

Fifty  
Readings  
in

Philosophy

SECOND EDITION

DONALD C. ABEL

# Fifty Readings in Philosophy

# FIFTY READINGS IN PHILOSOPHY

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SECOND EDITION

Donald C. Abel

St. Norbert College



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## Higher Education

### FIFTY READINGS IN PHILOSOPHY

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# About the Author

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DONALD C. ABEL is Professor of Philosophy at St. Norbert College in De Pere, Wisconsin. He holds a B.A. in Philosophy from Gonzaga University, an M.A. in Philosophy from Tulane University, a Ph.L. in Philosophy from St. Michael's Institute, an M.Div. in Theology from Loyola University of Chicago, and a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Northwestern University. He is the author of *Freud on Instinct and Morality* (1989) and *Theories of Human Nature: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (McGraw-Hill, 1992) and coauthor (with Samuel Enoch Stumpf, deceased) of *Elements of Philosophy: An Introduction*, 4th edition (McGraw-Hill, 2002). He is the editor of *Discourses*, an electronic database of philosophy readings that is part of *Primis*, McGraw-Hill's online resource for creating customized textbooks, and the editor of the readings in *PowerWeb: Philosophy* and *PowerWeb: Ethics*, McGraw-Hill's online supplements for introductory philosophy courses and ethics courses. Professor Abel has received two awards for excellence in teaching and an award for outstanding scholarship. He is a member of the American Philosophical Association, the American Catholic Philosophical Association, the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy, and the Society for Philosophy and Psychology.

# Preface

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This anthology is designed for an introductory course in philosophy based on texts of classical Western philosophers and contemporary authors writing in that tradition. To enable students to see alternative philosophical approaches to specific topics, I have included a reading from the Buddhist Pali Canon on the nature of the self, a reading on epistemology that draws on Buddhist and Hindu thought, and feminist readings on the mind–body problem, ethics, and social justice.

This second edition features eleven new readings, four expanded readings, eleven new translations, revised chapter introductions, updated biographies of living authors, and additional explanatory notes.

The fifty readings in this book were selected on the basis of their cogency of thought, clarity of expression, historical significance, diversity, and accessibility. They are organized according to seven basic topics: the nature of philosophy; philosophy of religion; theories of knowledge; philosophy of mind, body, and self; free will and determinism; ethics; and political and social philosophy.

Since most beginning philosophy students need assistance in reading primary texts, *Fifty Readings in Philosophy* incorporates editorial features that enable students to read the works with greater understanding and benefit:

- *Chapter Introductions*: Each of the seven chapters begins with an overview of the topic and states the basic position taken by each author in the chapter. The overviews focus on fundamental questions intended to generate the students' interest; the brief summaries of the authors' positions show students the diversity of opinion on these questions and, I hope, will encourage students to enter into the ongoing philosophical dialogue and to formulate their own views on the topic.
- *Length of Readings*: Each reading is long enough to present a self-contained argument, but not so lengthy that students lose track of the author's main point.
- *Headnotes*: Each reading begins with a headnote that gives a biographical sketch of the author and a brief summary of the reading. The biography helps place the reading in a personal and historical context; the summary, which guides students through the main arguments but is not so detailed as to serve as a substitute for reading the text itself, enables students to approach the reading with greater confidence.

- *Explanatory Notes:* Notes explain terms and references likely to be unfamiliar to beginning students. The number of notes has been significantly increased for this new edition.
- *Retention of Original Headings:* To help students better understand the context and organization of each reading, all the original headings and subheadings of the book, chapter, or article are included. This format also makes it easier for students to locate excerpts in the original work.
- *Contemporary Translations:* All the translations used in this anthology (except for Robinson's translation of Holbach, which is the only one available) are by contemporary scholars whose work reflects the latest scholarship and the modern idiom.
- *Stylistic Modernization of Classical British Authors:* To make the selections from Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Paley, and Wollstonecraft more accessible, I have revised archaic punctuation, capitalization, italicization, and spelling. This stylistic modernization is more comprehensive in this second edition than in the first.
- *Self-Contained Chapters:* Each of the seven chapters is an independent unit; neither the chapter introduction nor the readings within the chapter presuppose familiarity with any prior section of the book. It is therefore possible to take the chapters in a different order or to omit some of them.
- *Self-Contained Readings:* Each reading, together with its headnote, is a self-contained unit; the headnote provides enough background for students to understand the selection even when the author builds on or criticizes a theory presented earlier in the chapter. This feature enables instructors to vary the order of the readings or to omit some of them.

The new readings, expanded readings, and new translations included in this second edition of *Fifty Readings in Philosophy* are:

### Chapter 1. What Is Philosophy?

*New translation:* Plato, *Euthyphro*, translated by G. M. A. Grube, revised by John M. Cooper (2000)

*Note:* Plato's *Crito*, a new reading in Chapter 7, is also suitable for Chapter 1.

### Chapter 2. Philosophy of Religion

*New translation:* Anselm, *Proslogion and Exchange with Gaunilo*, translated by Thomas Williams (2001)

*New translation:* Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on God*, translated by William P. Baumgarth and Richard J. Regan (1994)

*New reading:* Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, translated by A. J. Krailsheimer (1995)

### Chapter 3. Theories of Knowledge

*New translation:* Plato, *Republic*, translated by G. M. A. Grube, revised by C. D. C. Reeve (1992); diagrams of the divided line and the cave have been added

*New translation:* René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, translated by John Cottingham (1996)

*New translation and expanded selection:* Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (1998); selection now includes material on the two forms of sensibility and the twelve categories of the understanding

*New reading:* Kaisa Puhakka, "An Invitation to Authentic Knowing"

#### Chapter 4. Mind, Body, and Self

*Expanded reading:* Pali Canon, *The Middle-Length Discourses of the Buddha* (selection now includes excerpt from Discourse 38, "Longer Discourse on the Destruction of Craving")

*New translation:* René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, translated by John Cottingham (1996)

*New reading:* D. M. Armstrong, "The Nature of Mind"

*New reading:* Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?"

*New reading:* Daniel C. Dennett, "The Origins of Selves"

#### Chapter 5. Free Will and Determinism

*New reading:* Nancy Holmstrom, "Firming Up Soft Determinism"

#### Chapter 6. Ethics

*New translation:* Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Christopher Rowe (2002)

*New translation:* Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on Law*, translated by Richard J. Regan (2000)

*New translation:* Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated by Mary Gregor (1997)

*New translation:* Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, translated by Judith Norman (2002)

*New reading:* A. J. Ayer, "Critique of Ethics and Theology"

*New reading:* James Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"

*New reading:* Rita C. Manning, "Just Caring"

#### Chapter 7. Political and Social Philosophy

*New reading:* Plato, *Crito*, translated by G. M. A. Grube, revised by John M. Cooper (2000)

*Expanded reading:* John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government* (selection now includes excerpt from Chapter XX, "Of the Dissolution of Government")

*Expanded reading:* Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (complete letter replaces excerpt)

*New reading:* Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*



I wish to thank Jon-David Hague, Editor of Philosophy and Religion at McGraw-Hill, for his invitation to prepare a second edition of *Fifty Readings in Philosophy* and his wise counsel throughout the project. I appreciate the excellent work of Brett Coker, the production editor for this book. My thanks to authors D. M. Armstrong, Richard Dawkins, Morwenna Griffiths, John Hick, Nancy Holmstrom, John Hospers, Kaisa Puhakka, and Richard Taylor for kindly providing me with biographical information for use in the headnotes. In addition, Penelope Mackie provided information about her late father, J. L. Mackie. I appreciate the thoughtful suggestions for revision given by the following reviewers:

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My students at St. Norbert College have contributed to this book by their helpful comments on various readings that I have tried out in the classroom over the years. Finally, I would like to thank the publishers (listed at the end of the book) who granted permission to reproduce copyrighted material.

Donald C. Abel

# Fifty Readings in Philosophy

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The ancient Greek thinkers who explored fundamental questions about the world and about human existence called themselves *philosophoi*, “lovers of wisdom.” They took time to stop and wonder about such things as the nature of the universe, the purpose of life, and the meaning of “good” and “bad.” In their search for wisdom, they were not content to rely on answers provided by religious and cultural tradition; they used reason and evidence gained from their own experience to formulate new hypotheses. Although not all the Greek philosophers thought it possible to find the ultimate answers to their questions, they all believed that the very activity of seeking wisdom is highly worthwhile. The philosopher Socrates was so convinced of the importance of philosophizing that he declared: “The unexamined life is not worth living for a human being.”

The Greek conception of philosophy as the “love of wisdom” is still valid today. Philosophy now, as then, begins with the realization that we know very little about the most important things in life. Philosophers continue to ponder basic questions about the universe and human existence. They are aware of the answers provided by common sense and by authority (religious or secular), but know that such answers can be partially or entirely mistaken. Philosophers are “skeptical” in the root sense of “taking a close look” (*skepesthai* in Greek) at an idea before accepting it. They seek answers based on reason and experience, realizing that any proposed answer (including their own) is tentative and subject to debate. In fact, practically every major philosophical question is still energetically disputed, even after centuries of debate. The lack of definitive answers in

philosophy may seem frustrating until we come to see that the value of philosophizing lies not so much in the theories it produces as in the very activity of seeking wisdom. To engage in philosophy is to deepen our understanding of fundamental issues and thereby enrich our lives.

The readings in this book present the reflections of classical and contemporary philosophers on seven basic topics. The readings in Chapter 1 deal with the nature and value of philosophy. (Paradoxically, to ask what philosophy is, is itself a philosophical question, since to understand the nature and importance of the search for wisdom is itself a part of wisdom.) The balance of the book will present differing — and often opposing — views on six topics: the existence of God and the rationality of religious belief (Chapter 2), the nature and grounds of human knowledge (Chapter 3), the relation of the mind to the body and the existence of the “self” (Chapter 4), the existence of free will (Chapter 5), the nature and requirements of morality (Chapter 6), and the nature and origin of political authority and of social justice (Chapter 7).

Chapter 1, “What Is Philosophy?,” contains two readings, one from Plato and one from Bertrand Russell. In the *Euthyphro* Plato illustrates his and Socrates’ method of philosophical inquiry. The work depicts a conversation between Socrates and a priest named Euthyphro on the subject of piety (holiness)— something that Plato believes is an essential element in living rightly and therefore a fitting topic for a philosophical dialogue. In the conversation Socrates uses a question-and-answer method to elicit and clarify Euthyphro’s opinions about the nature of piety, to make Euthyphro aware of his implicit assumptions, to show him inconsistencies in his views, and to encourage him to think more deeply and coherently about piety. Socrates and Plato believe that this dialectical (“Socratic”) method exemplified in the *Euthyphro*— whether used in conversation with another person or in an interior dialogue with oneself — is the surest path to wisdom. In the second reading, Russell presents his views on the value of philosophy. He argues that philosophizing enriches our mental lives. This enrichment comes not from attaining definitive answers to questions (since practically all philosophical questions remain undecided) but from teaching us to question our own beliefs and to see that there are alternative ways of viewing reality. Russell holds that philosophy helps us see the world more objectively by liberating us from our tendency to interpret everything in terms of how it affects us personally.

Plato and Russell would agree that philosophy is the love of wisdom, but — not surprisingly, given the controversial nature of philosophical questions — not all philosophers would. And even those who do agree would almost certainly have different views about what “wisdom” is and what it means to “love” wisdom. To illustrate the diversity of opinion among philosophers about the nature of philosophy, this introduction concludes with a series of brief quotations from a variety of well-known thinkers from Plato to the present. (Whether one considers these thinkers *philosophers* depends, of course, on how one defines philosophy!)

The feeling of wonder is the mark of the philosopher; philosophy has no other beginning than this.

—Plato

Philosophy is the cultivation of mental faculties.

—Marcus Tullius Cicero

The beginning of philosophy is the recognition of the conflict between opinions.

—Epictetus

Philosophy is the unusually stubborn attempt to think clearly.

—William James

Philosophy . . . has its origin and value in an attempt to give a reasonable account of our own personal attitude toward the more serious business of life.

—Josiah Royce

The proper method of philosophy consists in clearly conceiving insoluble problems in all their insolubility and then in simply contemplating them.

—Simone Weil

Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.

—Ludwig Wittgenstein

Philosophy [is] the endeavor to discover by systematic reflection the ultimate nature of things.

—Brand Blanshard

To philosophize is to act in such a way that one steps out of the workaday world.

—Josef Pieper

The main concern of philosophy is to question and understand very common ideas that all of us use every day without thinking about them.

—Thomas Nagel



# Euthyphro

Plato

Plato was born in Athens in about 428 B.C.E. As a youth he associated with Socrates, a philosopher who constantly challenged fellow Athenians to think about virtue and to improve their souls. Plato's initial interest was in politics, but he soon became disillusioned, especially when, under the democracy that was restored after the rule of the "Thirty Tyrants," Socrates was arrested on false charges of impiety and the corruption of youth, convicted, and condemned to die. After the execution of Socrates, Plato moved to nearby Megara for a time and may have traveled to Egypt. In 388 he visited Italy and the city of Syracuse in Sicily. Returning to Athens, he founded the Academy, a school devoted both to philosophical inquiry and to the philosophically based education of politicians. Plato spent most of his life teaching at the Academy (Aristotle was his most famous student) and writing philosophical works. He made two more trips to Syracuse, in 368 and 361, apparently with the intention of turning the city's ruler, Dionysius the Younger, into a "philosopher-king." (If this was indeed his purpose, he failed.) Plato died in Athens in 347 at the age of eighty-one.

Most of Plato's works are written as conversations between Socrates and one or more interlocutors on some topic concerning morality. His best-known "dialogues" (the name by which his surviving works are known) are the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*, *Meno*, *Symposium*, and *Republic*.

Our reading here is the *Euthyphro*, a work that illustrates how the historical Socrates used the method of question-and-answer to show people that they know less than they think they do about some moral topic and to encourage them to think more deeply and more consistently about it. In this dialogue Socrates meets a priest named Euthyphro at the court of the magistrate in charge of cases involving the state religion. Socrates has come there to deal with preliminary matters concerning the charges of impiety and corruption of youth that a man named Meletus has filed against him; Euthyphro is at the court to charge his father with murder. Since it was generally considered highly impious to bring legal action against one's father, Socrates tells Euthyphro that he must be very knowledgeable about piety, or else he would never have initiated such an action. Euthyphro quickly agrees that he is "far advanced in wisdom." At Socrates' request, he agrees to explain the nature of piety. Socrates expresses his gratitude, since a knowledge of piety will enable him to defend himself in court against the charge of impiety.

Euthyphro first says that piety (holiness, godliness) is doing what he is doing: prosecuting the wrongdoer. Socrates points out that while prosecuting wrongdoers may be an *example* of piety, it is not a *definition* because it does not specify the form (characteristic) of piety—the element that is common to all instances of piety and makes them be instances of piety. Euthyphro proceeds to define piety as "what is dear to the gods." Socrates' questioning shows Euthyphro the inadequacy of this definition. Euthyphro then proposes other definitions, but each time Socrates points out inconsistencies in Euthyphro's thought. The dialogue ends with Euthyphro telling Socrates that he is in a hurry and has to go.

EUTHYPHRO: What's new, Socrates, to make you leave your usual haunts in the Lyceum<sup>1</sup> and spend your time here by the king-archon's<sup>2</sup> court? Surely you are not prosecuting anyone before the king-archon as I am?