

# 1

## Powerful Ideas

Beware when the great God lets loose a thinker on this planet. Then all things are at risk. — Emerson

I do not know how to teach philosophy without becoming a disturber of the peace. — Baruch Spinoza

There are two powers in the world, the sword and the mind. In the long run, the sword is always beaten by the mind. — Napoleon

What I understand by “philosopher”: a terrible explosive in the presence of which everything is in danger. — Friedrich Nietzsche

Better to be on a runaway horse than to be a woman who does not reflect.  
— Theano of Crotona

**F**or a revolution you need more than economic problems and guns; you need a philosophy. Wars are founded on a philosophy, or on efforts to destroy one. Communism, capitalism, fascism, atheism, humanism, Marxism — all are philosophies. Philosophies give birth to civilizations. They also end them.

The philosophy department works with high explosives, philosopher Van Meter Ames liked to say. It handles dangerous stuff. This book is an introduction to philosophy. From it you will learn, among other things, why philosophy, as Ames said, is dynamite.



## WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

The word **philosophy** comes from the two Greek words *philein*, which means “to love,” and *sophia*, which means “knowledge” or “wisdom.” Because knowledge can be discovered in many fields, the Greeks, who invented philosophy, thought of any person who sought knowledge in any area as a philosopher. Thus, philosophy once encompassed nearly everything that counted as human knowledge.

This view of philosophy persisted for over two thousand years. The full title of Sir Isaac Newton’s *Principles*, in which Newton set forth his famous theories of mechanics, mathematics, and astronomy, is *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*. Even by the seventeenth century, then, physics was still thought of as a variety of philosophy. Likewise, nearly every subject currently listed in college catalogs at some point would have been considered philosophy. That’s why the highest degree in psychology, mathematics, economics, sociology, history, biology, political science, and most other subjects is the Ph.D., the doctorate of philosophy.

However, philosophy can no longer claim those subject areas that have grown up and moved out of it. What, then, *is* philosophy today?

There is no simple answer to the question, but you can get a pretty good idea from a partial list of the issues that philosophers are concerned with. As you read this list, you may think that scholars in the existing intellectual disciplines tackle these questions as well. And they do. But when a thinker ponders these questions, he or she goes outside his or her discipline — unless the discipline is philosophy.

- Does the universe have a purpose? Does life have a purpose?
- Is there order in the cosmos independent of what the mind puts there? Could the universe be radically different from how we conceive it?
- Is a person more than a physical body? What is the mind? What is thought?
- Do people really have free will?
- Is there a God?
- Does it make a difference if there is or isn’t a God?
- What is art? What is beauty?
- What is truth?
- Is it possible to know anything with absolute certainty?
- What is moral obligation? What is the extent of our moral obligation to other people and other living things?
- What kind of person should I be?
- What are the ethically legitimate functions and scope of the state? What is its proper organization?

Yes, it is possible to go through life and never spend a minute wondering about such questions; but most of us have at least occasional moments of reflection about one or another of them.

In fact, it is pretty difficult not to think philosophically from time to time. Whenever we think or talk about a topic long enough, if our thinking or discussion

is the least bit organized, we may become engaged in philosophy. For example, suppose your electric company undercharges you by mistake. Should you call their attention to it? You might think that if you don't, nobody will be the worse for it — if anyone at the company even notices the mistake in the first place. Yet you hesitate: Does someone have to *notice* that you underpaid the electric company for it to be wrong? What about the principle, you wonder? What you are doing is weighing principles against consequences — you are wondering, Which carries more weight? You are having a philosophical conversation with yourself. Unfortunately, when people get to this point in their thinking or conversation, they often just stop. They don't know what to think next, so they just drop the matter and go on about their business.

Or, perhaps later, when you are doing something on the Web, it may occur to you to wonder whether we might someday build a computer that could actually think. Perhaps your feeling is that computers can't possibly do this. Well, here again you are starting to think philosophically. *Why* can't computers think? Is it because they aren't made out of the right kind of organic stuff? Well, intelligent beings from other galaxies also might not be made out of our kind of stuff. So why not computers? Is it because computers don't have a soul? Because they aren't alive? Why don't they have souls? Why aren't they alive? What is it to be alive, anyway? All of these reflections are philosophical questions. The task of analyzing and trying to answer them is the task of philosophers.

One important feature of philosophical questions is that they cannot be answered, in any straightforward way, by the discovery of some fact or collection of facts. You can't just go out and observe whether computers can think or whether what makes an action okay is that it's not hurting anyone. Facts are often relevant to a philosophical question, but they cannot by themselves provide an answer.

This doesn't mean that philosophical questions are unanswerable. A common misconception about philosophy is that its questions cannot be answered. In fact, if a question truly were unanswerable, most philosophers would regard that as a good reason for not being interested in it.

Many philosophical questions concern norms. **Normative questions** ask about the value of something. The sciences are interested in finding out how things are, but they cannot tell us how things ought to be. When we decide that something is good or bad, right or wrong, beautiful or ugly, we are applying norms or standards. How can we establish whether or not it is okay to not call the electric company about the undercharge, or to drive faster than the speed limit, or to sacrifice a human being to please the gods? Do we just consult our conscience? A religious authority? Does what a majority of people think determine the issue? Is some *feature* of the action right or wrong, or what?

Often, too, philosophers ask questions about things that seem so obvious we might not wonder about them — for example, the nature of change. What is change? It's obvious what change is. If something changes, it becomes different — what's the problem? Well, for one thing, if we have a different thing, then aren't we considering *two* things, the original thing and the new and different thing? Shouldn't we therefore, strictly speaking, not say that something *changed* but, rather, that it was *replaced*? If, over the course of many years, you replaced every part in the Ford you bought — *every* part, the engine block, every door panel, every

## Which Came First, the Chicken or the Egg?

What comes to mind for many people when they think of philosophy and of philosophical questions is either or both of these inquiries: “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?” and “If there is nobody around, does a tree falling in a forest make a sound?”

The first question is not particularly philosophical and, in the light of evolution, is not even especially difficult: the egg came first.

The second question is often supposedly resolved by distinguishing between sound viewed as the mental experience of certain waves contacting certain sensory organs and sound as the waves

themselves. If sensory organs are absent, it is said, there can be no sound-as-experience, but there can still be sound-as-waves. Philosophy, however, asks not simply whether a tree falling in the forest makes a sound if no one is there but, rather, *If nobody is there, is there even a forest?* Is there even a universe? In other words, the question, for philosophers, is whether things depend for their existence on being perceived and, if so, how we know that. A somewhat similar question (equally philosophical) is debated by contemporary astrophysicists, who wonder whether the universe and its laws require the presence of intelligent observers for their existence.

nut, bolt, and piece of steel, glass, rubber, vinyl, or whatever — would you still have the same Ford? Or if you gathered up all the original pieces and put them together again, would *that* be the original Ford?

Perhaps these questions seem to be questions of nomenclature or semantics and of no practical interest. But over the course of a lifetime every molecule in a person’s body may possibly (or probably!) be replaced. Thus, we might wonder, say, whether an old man who has been in prison for 40 years for a murder he committed as a young man is really the same person as the young man. Since (let us assume) not a single molecule of the young man is in the old man, wasn’t the young man in fact replaced? If so, can his guilt possibly pertain to the old man, who is in fact a different man? What is at stake here is whether the old man did in fact commit murder, and it is hard to see how this might be simply a matter of semantics.

Other times philosophical questions come up when beliefs don’t fit together the way we would like. We believe, for example, that anything that happens was caused to happen. We also believe that a cause *makes* its effect happen — if spoiled meat caused you to get sick, it *made* you sick. But we also believe that when we voluntarily decide to do something, nothing made us decide. And that belief seems to imply that our decision wasn’t caused. So, which is it? Is every happening caused? Or are some happenings uncaused? Or is it perhaps that decisions aren’t actually “happenings”? Do you see a way out of this dilemma? If so, congratulations. You are philosophizing.

Philosopher Nicholas Rescher compiled a list of contemporary American philosophical concerns. His list will give you an idea of some of the things philosophers currently are investigating.

- Ethical issues in the various professions (medicine, business, law, etc.)
- Computer-related issues: artificial intelligence, information processing, whether or not machines can think
- Rationality and its ramifications

- Social implications of medical technology (abortion, euthanasia, right to life, medical research issues, informed consent)
- Feminist issues
- Social and economic justice, policies that determine distribution of resources, equality of opportunity, human rights
- Truth and meaning in mathematics and formalized language
- Skepticism and relativism in knowledge and morals
- What it is to be a person; the rights and obligations of persons
- Issues in the history of philosophy

### MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT PHILOSOPHY

A common misconception about philosophy, one that goes with the idea that philosophical questions are unanswerable, is expressed in the comment, “Philosophy never makes any progress.” Now, progress comes in many forms. It doesn’t happen only when questions are answered. Questions can be clarified, subdivided, and found to rest on confusions. They can be partially answered. These are all forms of progress. Even when a question is abandoned as unanswerable, that too is progress. Earlier answers to a question can be considered inadequate even if the final answer isn’t in, and that’s progress as well.

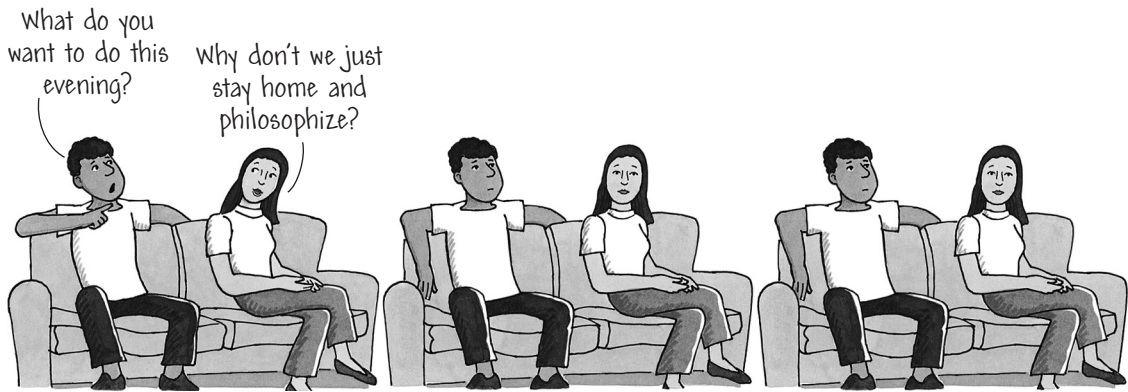
Another idea people have is that as soon as progress is made in a philosophical inquiry, the matter is turned over (or becomes) another field of learning. It is true, as we have already observed, that many disciplines that today are independent of philosophy had their origin within philosophy. But philosophy doesn’t always relegate its subjects to other disciplines. To take the most obvious example, logic is still a branch of philosophy, despite an enormous expansion in scope, complexity, and explanatory power during the last hundred years.

A couple of other ideas people have about philosophy ought to be discussed here at the outset.

First is the idea that in philosophy one person’s opinion is as correct as the next person’s and that any opinion on a philosophical question is as good or valid or correct as any other opinion. This idea is especially widespread when it comes to opinions on normative questions, that is, questions of values. Let’s say your opinion is that it’s okay to underpay the electric company, and your roommate’s opinion is that it isn’t. Some people might hold that the two views are equally correct and that there is no way to settle the matter.

The first thing to notice is that, if your view that it is okay to underpay and your roommate’s view that it isn’t okay to underpay are equally correct, then it is both okay and not okay for you to underpay. That is just unintelligible nonsense.

Another thing to notice is that implied in your view is that you believe your view is *correct*. To see this, imagine saying to your roommate, “Well, I think it is okay for me to underpay the electric company, but I believe you are entirely correct when you say that it is not okay for me to underpay the electric company.”



People hardly ever *say* they want to philosophize. But whenever their thinking is at all organized, they may well be engaged in philosophy — though they are probably not aware of the fact.

That remark also is unintelligible nonsense. The moral: If *you* express the opinion that value judgments are all equally correct, then nobody will have the faintest notion of what you mean when *you* make a value judgment.

Despite these considerations, you may still suspect that in philosophy one opinion *is* as good as the next. But if you do, then you have to concede that the person who says that in philosophy one opinion is *not* as good as the next is expressing an opinion every bit as good as yours. In any event, most philosophers distinguish *philosophy* from mere opinion, the difference being that philosophy at the very least involves opinions *supported by good reasoning*. If you express your opinion without providing supporting reasoning, your teacher may think you have an interesting opinion, but he or she probably won't think you have produced good *philosophy*. Philosophy requires you to support your opinions, which, by the way, can be hard work.

Another idea people sometimes have when they first enter into philosophy is that “truth is relative.” Now, there are numerous things a person might mean by that statement. If he or she means merely that people's beliefs are relative to their perspective or culture, then there is no problem. If, however, the person means that the same sentence might be both true and not true depending on one's perspective or culture, then he or she is mistaken. The same sentence cannot be both true and not true, and whatever a person wishes to convey by the remark “Truth is relative,” it cannot be that. Of course, two different people from two different cultures or perspectives might *mean* something different by the same words, but that is a separate issue.

A different sort of misconception people have about philosophy is that it is light reading, something you relax with in the evening, after all the serious work of the day is done. In reality, philosophical writing generally takes time and effort to understand. Often it seems to be written in familiar, everyday language, but that can be deceiving. It is best to approach a work in philosophy with the kind of mental preparedness and alertness appropriate for a textbook in mathematics or science. You should expect to be able to read an entire novel in the time it takes you

to understand just a few pages of philosophy. To understand philosophy, you have to reread a passage several times and think about it a lot. If your instructor assigns what seem to be short readings, don't celebrate. It takes much time to understand philosophy.

## THE TOOLS OF PHILOSOPHY: ARGUMENT AND LOGIC

So, then, philosophy is not light reading, and it is not mere expression of unsupported opinion. Philosophers *support* their views to make it plain why the reasonable person will accept what they say. Now, when someone supports a belief by giving a reason for accepting the belief, he or she has given an **argument**. Setting forth arguments is the most basic philosophical activity and is one of the activities that distinguishes philosophy from merely having opinions. (Incidentally, when you see a word or phrase in bold print in this book, it is defined in the glossary/index at the back of the book.)

When you study other subjects, you are expected to remember what person A or person B believed or discovered or accomplished. When you study philosophy, you need to remember not just what the philosopher believed but also the arguments given. Unfortunately, in the case of some early philosophers about whose arguments we do not have much information, we have to make intelligent guesses.

For an example of an argument, let's consider this one:

1. Whatever rights a man has, a woman should have too.
2. A man has the right to marry a woman.
3. Therefore, a woman should have the right to marry a woman.

The **conclusion** of an argument is the point the person is trying to establish (in this case, line 3). The reason the person gives for accepting the conclusion is stated in the **premises** (in this case, lines 1 and 2).

There are only two ways in which an argument — any argument — can fail or be “incorrect.” First, one or more of the premises might be false or questionable. Second, the premises might fail to establish the conclusion. **Logic**, the theory of correct inference, is concerned with the second type of failure.

Common mistakes in reasoning of the second type are called **fallacies**, and one important contribution of logic has been the identification, classification, and analysis of fallacies. Anyone concerned with sound reasoning tries to avoid fallacies, but even philosophers aren't always successful in doing so. The following are frequently encountered fallacies, we hope more frequently encountered outside philosophy than within.

- ***Argumentum ad hominem*** (or in plain English, “argument to the person”). Frequently, people have the mistaken idea that they can successfully refute an opinion or view by criticizing the person who has that opinion or holds that view. One of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century, Martin Heidegger, supported the Nazis. You would be guilty of *ad hominem* reasoning if you thought that this fact about *Heidegger* refuted

Heidegger's *views* on, say, technology. Except in very unusual circumstances, a person's views cannot be *refuted* by discrediting the person. Even if Martin Heidegger were a known pathological liar, pointing that out wouldn't entail that his views on technology were *false*, although it would be good reason for *suspending judgment* on the veracity of any factual claims he happened to make. (Suspending judgment is different from rejecting the claim as false.) Ad hominem arguments are surprisingly common, and it takes a special effort to evaluate a person's views on their merits and not on the merits of the person whose views they are.

- **Appeals to emotion.** Arguments that try to establish conclusions solely by attempting to arouse or play on the emotions of a listener or reader are known as appeals to emotion. Suppose we try to “prove” to you that God exists with the argument that “if you don't believe it you will burn in hell.” We have not really given you a proof; we are just trying to scare you into agreeing with us.
- **Straw man.** Sometimes people (even philosophers) will “refute” someone's view by refuting what is actually a misrepresentation of that view. If we aren't careful, we may think the original view has been refuted rather than the “straw man” that actually has been attacked. When the Irish philosopher George Berkeley maintained that physical objects are really just clusters of sensations existing only in the mind, the English writer Samuel Johnson “refuted” Berkeley by noting that some physical objects are so hard that things just bounce off them. Johnson then kicked a rock, trying to demonstrate that rocks are too hard to be mere sensations. But Johnson had in fact misrepresented Berkeley, for Berkeley had never maintained that rocks are not hard. Johnson had set up a straw man that was easy to knock over.
- **Red herring.** This argument occurs when someone addresses a point other than the one actually at issue, that is, brings in something that is off the point. For example, suppose we wish to establish that people have free will—that is, that they could have acted otherwise than they did. Suppose, further, our “proof” is that people obviously do lots of things they do not like to do and that therefore people must be able to make choices. We have brought in a red herring. What we have proved is not that people could have acted otherwise than they did but, rather, that they can make choices. (The fact that you chose to act is not equivalent to the fact that you could have acted differently.)

As you can see, ad hominem arguments, appeals to emotion, and straw man arguments might all be said to be red herrings because they all seek to establish something that is not quite the issue. If you like, you can think of them as red herrings that have their own special names.

- **Begging the question.** In this fallacy, one premise rests on an assumption that is more or less identical to the very thing you are trying to prove as your conclusion. For example, suppose what is at issue is whether you can know that your friends are really people (not zombies or robots controlled by Martians). Suppose someone then argues, “Of course your friends are really



people, because they say they are and they would not lie to you.” The problem with this “proof” is that one of its premises—that your friends would not lie to you—rests on the assumption that your friends really are people, which is the very thing at issue. Begging the question is also called *circular reasoning*.

- **Black-or-white fallacy.** Suppose someone says to you, “Either God exists, or there is no explanation for the universe. Therefore, because the universe must have some explanation, God exists.” This argument offers just two options: either God exists or the universe has no explanation. This argument ignores a third possibility, namely, that there is an explanation for the universe that does not involve God. Arguments that limit us to two options when in fact more options exist commit the black-or-white fallacy. Other terms for this include *false dilemma*, *all-or-nothing fallacy*, and *either-or fallacy*.

If you are reading this book as part of a philosophy course, there could be lots of discussion in the class, and the discussion is apt to involve arguments—not in the sense of people fighting with each other using words but in the sense of people trying to support their views with reasons. It is possible that you will find examples of these fallacies among the arguments you hear. You may even find an example or two in the arguments you read about in this book.

An instructor we know once had her students make signs saying “straw man,” “ad hominem,” and the like and hold them up when someone in the class used one of these arguments. The problem, as we understand it, was that her students began taking the signs with them to other classes—and holding them up when the instructors spoke.

## THE DIVISIONS OF PHILOSOPHY

Most philosophical questions tend to fall into one of these four areas:

- *Questions related to being or existence.* **Metaphysics** is the branch of philosophy that is concerned with these questions. Two basic questions of metaphysics are What is being? and What are its fundamental features and properties? Several of the questions listed at the beginning of this chapter are questions of metaphysics, including Is there order in the cosmos independent of what the mind puts there? What is the mind? Do people have free will? Metaphysics, as you will see, has little to do with the occult or Tarot cards and the like.
- *Questions related to knowledge.* **Epistemology**, the theory of knowledge, is the branch of philosophy concerned with these questions. What is the nature of knowledge, and what are its criteria, sources, and limits? These are basic questions of epistemology, and thus it includes such questions from the list at the beginning of the chapter as What is truth? and Is it possible to know anything with absolute certainty?

- *Questions related to values.* Included under this heading are primarily (1) **moral philosophy (ethics)**, the philosophical study of moral judgments; (2) **social philosophy**, the philosophical study of society and its institutions; (3) **political philosophy**, which focuses on the state and seeks to determine its justification and ethically proper organization; and (4) **aesthetics**, the philosophical study of art and of value judgments about art.
- *Questions of logic, the theory of correct reasoning,* which seeks to investigate and establish the criteria of valid inference and demonstration.

Part One of this book is devoted to metaphysics and epistemology, which are closely related. Part Two is concerned with questions of values, especially moral and political values. We talked a bit about logic earlier in this chapter.

Although philosophy has four main branches, they do not each contain an equal number of theories or concepts or words. Your library probably has more holdings under political philosophy than under the other areas, and the fewest under epistemology or aesthetics.

There are other ways of dividing philosophy. Many universities offer philosophy courses that examine the fundamental assumptions and methods of other disciplines and areas of intellectual inquiry, such as science (philosophy of science), language (philosophy of language), and religion (philosophy of religion). Philosophy of science and philosophy of language are covered in Part One because most of the issues in these two areas are either metaphysical or epistemological issues. Part Three is devoted entirely to the philosophy of religion, especially to the question of whether God's existence can be proved.

The fourth and last part of this book is called "Other Voices," and in it we will consider various current themes in philosophy as well as influences and traditions beyond mainstream Western philosophy.

## THE BENEFITS OF PHILOSOPHY

We conclude this chapter with a few remarks on the benefits of studying philosophy.

The importance of some philosophical questions—Is there a God who is attentive, caring, and responsive to us? and Is abortion morally wrong?—is obvious and great. A justification would have to be given for *not* contemplating them. But some philosophical questions are of more or less obscure, and seemingly only academic or theoretical, consequence. Not everything philosophers consider is dynamite. The questions posed earlier about whether computers might be able to think someday would be perceived by many as pretty academic and theoretical.

But then, every field has its theoretical and nonpractical questions. Why do astronomers wonder about the distance and recessional velocity of quasars? Why are paleontologists interested in 135-million-year-old mammalian fossil remains in northern Malawi? Why do musicologists care whether Bach used parallel fifths? The answer is that some questions are inherently interesting to the people who pose

## Philosophers on Philosophy

Wonder is a feeling of a philosopher, and philosophy begins in wonder. —*Plato*

All *definite* knowledge—so I should contend—belongs to science; all *dogma* as to what surpasses definite knowledge belongs to theology. But between theology and science there is a No Man's Land, exposed to attack from both sides; this No Man's Land is philosophy. —*Bertrand Russell*

Without it [philosophy] no one can lead a life free of fear or worry. —*Seneca*

Uncertainty, in the presence of vivid hopes and fears, is painful, but must be endured if we wish to live without the support of comforting fairy tales. . . . To teach how to live without certainty, and yet without being paralyzed by hesitation, is perhaps the chief thing that philosophy, in our age, can still do for those who study it. —*Bertrand Russell*

The most important and interesting thing which philosophers have tried to do is no less than this; namely: To give a general description of the whole Universe, mentioning all of the most important kinds of things which we *know* to be in it, considering how far it is likely that there are in it important kinds of things which we do not absolutely *know* to be in it, and also considering the most important ways in which these various kinds of things are related to one another. —*G. E. Moore*

The philosopher has to take into account the least philosophical things in the world. —*C. Chincholle*

Life involves passions, faiths, doubts, and courage. The critical inquiry into what these things mean and imply is philosophy. —*Josiah Royce*

What is philosophy but a continual battle against custom; an ever-renewed effort to transcend the sphere of blind custom? —*Thomas Carlyle*

[Philosophy] consoles us for the small achievements in life, and the decline of strength and beauty; it arms us against poverty, old age, sickness and death, against fools and evil sneerers. —*Jean de la Bruyère*

Not to care for philosophy is to be a true philosopher. —*Blaise Pascal*

There is no statement so absurd that no philosopher will make it. —*Cicero*

The most tragic problem of philosophy is to reconcile intellectual necessities with the necessities of the heart and the will. —*Miguel de Unamuno*

Without philosophy we would be little above animals. —*Voltaire*

Philosophy asks the simple question, What is it all about? —*Alfred North Whitehead*

Philosophy limits the thinkable and therefore the unthinkable. —*Ludwig Wittgenstein*

them. An astronomer wonders about a quasar *just because it is there*. And some philosophical questions are like that too: the philosopher wants to know the answer simply to know the answer.

There are also side benefits in seeking answers to philosophical questions, even those that are difficult, abstruse, or seemingly remote from practical concerns. Seeing philosophical answers usually entails making careful distinctions in thought, words, and argument, and recognizing subtle distinctions among things and among facts. Philosophical solutions require logic and critical thinking skills, discussion, and exposition. Students of philosophy learn to look carefully for similarities and differences among things. They also develop an ability to spot logical difficulties in what others write or say and to avoid these pitfalls in their own thinking. In

addition, they learn to recognize and critically assess the important unstated assumptions people make about the world and themselves and other people and life in general. These assumptions affect how people perceive the world and what they say and do, yet for the most part people are not aware of them and are disinclined to consider them critically. These abilities are of great value in any field that requires clear thinking.

Thus, while few employers actively seek philosophy students as such to fill openings, many employers seek people with the skills that philosophy students tend to have in abundance, such as the abilities to think clearly and critically, to reason carefully, and to recognize subtle but important distinctions. Philosophy students tend to score above students in all other subjects on admissions tests for professional and graduate schools too. In fact, according to *The Economist*, “Philosophy students do better in examinations for business and management schools than anybody except mathematicians — better even than those who study economics, business or other vocational subjects.” This helps explain why, according to *The Economist*, philosophy Ph.D.’s are less likely to be unemployed than even chemists or biologists. It is possible, of course, that philosophy attracts unusually capable students to begin with and that this accounts for results like these. But there is at least some reason to believe that the kind of training philosophy provides helps students to think, read, and write, and possibly to speak more critically, carefully, and cogently.

Finally, students who have learned their philosophical lessons well are not as likely as those who have not to become trapped by dogmatism. Such students have learned the value of open-mindedness and seeking solutions to problems that meet standards of coherence and reasonableness. These general attitudes, along with the critical-thinking skills that come with the practice of philosophical argumentation, can stand us in good stead when we are faced with many of the problems life generously provides for us.

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### CHECKLIST

#### *Key Terms and Concepts*

philosophy	black-or-white fallacy
normative question	metaphysics
argument	epistemology
conclusion	moral philosophy/ethics
premise	social philosophy
logic	political philosophy
fallacy	aesthetics
<i>argumentum ad hominem</i>	
appeals to emotion	
straw man	
red herring	
begging the question	

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### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REVIEW

1. Why do you want to study philosophy?
2. Now that you’ve read this chapter, is philosophy what you expected it to be?
3. Why is it that the most advanced degree in so many fields is the doctor of philosophy?
4. Which of the questions on page 2 is the most interesting to you? What do you think the answer is?
5. If the electric company undercharges you, should you notify them? Why or why not?
6. If bit by bit you replace every part of your Ford, do you end up with the same Ford? If

- by the time you become an adult, every molecule in your body has been replaced with a different one, are you-the-adult the same person as you-the-child?
7. Are all philosophical questions unanswerable? How about the question you mentioned in Question 4?
  8. Is one person's opinion as correct as another's opinion when it comes to the question of whether murder is wrong? Why or why not?
  9. Does what is true depend on what your society believes is true? Was the world flat when people believed it was flat?
  10. Evaluate the argument on page 7. Does the conclusion follow from the premises? Are the premises true?

### SUGGESTED FURTHER READINGS

Here are some of the best reference books on philosophy in the English language.

- The Bigview.com*, [www.thebigview.com](http://www.thebigview.com). A Web page that gives a bird's-eye view of philosophy. Light but fun.
- Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Concise and readable.
- Steven M. Cahn, ed., *Exploring Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). A new collection of contemporary essays on the basic questions posed by philosophy concerning knowledge, action, and the meaning of existence.
- Diané Collinson, *Fifty Major Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 1988). A relatively accessible and short reference book.
- F. C. Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, 9 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1965). Still the most complete history of philosophy available to English-only readers.
- Arthur C. Danto, *Connections to the World: The Basic Concepts of Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989). An important contemporary philosopher summarizes some of the main problems.
- Paul Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 8 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1967). If you need to find out something about a philosopher or philosophical topic prior to 1967, begin here.
- A. C. Ewing, *Fundamental Questions of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1985). Readable.
- Albert Hakim, *Historical Introduction to Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1987). An extensive collection of short original writings.

- History of Philosophy*, [www.friesian.com/history.htm](http://www.friesian.com/history.htm). Essays on many philosophical topics; the ones we have looked at seem pretty good and not too difficult.
- Ted Honderich, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). A dictionary of short articles, definitions, and short biographies.
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