

PHILOSOPHY

An Introduction Through Original Fiction, Discussion,
and a Multi-Media CD-ROM

fourth edition



THOMAS D. DAVIS

PHILOSOPHY

An Introduction Through
Original Fiction, Discussion,
and a Multi-Media CD-ROM

FOURTH EDITION

Thomas D. Davis



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PHILOSOPHY: An Introduction through Original Fiction,
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Mr. Davis is the author of three novels, *Suffer Little Children*, *Murdered Sleep*, and *Consuming Fire*, as well as a satire of Sartre, *Dear Jean: A One-Act Play* (in *Teaching Philosophy*, Vol. 5, No. 1).

*To Diane:
My wife and soul-mate*

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. 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.

To add to the fun, as well as to facilitate the learning of the basic definitions, positions, and arguments in the text, a multi-media CD has been added to the fourth edition. The CD contains exercises, animated cartoons, and even original pop and rock songs (in the sections called, “Rockin’ Review”) incorporating fundamental philosophical concepts. The CD is intended as a supplement to the text; it won't work in place of it. Moving back and forth from text to CD should make it easier and more enjoyable to absorb the ideas in the text.

Thomas D. Davis

To the Instructor

Changes in the Fourth Edition

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

1. An author-developed multi-media CD containing exercises, animations, and music has been added to the text. The CD is included to add modes of learning that are more congenial to the interests of many of today's students. The CD is intended as a supplement to the text; it won't work in place of the text. The student should start with the text, then move back and forth between CD and text.
2. Readings: All secondary source material has been removed from the fourth edition. Reviews indicated that the readings were assigned sporadically and then often in conjunction with a supplementary anthology. Dropping the readings allowed for the inclusion of the CD.
3. Chapter One, "Freedom and Responsibility": Virtually all the material on divine foreknowledge, time, and time travel has been removed from this chapter and made part of a new chapter. A discussion of compatibilism is included, and in the original discussion of free will as contra-causal freedom, it is made clear that there are disputes about the meaning of free will.
4. Chapter Two, "Time and Time Travel": This is a new chapter with a time travel story and a discussion of time and time travel.

5. Chapter Three, “God and Suffering”: The discussion of the traditional arguments for the existence of God has been shortened and new material added on the relevance of the “Big Bang” theory to the idea of a First Cause.
6. Chapter Four, “Moral Principles”: The story, “Those Who Help Themselves,” has been shortened and a new story added that sets up a new discussion of consequentialist versus deontological ethics, of utilitarianism versus Kant.
7. Chapter Six, “The Nature of the Mind”: The order of the stories has been reversed, and the discussion now starts off with dualism. There is additional discussion covering functionalism, minds and machines, some materialist visions of life after death, and updated versions of dualism.
8. Chapter Seven, “Appearance and Reality”: The chapter includes an updated version of “The Descartes Tape” story from the second edition, retitled, “The Fantasy Machine.”
9. The chapters “Logic” and “Methodology” have been eliminated from this edition to make room for new material.
10. The text has been reformatted slightly, including boxes and **increased underlining** that highlight major points for easier reading, as well as easier reference during class discussion.

I would like to thank the following individuals, whose suggestions were helpful in planning the fourth edition:

I would like to continue to thank the helpful reviewers from earlier editions: Robert Cogan, Steven Fishman, Robert Gibson, Robert L. Gray, Linda Kayes, James Manley, Darryl Mehring, Gerald E. Meyers, Todd Moody, Dean J. Nelson, George S. Pappas, Rickey J. Ray, David Roberts, Samuel R. Roberts, III, Craig Staudenbauer and James D. Taylor (student).

I’d like to add a special thanks to James Manley, who suggested the idea of a multi-media CD and helped me with some initial technical matters.

Thomas D. Davis

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Freedom and Responsibility

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 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

 The CD, Ch. 1, *Please Don't Tell Me How the Story Ends (1)*, contains animation and exercises related to this story.

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 follow 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 situations 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