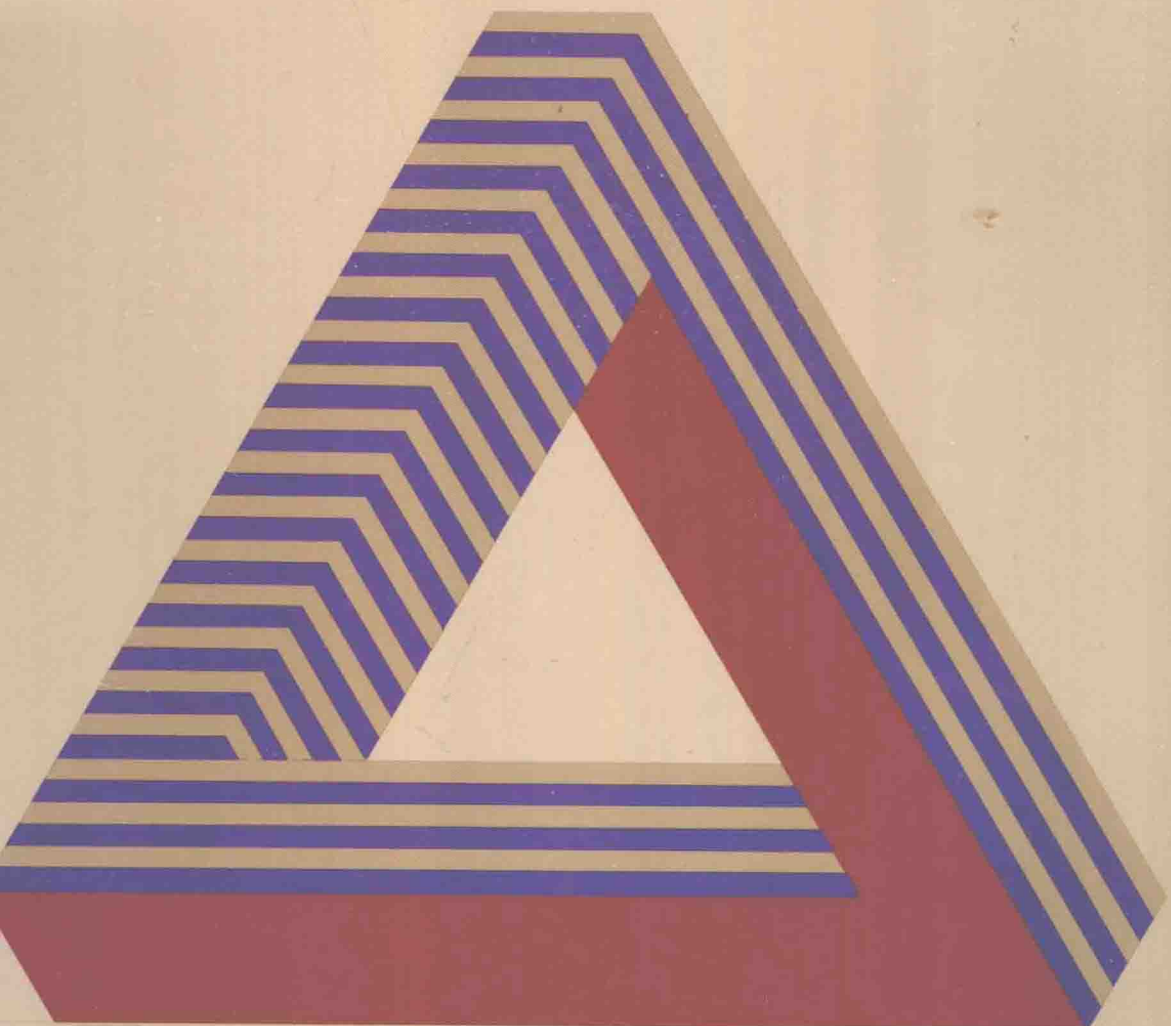
PHILOSOPHY

PARADOX AND DISCOVERY

Third Edition



ARTHUR J. MINTON THOMAS A. SHIPKA

Philosophy: Paradox and Discovery

THIRD EDITION

Arthur J. Minton

Thomas A. Shipka

Youngstown State University

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Philosophy:
Paradox and Discovery

To Chris and Scott

To Kate, Anne Louise, and Andrew

To the students of
Youngstown State University—
past, present, and future

PREFACE

This collection of readings in philosophy was assembled after an extensive survey of teachers across the country indicated a widespread dissatisfaction with traditional texts, as well as with more recent texts which emphasize "relevance." A great many instructors indicated the need for a text that speaks to the beginning student without sacrificing the hard-won insights of the past. The fundamental questions of philosophy are "relevant" in the highest sense of that much-abused word, for the simple fact is that most great philosophers theorized to solve some pressing moral and intellectual concern. From Plato to Marx, the history of the world has moved from the pressure of their pens.

Since the task of philosophy is to examine life, to tear down the comfortable barriers of dogma which prevent us from growth, the teacher of philosophy must always keep a finger on the pulse of immediate experience. But, at the same time, philosophy builds where it destroys, and this constructive task demands that the connection between first principles and the world of the here and now be made explicit. It is not enough to mix a few of the classics with articles dealing with contemporary concerns, praying that the connection will be made. In this text a different approach has been tried. First, every effort has been made to ensure that the readings deal with issues of fundamental concern. Selections that supplement one another, building together to create complexity and rigor, were chosen over more extensive, but technical, writing. Whenever possible, thinkers of unusual clarity and style were selected. Second, selections which make a clear connection between theory and practice are included in every part. In addition, the readings are integrated so that selections in one part supplement those in another. Robert Paul Wolff's defense of anarchism, for example, is founded on Kant's ethics, and the two may be read together. Mark Twain's devastating attack on traditional religion can be productively read with Clarence Darrow's defense of Leopold and Loeb, and John Hick's rebuttal to Twain is nicely supplemented by Peter Bertocci's defense of free will. There are many interesting combinations that allow the instructor to show how different areas of experience fit together to form a unified system of thought.

ORGANIZATION

As the table of contents illustrates,

- The text is divided into five major parts, each beginning with a short essay designed to confront the student with the paradoxes inherent in this general area of experience.
- Within each part, every chapter takes up a specific problem area, introduced by an essay that furnishes the unifying historical and conceptual thread between the readings. These problem introductions avoid technical language as much as possible, for two reasons: (1) many instructors have individual classification systems; and (2) an abundance of technical terms in introductory material can be counterproductive pedagogically.
- Each reading within a chapter is preceded by a critical headnote providing a brief biography of its author as well as a hint of the major ideas presented in the selection. The headnotes are designed to arouse the reader's interest and to suggest questions for reflection, so that reading the selection will be undertaken more critically.
- Each reading is followed by a series of study questions designed both to aid the student in locating and understanding the main ideas of the reading, and to stimulate reflection on these ideas and their implications. The questions do more than force the student to review the reading—they also focus attention on new avenues of inquiry.

NEW TO THIS EDITION

We believe that this third edition is improved as well as revised. We have applied the same criteria that governed selection of materials in the previous two editions. However, we have made a special effort to select readings that are likely to stimulate discussion of basic philosophical issues both in and out of class. "Doing philosophy" requires dialogue and active participation, not merely careful listening. Not surprisingly, a recent study of students' evaluation of philosophy courses and instructors shows that students want and expect an opportunity for class discussion.*

David Stewart's ingenious essay "The Philosopher as Detective," which appears in print for the first time, will help students better answer the Introduction's question: What is philosophy? In Part One, **Philosophy of Religion,** this edition has a new third chapter, "Faith and Reason." In addition to the essays by Stace and Scriven, retained from the second edition, you will find the pragmatic justification for believing in God by William James, the great American pragmatist; and an overview of humanism, an alternative to theism, by Corliss Lamont, a long-time spokesperson for American humanism. There is also a new selection in the second chapter: J. L. Mackie's "Evil and Omnipotence."

* Lee C. Rice, "Student Evaluation of Teaching: Problems and Prospects," *Teaching Philosophy*, Volume II, Number 4, December 1988, pp. 329–344.)

In Part Two, **Knowledge**, a chapter from George Johnson's *Machinery of the Mind* gives the mind-body debate new currency.

In this edition, **Free Will and Determinism** appears as Part Three, and **Morality** appears as Part Four—the reverse of the previous edition. The reason for this is that if human choice is not free, then discussion of morality, in the view of many, is pointless. If I cannot avoid doing what I do, why consider me blameworthy or praiseworthy? Except for this transposition, however, Free Will and Determinism is unchanged.

In Part Four, **Morality**, there are two exceptional additions. One is a feminist essay by Jane Caputi, an award-winning author from the University of New Mexico, that delivers a powerful indictment of modern mass communication as a preserver of sexism. The other is an elegant, balanced critique of cultural relativism by James Rachels.

In Part Five, **Political Philosophy**, there are two new articles. Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" gives a justification of morally grounded resistance to law, and Carl Cohen's essay from his *Four Systems* argues, against philosophical anarchism, that autonomy and authority are compatible.

You will find new study questions for some readings, and increased bibliographic material in every section. For the first time, an Instructor's Manual is available to aid instructors with developing teaching strategies, presenting material in class, selecting the right mix of readings, preparing examinations and assignments, using films and videotapes to increase students' interest and learning, and fostering class discussion.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Over the years this book has profited from the help of many persons. They include users of the book and the publisher's reviewers, who have once again given solid advice to make the book more useful to instructors and students. For their help with this edition, we would like to thank Jeffrey Barker, Albright College; Richard Glidewell, Fitchburg State College; John McKenney, Community College of Philadelphia; Gunnulf Myrbo, Pacific Lutheran University; James Treanor, Southwest Texas State University; Paul de Vries, Wheaton College; and Edward Walter, University of Missouri, Kansas City. Thanks also to the faculty members in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Youngstown State University, especially Christopher Bache, James Dale, Brendan Minogue, Charles Reid, J-C. Smith, L. J. Tessier, and Victor Wan-Tatah. As in the past, the staff at McGraw-Hill proved to be highly competent, thorough, and cooperative. Special thanks are due to Phillip Butcher, Judith Cornwell, and Susan Gamer for their important roles in producing the third edition. Publishers and authors, as in the past, have been most cooperative in

granting permissions for reprinting copyright material. To all these persons, we express our gratitude. Finally, we acknowledge the valuable support which the University Research Council of Youngstown State University has provided for preparation of this edition.

Arthur J. Minton

Thomas A. Shipka

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Introduction

WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

Philosophy, like other studies, aims at knowledge. But philosophers seek a special sort of knowledge that eludes exact definition. The word "philosophy" comes from the Greek *philein*, "to love or desire," and *sophia*, "wisdom." The philosopher, then, is a "lover of wisdom." Wisdom is knowledge in its broadest sense. It does not concern things that huddle on the periphery of life. It is knowledge directed to the fundamental and pervasive concerns of existence. To desire wisdom is to seek principles that cut through the superficial and trivial facts that clutter our intellectual landscape, revealing the basic shape of things beneath. Philosophy, as a quest for wisdom, is an attempt to provide a vision of the world that is systematic and clear, in which the connections between significant facts are made manifest. It is the search for first things and last things—for first principles and their ultimate implications.

We all become philosophers at crucial points in life. We go at the painful task of living with a set of beliefs—faiths, if you will—that organize the helter-skelter of experience into a more or less systematic and coherent whole. From culture, class, religion, and family we are provided with a general framework, a world view, that filters out the unimportant and impregnates experience with meaning. This framework of beliefs and values is largely unconscious and inarticulate; and when it smashes against the hard rock of reality, the dilemma we feel, but do not yet understand, kindles philosophical reflection. As our personal relationships become more complicated, youthful optimism about human nature is tempered by disappointment and hurt. As more and more is demanded of us and we begin to see flaws in ourselves, the infinite horizon of opportunity shrinks in the face of our limitations. As we see ourselves and others repeating the same errors, playing out the same roles, we begin to wonder whether society and nature have conspired to lock us into a mechanical mode of reaction impossible to resist. As we grow conscious of the enormous

amount of suffering and anguish in the world, seeing at first hand the vast waste of human life, the old easy answers about a good and loving God are shattered. As we face wholesale changes in the behavior of society, each decade overthrowing the values of the last, we cannot help wondering whether our own commitments will stand the test of time or even whether such commitments are more than subjective whims that we have elevated to first principles. At such times we lose our way in the world and we ask, "What am I about?" This is philosophical territory.

Traditionally, philosophy has been partitioned into three areas: epistemology, metaphysics, and value theory. *Epistemology* is the theory of knowledge. The following are typical epistemological questions: What is scientific method? What is the role of observation in knowing? Can there be absolute certainty about anything? What is an explanation? What is a proof? *Metaphysics* is concerned with the description of the fundamental aspects of reality. These are typical metaphysical questions: What is mind? Is it different from matter? Is there necessity in nature? Is there necessity in human decision? Does God exist? Are numbers real? Which is basic—force or matter? *Value theory* consists in resolving a number of problems about the nature of value in art, ethics, and politics: What makes something beautiful? Is it taste or an objective property? What makes something good? Again, is personal morality subjective or can it be assessed by an absolute standard? When should I disregard my own interests, if at all? What makes one political system better than another? Should I always obey the law? What makes someone into a moral authority? As you can see, sometimes philosophical inquiry becomes lofty and abstract; but even the most abstract theorizing is generated in a practical dilemma and will eventually come back to illuminate its beginnings. The philosophical perspective is ever the human perspective.

But the human perspective is limited. No one can scan the entire horizon of human concern with the eye of a god. We see the world from where we stand, and partial vision yields only partial truth. To recognize this fact, however, is not to counsel inaction, indecision, or despair. Nor is it to fall back on the comfortable but wholly fallacious assumption that since no one has all the answers, everyone's opinion is equally valid. The recognition of fallibility is simply an acknowledgment of our humanity. We have to get on in this world, and either we entrust our course to intellect and whatever insight we can muster or we flounder and take our chances with fate. There are no other alternatives. The basic assumption of philosophical inquiry is that the most intractable puzzles of life—no matter how large—will ultimately give way to rational analysis. But before this can happen, we must develop, as carefully as we can, our own vision of things. Lived experience is the testing ground for these partial insights. The experience of one individual or even of a generation may not be sufficient; but eventually what is true in our outlook will enlarge our understanding of

the world and open it up to our command, while what is false will lead us to confusion and frustration.

THE SEARCH FOR BEDROCK: PARADOX

Philosophical thought usually begins when the world does not behave as we thought it must. In frustration, the wise person takes stock. "Know thyself" is the first injunction of philosophy, for until we appreciate the extent to which self colors experience with its own loyalties, infuses it with its inarticulate commitments, we cannot enjoy the flexibility of action and purpose that is the mark of true freedom. Many people believe that the mind is like a sponge, soaking up facts which then present themselves on the stage of consciousness in all their pristine reality. The mind, according to this view, is simply a receptacle which does not alter or transform what flows into it. This conception of the "passivity" of intellect is perhaps the greatest barrier to philosophical thinking. Philosophers are constantly reminding us that we are the active shapers of experience, investing it with meaning from a hidden fund of presuppositions, mostly submerged beneath consciousness like the great mass of an iceberg beneath the water. The first task of philosophy is to bring these presuppositions to consciousness—to remind us that the sense of obviousness accompanying certain facts has been contributed by ourselves. An example will make this clearer.

When surgical techniques allowed for the safe removal of cataracts, people who had been afflicted with this condition since birth were able to see for the first time. It is tempting to think that upon opening their eyes, they experienced the beautiful and familiar world of vision—a world of form and color, of public objects in a public space. But this does not occur. The patient is immediately confronted with a wall of brightness containing color patches that blend indistinguishably into one another. The flood of sensations is absolutely meaningless. There is no awareness of shape or size, nor any idea of distance. In fact, some patients report the impression that the swirl of color is touching their eyes. Familiar shapes, such as squares and triangles, which are easily identified by touch, are unrecognized in the visual array. One investigator writes:

> The newly-operated patients do not localize their visual impressions; they do not relate them to any point, either to the eye or to any surface, even a spherical one; they see colors much as we smell an odor of peat or varnish, which enfolds and intrudes upon us, but without occupying any specific form of extension in a more exactly definable way.*

* This quotation and all following quotations are taken from Marius Von Senden, *Space and Sight* (New York: Free Press, 1960). This remarkable book is a collection of case histories of persons who acquired sight for the first time through surgery or by spontaneous remission.