those people who scapegoat journalists, who constantly criticize them?

You know, I'm new in this country. I wouldn't want to pass judgment. But why can't we criticize journalists?

That's a different question entirely! But the answer is easy—because journalists embody freedom of expression, because to criticize them is to undermine freedom, democracy.

What freedom are you talking about?

There you go again! Freedom of expression at all costs! This is obvious.

For example, does the freedom of expression of journalists include the freedom to say uncertain or erroneous things?

Uh, what are you talking about? No, of course not.

Does it include the freedom to say untrue things?

No, no, no. Look, I'm asking the questions!

Let me finish. I will be brief. So, you agree that the freedom of expression is based on something beyond it?

Maybe, maybe not. But, please, Socrates, let's get back to the subject. Let's go back to... I don't know.

Let's go on, if you don't mind. What is freedom of expression for?

Now you're getting annoying. But how should I know. They never talk about these things in journalism schools.

What freedom of expression is based on, wouldn't that be the real thing?

Yes, maybe, if you like.

So, the freedom you claim is the freedom to tell the truth?

Yes, that's it, that's it.

So, if a journalist does not tell the truth, is it not reasonable to criticize him?

If you want to, yes, but that never happens.

Are you saying that journalists are infallible and that they abhor cheating?

Oh, that's too much! Thank you, thank you, Socrates! This was Open Mind, a program by... by... Waffler George. Next week, ...well..., you'll see. A few ads up next.

As he left the studio, a gaggle of journalists were all over Socrates. He managed to escape, but one of them, the fastest, the youngest, caught up with him.

"Please, Socrates, please, a word. If I come back empty-handed, my editor will fire me. Besides, I know you. I've read your disciple, Plato."

Socrates stopped.

"I work for *Time*," said the young man with pride. And he quickly continued:

"Here, here is my question. I'm sure it will interest you. You say in the *Phaedrus* that the written word is inherently defective because one cannot know to whom one is speaking, whereas the spoken word allows one to tell each person what it is good for him to hear. So, why did you agree to speak on the radio? You will tell me that you spoke without a doubt, but radio has the defects of the written word—you could not know precisely to whom you were speaking."

Yes, yes, I congratulate you. But can you say that I said many things on the radio?

"Yes, well, no. I mean you asked a lot of questions."

That's my usual way. But do you think we've gone too far?

"I suppose you're going to blame the journalists again."

I'm just asking if an ordinary radio interview lends itself to dialectic, I mean to a real dialogue.

"But it certainly does. The microphone was all yours."

Isn't it true that radio journalists usually stay on the surface of things?

"You are very severe!"

That they shy away from developments?

"But that's the law of the genre!"

That they like to make a show of things and play the arbiter of elegance?

"Now, you're exaggerating!"

And that the best thing to do is to make the journalist pass an examination that is useful to him and to those who listen?

"Ah, that's it. You went to the radio to say bad things about the radio! Or rather, to show off. But, but I can't write what you say. My editor would have a fit. Tell me something I can write. I don't know, about... about... OK. What advice would you give to a young man?"

But, my young friend, I don't know anything. I am only trying to give birth to the mind of the one I am talking to.

"Go ahead, go ahead, I am ready."

I would be happy to, if it were possible, but time is too short. I have to be at the Champs Elysees this afternoon.

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*Philippe Bénéton is Professor emeritus of Rennes I and is the author of [Le dérèglement moral de l'Occident](#), [Les fers de l'opinion](#), [Introduction à la politique](#), [Le conservatisme](#). This interview appears courtesy of [La Nef](#).*



