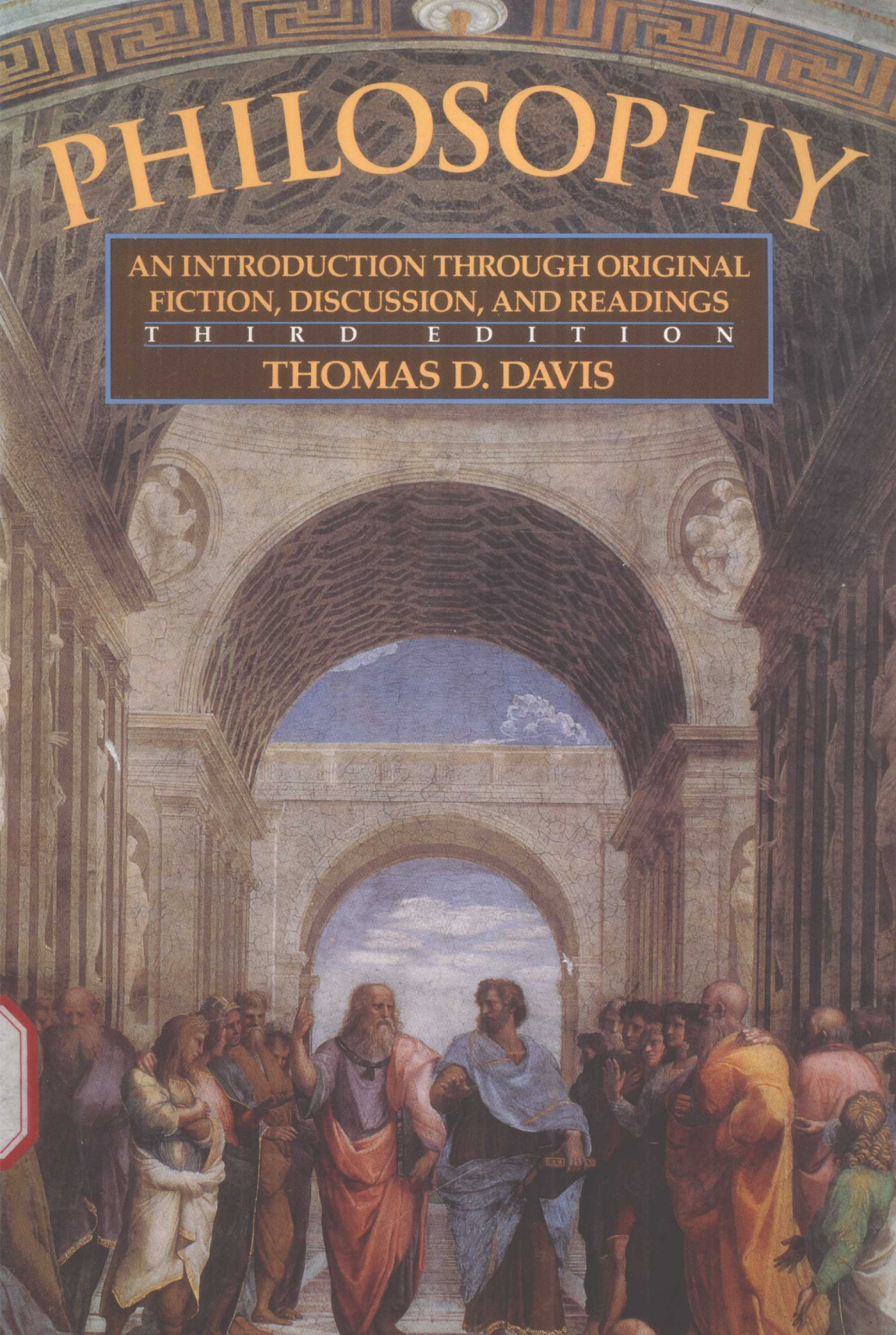


PHILOSOPHY

AN INTRODUCTION THROUGH ORIGINAL
FICTION, DISCUSSION, AND READINGS

T H I R D E D I T I O N

THOMAS D. DAVIS



PHILOSOPHY

An Introduction
through Original Fiction,
Discussion, and Readings

THIRD EDITION

Thomas D. Davis

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About the Author

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Mr. Davis is the author of two mystery novels with philosophical themes: *Suffer Little Children*, which received a Shamus Award from the Private Eye Writers of America for best first mystery of 1991, and *Murdered Sleep*.

Preface

In an episode from the classic TV series *Twilight Zone*, a prisoner is exiled on a deserted asteroid. For company he is given a sophisticated robot who looks and feels and behaves just like a real woman. As time goes by, the robot and the prisoner become lovers and friends. Then one day an official arrives, telling the prisoner he has been reprieved. But there is no room in the two-person space shuttle for the robot, and the prisoner refuses to leave her—in spite of the official's arguments that she is “just a machine.” To illustrate his argument, the official shoots the female, who falls down, wires springing out of her chest, crying “no” in a voice that winds down like a broken tape recorder. “See?” says the official triumphantly, but the prisoner just stares down at the robot, not sure how to react. We viewers are not sure how to react either. Does the fact of the wires make ridiculous every feeling that the prisoner felt for the robot? Do the wires mean she had no moral right to exist? Is she supposed to be “just a machine” because she had no real feelings? But how could we be certain of that, since feelings can be experienced only by the creature having them?

* * * * *

In *Brave New World*, after a terrible period of war and famine and social upheaval, the world is altered through embryo engineering, early conditioning, and drugs to be a stable, happy world in which such things as art, inquiry, and individuality no longer fit. John, the “Savage,” a holdover from the old world, is appalled by this new world. “I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want . . . the right to be unhappy.” Mustapha Mond, the “Controller,” says he doesn't much like this new world either, but thinks it's the right one from a moral standpoint. He had the choice of giving people misery and its compensations or happiness and stability. Most people, Mond claims, would prefer happiness and stability, and that's what the new world gives them.

Who's right, Mond or the Savage? It seems wrong of Mond to take away people's free will. On the other hand, how much suffering is free will really worth? Are we so sure people have free will in the first place? It also seems wrong of Mond to pick a world with no art or individuality. On the other hand, don't most people avoid art like the plague? Aren't most people trying desperately to be just like everybody else? Isn't happiness what most people really care about?

* * * * *

It was dramatized questions such as these that got me interested in philosophy and led me to take my first philosophy course. It was a course I almost flunked, in part because it went against my temperament at the time. I wanted to throw around great (and mostly fuzzy) ideas; my instructor wanted me to define my terms and present careful arguments. I wanted to read philosophical fiction; my instructor wanted me to struggle through the aged exposition of such thinkers as Plato and Descartes.

I could have thrown up my hands and said philosophy is boring and gone on to something else. But I still had those questions I wanted answered, and I saw that I couldn't pretend to any seriousness in my answers unless I was willing to do some hard thinking. I realized that exposure to some of the best minds in philosophy could help me with that kind of thinking, even if reading them was a bit of a struggle.

Eventually I went to graduate school, where I had my first teaching experiences as an assistant in another instructor's course. We'd try to discuss Descartes's question about whether we can be sure we're not now dreaming, and the students would shake their heads as if that was the most insane question they'd ever heard. Then outside the class I'd hear one of those same students say, "Hey, man, did you see that great *Star Trek* last night where the guy was dreaming his whole life?" and I realized some crucial connection was being missed. When I started doing my own teaching I'd preface each topic with some piece of dramatic literature, and that helped to make the connection, but in most of the pieces I could find there wasn't enough philosophy to get us deeply into the topic. Having done some writing myself, I decided to create my own stories. Hence the evolution of this textbook.

The tough stuff is here—the analysis and arguments and careful thinking—even some of the hard-to-read philosophers. But the point of this text is to start you off with the wonder, the drama, and the fun of philosophy, which is what will sustain you through the harder material. It has worked for a lot of students; I hope it works for you.

Thomas D. Davis

To the Instructor: Changes in the Third Edition

In this third edition, as in the second, each philosophical topic is presented through original fiction, transitional questions, discussion, and source readings. The third edition contains the following changes:

1. Chapter One, "Freedom, Foreknowledge, and Time," now contains a brief discussion of freedom and responsibility and a related reading by Moritz Schlick. The discussion section, "Is Free Will Desirable?" has been revised to strengthen its connection to the story, "A Little Omniscience Goes a Long Way."
2. Chapter Two, "God and Suffering," contains a new story, "The Vision," which brings up questions about religious experience: The topic is continued in a new discussion section and in an added reading by William James. The discussion of the problem of suffering now contains some comments on a defense that many of my students offer: that it is impossible to have happiness without unhappiness. The readings section also contains a short selection from my novel, *Suffer Little Children*.
3. Chapter Three, "Moral Proof and Moral Principles," contains an added reading by Jeremy Bentham to supplement the brief discussion of utilitarianism in the text.
4. Chapter Four, "One Moral Issue: The Right to Die," now contains a full discussion section. In the second edition, this chapter contained only preface, story, and readings.
5. In Chapter Six, "Appearance and Reality," the three stories from the second edition have been replaced by a single new story, "Why Don't You Just Wake Up," and the discussion has been somewhat simplified. Many teachers felt that the original chapter was just too complicated in its presentation.
6. In Chapter Seven, "Logic," the somewhat inappropriate reading by Russell (really meant to go with Chapter Six) has been replaced by a short selection by Irving Copi.
7. In the interest of readability and teachability, I have presented important arguments somewhat more formally. Questions and exercises relating to the discussion and readings have been added at the end of each chapter.
8. In a new chapter, entitled "Methodology," there is a section on "Understanding Philosophical Argumentation" which discusses some

basic logical concepts in the context of an imagined debate. The purpose of this section is to present some methodological material that could be used to help increase the students' sophistication in reading the text and discussing the material. Originally I intended to offer the material as an introduction, but then I realized that starting the students off with logical concepts would defeat the purpose of this text. I use this appendix material at the third or fourth class session, after the students have gotten into the discussion material in the first chapter. It could, of course, be used later or not at all. Nothing in the text requires that it be used.

9. Also in the "Methodology" chapter is a section on "Writing a Philosophy Paper." The material comes from workshops I do for older adults in non-traditional management programs who want no-nonsense tips on how to write acceptable papers. I found the material adapted well to my students in traditional philosophy courses. In my classes I give my students an excerpt and assignment like the one in Chapter Eight, and require them to write their papers using exactly the same subtopics. This drills in the how-to material, makes for some interesting class discussions, and makes grading the papers a much easier task.

ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF PRESENTING THE TEXT

The more reviews I receive regarding revisions, the more obvious it becomes that everyone has a slightly different preference as to how this text should be done. That's understandable. What bothers me is a sense that some instructors feel locked into using whatever materials I include in whatever order I include them. I don't even use my own text as written. For instance, in teaching the first chapter of the second edition to community college students, I started off with "Please Don't Tell Me How the Story Ends," followed by the initial discussion of free will and determinism. I then provided some handouts on arguments, having the students apply the handout material to the discussion they'd read, as well as to newly assigned articles by Holbach and/or Barrett. Next I assigned "A Little Omniscience Goes a Long Way" and the discussion of the desirability of free will. Following a quiz, I showed a *Star Trek* video and had the students read the discussion of time travel (treating the material almost as if it were a separate chapter). I didn't assign the Campbell or Williams article.

In assigning Chapter Two, I omitted the following: the discussion of the ontological argument, all but the first three paragraphs of the discussion of the cosmological argument, and all articles except the one by Hick. I then assigned *Brave New World*, which helped make vivid the issues discussed in the first two chapters.

This text is intended as a resource. Use whatever is helpful, in whatever order is helpful, with whatever other materials might be useful.

I would like to thank the following individuals, whose suggestions were particularly helpful in planning the third edition: Robert Cogan, Edinboro

University of Pennsylvania; Robert Gibson, Community College of Denver; Linda Kayes, Oakland Community College; Darryl Mehring, University of Colorado at Denver; Dean J. Nelson, Dutchess Community College; Rickey J. Ray, East Tennessee State University; David Roberts, The University of Alabama at Birmingham; Samuel R. Roberts, III, Tennessee Wesleyan College; and James D. Taylor, student at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

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Thomas D. Davis

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1

Freedom, Foreknowledge, and Time

Fiction: Please Don't Tell Me How the Story Ends

The heavy door closed behind him, and he glanced quickly at this new detention room. He was startled, almost pleasantly surprised. This was not like the drab cell in which he had spent the first days after his arrest, nor like the hospital rooms, with the serpentine carnival machines, in which he had been tested and observed for the last two months—though he assumed that he was being observed here as well. This was more like a small, comfortable library that had been furnished like a first-class hotel room. Against the four walls were fully stocked bookcases that rose ten feet to the white plaster ceiling; in the ceiling was a small skylight. The floor was covered with a thick green carpet, and in the middle of the room were a double bed with a nightstand, a large bureau, a desk, an easy chair with a side table, and several lamps. There were large gaps in the bookcases to accommodate two doors, including the one through which he had just entered, and also a traylike apparatus affixed to the wall. He could not immediately ascertain the purpose of the tray, but the other door, he quickly learned, led to a spacious bathroom complete with toilet articles. As he searched the main room, he found that the desk contained writing paper, pens, a clock, and a calendar; the bureau contained abundant clothing in a variety of colors and two pairs of shoes. He glanced down at the hospital gown and slippers he was wearing, then quickly changed into a rust-colored sweater and a pair of dark brown slacks. The clothing, including the shoes, fitted him perfectly. It would be easier to face his situation, to face whatever might be coming, looking like a civilized human being.

But what was his situation? He wanted to believe that the improvement in his living conditions meant an improvement in his status, perhaps even an imminent reprieve. But all the same he doubted it. Nothing had seemed to fol-

low a sensible progression since his arrest, and it would be foolhardy to take anything at face value now. But what were they up to? At first, when he had been taken to the hospital, he had expected torture, some hideous pseudo-medical experiment, or a brainwashing program. But there had been no operation and no pain. He had been tested countless times: the endless details of biography; the responses to color, scent, sound, taste, touch; the responses to situation and ideas; the physical examination. But if these constituted mind-altering procedures, they had to be of the most subtle variety. Certainly he felt the same; at least no more compliant than he had been in the beginning. What were they after?

As his uncertainty grew to anxiety, he tried to work it off with whatever physical exercise he could manage in the confines of the room: running in place, isometrics, sit-ups, and push-ups. He knew that the strength of his will would depend in part on the strength of his body, and since his arrest he had exercised as much as he could. No one had prevented this.

He was midway through a push-up when a loud buzzer sounded. He leaped to his feet, frightened but ready. Then he saw a plastic tray of food on the metal tray that extended from the wall and a portion of the wall closing downward behind the tray. So this was how he would get his meals. He would see no one. Was this some special isolation experiment?

The question of solitude quickly gave way to hunger and curiosity about the food. It looked delicious and plentiful; there was much more than he could possibly eat. Was it safe? Could it be drugged or poisoned? No, there could be no point to their finishing him in such an odd, roundabout fashion. He took the tray to the desk and ate heartily, but still left several of the dishes barely sampled or untouched.

That evening—the clock and the darkened skylight told him it was evening—he investigated the room further. He was interrupted only once by the buzzer. When it continued to sound and nothing appeared, he realized that the buzzer meant he was to return the food dishes. He did so, and the plastic tray disappeared into the wall.

The writing paper was a temptation. He always thought better with a pen in hand. Writing would resemble a kind of conversation and make him feel a little less alone. With a journal, he could construct some kind of history from what threatened to be days of dulling sameness. But he feared that they wanted him to write, that his doing so would somehow play into their hands. So he refrained.

Instead, he examined a portion of the bookshelf that contained paperback volumes in a great variety of sizes and colors. The books covered a number of fields—fiction, history, science, philosophy, politics—some to his liking and some not. He selected a political treatise and put it on the small table next to the easy chair. He did not open it immediately. He washed up and then went to the bureau, where he found a green plaid robe and a pair of light yellow pajamas. As he lifted out the pajamas, he noticed a small, black, rectangular box and opened it.

Inside was a revolver. A quick examination showed that it was loaded and operative. Quickly he shut the box, trembling. He was on one knee in front of the open drawer. His first thought was that a former inmate had left the gun to help him. He was sure that his body was blocking the contents of the drawer from the view of any observation devices in the room. He must not give away the secret. He forced himself to close the drawer casually, rise, and walk to the easy chair.

Then the absurdity of his hypothesis struck him. How could any prisoner have gotten such a thing past the tight security of this place? And what good would such a weapon do him in a room to which no one came? No, the gun must be there because the authorities wanted it there. But why? Could it be they wanted to hide his death under the pretense of an attempted escape? Or could it be that they were trying to push him to suicide by isolating him? But again, what was the point of it? He realized that his fingerprints were on the gun. Did they want to use that as some kind of evidence against him? He went to the bureau again, ostensibly to switch pajamas, and, during the switch, opened the box and quickly wiped his prints off the gun. As casually as he could, he returned to the chair.

He passed the evening in considerable agitation. He tried to read but could not. He exercised again, but it did not calm him. He tried to analyze his situation, but his thoughts were an incoherent jumble. Much later, he lay down on the bed, first pushing the easy chair against the door of the room. He recognized the absurdity of erecting this fragile barrier, but the noise of their pushing it away would give him some warning. For a while, he forced his eyes open each time he began to doze, but eventually he fell asleep.

In the morning, he found everything unchanged, the chair still in place at the door. Nothing but the breakfast tray had intruded. After he had exercised, breakfasted, bathed, and found himself still unmolested, he began to feel more calm. He read half the book he had selected the night before, lunched, and then dozed in his chair.

When he awoke, his eyes scanned the room and came to rest on one of the bookshelves filled with a series of black, leatherbound volumes of uniform size, marked only by number. He had noticed them before but had paid little attention, thinking they were an encyclopedia. Now he noticed what a preposterous number of volumes there were, perhaps two hundred in all, filling not only one bookcase from floor to ceiling but filling parts of others as well. His curiosity piqued, he pulled down Volume LXIV, and opened it at random to page 494.

The page was filled with very small print, with a section at the bottom in even smaller print that appeared to be footnotes. The heading of the page was large enough to be read at a glance. "RE: PRISONER 7439762 (referred to herein as 'Q')." He read on: "3/07/06. 14:03. Q entered room on 3/06/06 at 4:52. Surprised at pleasantness of room. Glanced at furniture, then bookcase, then ceiling. Noted metal tray and second door, puzzled by both. Entered bath-

room, noting toilet articles. Lifted shaver and touched cologne." He skipped down the page: "Selected brown slacks, rust sweater, and tan shoes. Felt normal clothing made him more equal to his situation."

It seemed that they were keeping some sort of record of his activities here. But what was the purpose of having the record here for him to read? And how had they gotten it in here? It was easy to figure out how they knew of his activities: they were watching him, just as he had suspected. They must have printed this page during the night and placed it here as he slept. Perhaps his food had been drugged to guarantee that he wouldn't awake.

He glanced toward the door of his cell and remembered the chair he had placed against it. In a drugged sleep, he wouldn't have heard them enter. They could have pulled the chair back as they left. But all the way? Presumably there was some hidden panel in the door. Once the door was shut, they had merely to open the panel and pull the chair the last few inches.

Suddenly he remembered the matter of the gun. He glanced down the page and there it was, a description of how he had handled the gun twice. There was no warning given nor any hint of an explanation as to why the gun was there. There was just the clipped, neutral-toned description of his actions and impressions. It described his hope that the gun might have been left by another prisoner, his rejection of that supposition, his fear that the gun might be used against him in some way, his desire to remove the fingerprints. But how on earth could they have known what he was feeling and thinking? He decided that he had acted and reacted as any normal person would have done, and they had simply drawn the obvious conclusions from his actions and facial expressions.

He glanced further down the page and read: "On 3/07/06, Q awoke at 8:33." And further ". . . selected *The Future of Socialism* by Felix Berofsky. . . ." And further: ". . . bent the corner of page 206 to mark his place and put the book. . . ." All his activities of that morning had already been printed in the report!

He began turning the book around in his hands and pulled it away from the shelf. Was this thing wired in some way? Could they print their reports onto these pages in minutes without removing the books from the shelves? Perhaps they had some new process whereby they could imprint specially sensitized pages by electronic signal.

Then he remembered that he had just awakened from a nap, and he slammed the volume shut in disgust. Of course: they had entered the room again during his nap. He placed the volume back on the shelf and started for his chair. How could they expect him to be taken in by such blatant trickery? But then a thought occurred to him. He had picked out a volume and page at random. Why had the description of yesterday and this morning been on that particular page? Were all the pages the same? He returned to the shelf and picked up the same volume, this time opening it to page 531. The heading was the same. He looked down the page: "Q began to return to his chair but became puzzled as to why the initial description of his activities should have appeared on page 494 of this volume." He threw the book to the floor and