

Pathways in Philosophy

An Introductory Guide with Readings

Dale Jacquette

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PREFACE

This book, *Pathways in Philosophy*, offers both a historical and topical introduction to some of the most important problems of philosophy. We will take a close critical look at a selection of ten primary sources written by ten different philosophers. The chapters are organized into two main parts: (1) Metaphysics and Epistemology and (2) Ethics and Political Philosophy.

Taking this cross-section from the history and problems of philosophy offers unique opportunities to learn about philosophical problems and methods from points of interest chosen from every major period in philosophy's history. The book offers a natural but not inevitable way to divide up the subject matter of a historical introduction to philosophy. We must begin somewhere, end somewhere, and make good choices along the way about what to include and what to ignore as we try to tell a unified story about the development of Western philosophy. We shall explore some of the most prominent peaks and valleys, proceeding chronologically from the origins of ancient Greek thought to contemporary philosophy.

In discussing each philosopher, we are not merely reporting on their ideas in historical context. We are actively engaging in philosophical dispute with the authors we have chosen to study on the topics for which they are especially well known. We shall read and criticize extensive passages from classic writings of Plato, Aristotle, William of Ockham, René Descartes, George Berkeley, Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, Friedrich Nietzsche, G. E. Moore, and John Rawls. By the time we are done, we will have a vivid picture of revolutionary ideas throughout the history of philosophy, of the problems that have interested philosophers, and the methods they have developed to address them. The interpretation of historical philosophical writings is an art and a pleasure, but not necessarily an end in itself. We may become fascinated with the questions posed or suggested by the thinkers we will study and decide that we want to work out a new and different philosophy, carrying their traditions in a new direction.

Pathways in Philosophy, accordingly, has two main goals: (1) to understand accurately and in good detail the philosophical positions adopted by each thinker on particular topics and (2) to evaluate critically each thinker as we try to decide whether what he says is true or philosophically insightful. We not only want to know what Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, and other philosophers believed and why they believed it, but more important, whether their ideas are right or wrong and whether or not they

are on the right track with good reasoning leading to philosophical positions that we can accept and make our own. We want to learn how to evaluate the philosophical ideas of these thinkers by clarifying concepts and identifying, criticizing, and constructing good arguments. We want to know why philosophers think the way they do, why they are right if they are right, and why they are wrong if they are wrong. We learn philosophy and not just history in the process of studying philosophy's history.

To immerse ourselves in philosophy, to understand the point of it and appreciate what it can offer, we need to become philosophically minded. We must read philosophical works, not as we would read a novel or newspaper, but with a sense for the ideas and arguments that have shaped the history of thought. We should not only think about what each philosopher says, but about whether or not we agree, and why. Entering deeply into a choice of philosophical texts and making the authors' problems our own is the best way to enjoy and profit from an introduction to philosophy. We must read and re-read philosophical writings carefully, wonder why philosophers would want to say the things they do, and be prepared to offer objections and arguments of our own to test their conclusions. We become philosophers when we read and think about the problems of philosophy, grappling with the difficult concepts and inferences that lead from one philosophical stepping stone to another. This, after all, is how great philosophers of the past became philosophers. By thinking about these problems in depth, reflecting on philosophical dilemmas, puzzles, paradoxes, and thought experiments, we discover a remarkable world of absorbing intellectually challenging ideas. We will learn to combine accurate historical exposition of a thinker's ideas in a sound interpretation of their writings with a full engagement of critical attention to their philosophical arguments. Reading, thinking about, and evaluating the ideas presented in these commentaries on passages from the history of philosophy help us to define our own philosophical views—which is an excellent reason for studying great moments in the history of philosophy.

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The following texts and translations are the sources of quotations:

CHAPTER ONE: The Soul and Its Wisdom

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CHAPTER TWO: Substance and the Changing World

Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, translated by W. D. Ross. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924.

CHAPTER THREE: Universals, Particulars, and the Concept of Truth

William of Ockham, *Ockham's Theory of Terms, Part I of the Summa Logicae*, translated by Michael J. Loux. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

CHAPTER FOUR: Reason, Knowledge, and Certainty

René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy in Which the Existence of God and the Distinction of the Soul from the Body are Demonstrated*, translated from the Latin by Donald A. Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1979. Reprinted by permission of Hackett Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

CHAPTER FIVE: Existence and Nature of God

George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous (The Design of Which is Plainly to Demonstrate the Reality and Perfection of Human Knowledge, the Incorporeal Nature of the Soul, and the Immediate Providence of a Deity in Opposition to Sceptics and Atheists. Also to Open a Method for Rendering*

the Sciences More Easy, Useful, and Compendious), in *The Works of George Berkeley*, collected and edited with prefaces and annotations by Alexander Campbell Fraser. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1871.

CHAPTER SIX: Moral Rights, Obligations, and Responsibility

Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated by James W. Ellington. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993 (third edition). Reprinted by permission of Hackett Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Consequences of Actions in Ethical Conduct

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907 (fifteenth edition).

CHAPTER EIGHT: Individual Values and the Will to Power

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, translated with an introduction and notes by Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998. Reprinted by permission of Hackett Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

CHAPTER NINE: Philosophical Analysis of the Concept of Good

G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903; 1922.

CHAPTER TEN: Justice and the Social Good in Political Decision Making

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Copyright © 1971, 1999 (second edition) by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

INTRODUCTION

A Compass and Map

In *Pathways in Philosophy*, we study philosophy by analyzing the work of ten philosophers on ten philosophical topics. Each thinker introduces a different philosophical problem in a different way, and each offers philosophical insights into an aspect of existence, knowledge, moral or political value. We shall combine historical background with critical engagement in philosophical problems to begin exploring the world of philosophy.

The writings considered here represent major thinkers from a variety of philosophical perspectives on a variety of philosophical problems. Selections of passages from primary texts are integrated with extensive commentary and philosophical questions that lead us to what are widely regarded as some of the most important conclusions in philosophy. We consider the writings of famous philosophers not only in order to know from a historical standpoint what they believed and why, but as a source of ideas to stimulate our own philosophical reflections. From the philosophy of antiquity to today, the point of each chapter is to identify the ideas and methods that philosophers have explored—that are at once a vital part of our cultural and intellectual heritage and an inducement to think philosophically about problems that have interested philosophers from ancient Greece to the present day.

Thus, in each chapter we will learn:

- To interpret and critically analyze philosophical texts.
- To recognize and critically analyze philosophical concepts, ideas, and arguments, beginning with characteristic selections from every major period in philosophy's history; to engage in philosophical dialogue with some of the most important great philosophers of the past.
- To construct, criticize, and refine philosophical definitions and arguments in the course of developing a philosophical perspective; to identify defensible philosophical positions and philosophically defend them; to carry forward in new ways the work of great philosophical traditions.

Along the way, we will learn many facts about philosophers and the history of philosophical movements. We will get to know all ten philosophers personally as we examine their ideas and begin to fit them together into a picture of philosophy's history that will help us to understand other thinkers and provide essential background to contemporary philosophical disputes.

Philosophy is unlike other disciplines. It is at once a forward-looking search for understanding, enlightenment, and truth that remains constantly in dialogue with its own history. We can think of philosophy as a network of branching pathways, like hiking paths in the woods. Philosophy presents endlessly interconnecting linkages of ideas that sometimes diverge and sometimes come together again in unexpected ways. We can follow along some of these routes at least for a while to see where they lead, or we can go forward in search of our own principles, extending the walk in new directions. We can stroll casually through the history of philosophy, just as we can in other subjects, sniffing at things to see if they interest us without bothering to learn much about them. With a definite purpose in mind, however, a specific set of questions to address, we can better find our way about the major landmarks in the history of philosophy or blaze our own trail. There are some paths we may choose not to follow, but if we give them a chance and try to see where they are going, we will at least be in a position to make informed choices, and we might surprise ourselves by discovering new things we had not expected to enjoy.

When you first set foot on a hiking path, you generally do so with a purpose. You are in search of something, even if it is only a bit of fresh air and exercise or an interesting landscape to enjoy in the course of the walk. Perhaps the point is to be able to talk at length with a friend. There is always a reason why we embark upon a particular pathway, especially in philosophy. The reason usually involves our natural curiosity and a desire to understand something remarkable about the world. The history of philosophy takes us along routes that have been laid down by others who came before us. It is the meaning of their work in understanding philosophical problems that we are challenged to interpret and apply. Each of us passes through the scenery in a different way and sees and thinks about things from a different perspective. No two individuals wandering the same course will notice precisely the same features or think precisely the same thoughts. They will interpret what they encounter by their own lights, so that the pathway accordingly has an individual meaning for everyone who makes the journey. The questions and problems that interest you when you pick up any of the classics in the history of philosophy will direct your attention in particular ways and color and influence your understanding.

We need a compass and map to find our way into unknown territory. If you have ever gone hiking in the woods or mountains, the chances are you made your way into the country by following a preexisting trail. This makes it appropriate to begin by considering more philosophically what is meant by the idea of a path. To enter onto a path means among other things that someone has been there before. The path is trodden or marked by another walker, someone who has sought out a way to get from one place to another just like you and has left a track for others to follow if they choose. Much the same is true in the history of philosophy. If we study philosophy by way of its history, we follow in the footsteps of major thinkers who have come before us and have partly shown the way that they found best in trying to understand philosophical concepts and answer philosophical problems. The pathways that we shall traverse have been visited by some of the most widely discussed thinkers in the history of philosophy. They have chosen directions for thought by beginning with one set of assumptions rather than another, with one choice of methods as opposed to others, which somehow seemed to them to be the right starting places, the right trailheads. We must eventually choose paths that are right for us, and thereby make

them our own, even when the trails have been cut in the past by major thinkers in the history of philosophy. Nor should our respect for previous philosophers inhibit us from giving close critical evaluations of their ideas. The signposts are there for us to use in the great works of philosophy, but we must decide whether to use them and how, for we are each moving step-by-step through our own personally meaningful philosophical journey.

By following established guides, seeing where paths lead, and understanding many of the alternatives in established philosophical traditions, we come to appreciate the diversity of philosophical perspectives that have earned them a prominent place in history. The joy of philosophy is not merely to find a predetermined path that we think is right for us, but to achieve a higher level of understanding by learning about the multiplicity of choices, the many different pathways available to thought. If we want to improve our understanding of philosophy, then we need to see how many different directions it can take. We need to sympathize at least to a certain extent with the reasons why other philosophers have chosen to follow one path rather than another, even if that trail is very different from any we may choose to follow ourselves. In this way, we broaden our philosophical horizons beyond the limits of our own unassisted wayfaring. This in itself can become an important source of philosophical understanding as we develop a sense of the many directions the mind can follow in its efforts to bring clarity to ideas as it struggles to solve philosophical problems.

What, then, should be our orientation as we enter on these historical pathways in philosophy and begin to think about going forward toward new destinations of our own? What is our compass and what is our map? If we think of ourselves as groundbreaking explorers, then part of our task will be to create a map of the philosophical topography as we proceed. We have already remarked that in this historical introduction to the problems and methods of philosophy we are starting out by retracing the pathways that great thinkers in philosophy's history have staked out. We shall, at least at the outset, go where these philosophers have gone before. Thus, a map of sorts exists that we can use to our advantage without having to discover absolutely everything for ourselves, as though there had never been any philosophical predecessors who also thought about the same problems.

We learn above all in the process how to think philosophically. This book is not only engaged in historical inquiry, but points us toward a philosophical goal. We hope by following this route to arrive at good answers to interesting philosophical questions, most of which have a direct or indirect effect on the way we live and the science, art, religion, and political realities in the cultural milieu in which we find ourselves. The quest for philosophical insight in the history of philosophy requires careful reading and critical interaction with the ideas each philosopher has contributed to philosophical discussion, not only for its own sake but as a preparation for self-guided philosophical excursions. An introduction to philosophy, after all, regardless of its orientation and selection of thinkers and topics, is also an invitation for every reader to learn more about philosophy and its history. Whatever your reasons for setting forth on these philosophical pathways, you can expect to discover something valuable that other travelers have overlooked.

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*I came to my truth
by diverse paths*

PART 1

METAPHYSICS AND EPISTEMOLOGY





THE SOUL AND ITS WISDOM

Plato's *Meno*

In this chapter we enter the world of ancient Greek philosophy. We learn about Socrates and Plato as we work through one of Plato's most interesting early dialogues. We study the Socratic method as Socrates investigates the concept of virtue, the nature of knowledge, and an argument for the immortality of the soul. In Plato's writings we witness the birth of philosophy in the Western tradition.

SOCRATES AND PLATO

Plato's dialogues provide an excellent introduction to philosophy. The *Meno*, one of Plato's early dialogues, is in many ways the perfect place to start in understanding his thought. Plato (427–347 B.C.E.) was one of many young persons in ancient Greece who admired the philosopher Socrates (469–399 B.C.E.).

During his lifetime, Socrates attracted a circle of followers who were interested in philosophy. They enjoyed hearing Socrates discuss philosophical problems, during the course of which he would often refute the ideas of persons who were supposed to be authorities on a variety of topics. The established rulers in the city, politicians, religious leaders, and others, presented themselves as experts in specialized areas of knowledge. As such, these persons, Socrates assumes, must understand the concepts required by their trades. If they are judges, they must understand the concept of justice; if they are priests, they must understand the concept of piety; if they are artists, they must understand the concept of beauty.

As the promising young son of a wealthy aristocratic family, Plato was expected to undertake a career in politics. Plato, however, at first wanted to become a playwright and to write tragedies for national dramatic competitions. Later, especially after Socrates' trial and execution by the city-state of Athens on trumped-up charges of corrupting the youth of the city and failing to respect the city's gods, Plato turned

increasingly to philosophy and eventually started his own philosophical school. Plato's Academy was a model for modern universities that existed for about seven hundred years, longer than any other institution of higher learning in history. At the Academy, Plato taught many famous students, including Aristotle, and wrote dialogues that are somewhat like philosophical plays in which Socrates appears as the main character who is also a moral and intellectual hero.

Socrates never wrote books or essays in philosophy, at least none that have survived to modern times. Socrates is primarily interested in the idea of virtue, and of what he refers to in Plato's dialogues as "the care of the soul." We are fortunate in that, while we have lost many classical writings of other ancient philosophers, such as the voluminous manuscripts of the Presocratic materialist thinker Democritus of Abdera and even some of Aristotle's works, all of Plato's known dialogues and many of his interesting letters have survived to the present day. The result is that we have in Plato's dialogues not only an enormously valuable resource on Plato's thought, offering a picture of life and ideas in the world of ancient Athens, but also indirectly of Socrates' philosophy. Plato's portrait of Socrates is largely confirmed by the writings of other contemporaries such as Xenophon, who also knew Socrates personally. Together, Plato's and Xenophon's dialogues and other authors in antiquity provide the only account of the life and work of Socrates as a brilliant and morally dedicated thinker whom many commentators continue to regard as the founder of Western philosophy.

Typically, in Plato's dialogues, Socrates confronts a fellow Athenian citizen somewhere in the city, in the *agora* or marketplace, for example, or on the steps of the law court, and begins to engage the person in conversation that quickly leads to the painstaking examination of a philosophical concept. Socrates buttonholes these unsuspecting individuals and after a series of questions, and a particular style of criticizing his interlocutors' replies, convinces them to reject or at least rethink their views. Eventually, Socrates was brought before the law because of his practice of philosophy. We learn a great deal about him from Plato's description of these events. When Socrates was put on trial for his life, he remarks that his practice of engaging in dispute was inspired by respect for the gods. He was indirectly told by the divine oracle of Apollo at Delphi that he was the wisest person in Athens. With typical Socratic irony, Socrates accepts this pronouncement, but only if it is interpreted as meaning that he knows that he does not know, while others claim to know things that they really do not know. Socrates explains that in order to prove that what the oracle said was true, he proceeded to question others to see whether or not he was wiser than anyone else.

Socrates' day in court is portrayed in almost identical terms in Plato's and Xenophon's dialogues both titled the *Apology*, meaning "defense," from the Greek word *apologia*, rather than an expression of remorse or request for forgiveness or pardon. Socrates, we soon learn, is completely unrepentant about his philosophical challenges to the pretensions of established thinking. When he demonstrates that persons do not always know what they claim to know or are supposed to know, Socrates admits that he may have inadvertently encouraged idle young men in the city to associate with him for the sheer sport of seeing their elders refuted, which is probably one but not the only thing that eventually got Socrates into legal hot water. Raising philosophical doubts about what other people claim to know evidently contributed to