Fundamentals of

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Sixth Edition

David Stewart H. Gene Blocker

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Preface

From our years of experience in teaching the introductory philosophy course, we have concluded that such a course should do two things: (1) introduce students to the major themes and thinkers in the philosophic tradition and (2) show how the issues students encounter in the great thinkers sections apply to concerns they encounter in their life experiences. A beginning philosophy course can attempt to do too much and, as a consequence, accomplish too little. However, we think that an introductory philosophy course should contribute to students' general education by helping them develop a conceptual framework and vocabulary for discussing important intellectual and social issues.

Philosophy has something to say when people become upset over a controversial art exhibit or groups complain about art works that critics say degrade a religious or ethnic group. It also has something to say when people are misled by specious arguments and faulty reasoning. It can assist us in understanding that claims to absolute knowledge are not to be taken at face value, and it can guide us through the perplexing issues raised in public policy debates, such as the ongoing tugs of war about the protection of minority groups or life styles. Students probably first begin to think philosophically about matters of ethics and religion, though they may not be fully aware that they are doing philosophy when they encounter such problems in their own thinking. And with the increased awareness of other countries and cultures, students today need to have an understanding of non-Western thought systems.

At the same time, we do not intend this book to be just about philosophy, that is, a second-hand recounting of philosophical positions. We believe that students need to encounter the great thinkers directly. Therefore we offer here the best features of the reader and the expository text. The readings themselves have been selected to represent a wide range of philosophical styles and temperaments—from Kant, Berkeley, Hume, and Descartes to Tolstoy, Mencius, Wittgenstein, and Kenneth Clark. The readings are no mere snippets but are solid chunks of material from relatively self-contained units, ranging from five to ten pages in length.

The book is divided into forty chapters (arranged under nine topics), and within each part users may select some readings and omit others without loss of pedagogical effectiveness. Since the book contains more material than can be covered in a single academic term, instructors may pick and choose those chapters that best suit their own philosophical dispositions. The book offers a wide array of selections from classic as well as contemporary philosophers so that students can understand philosophy as a living discipline that draws from its past in order to deal with current issues. A sixth edition of this work has given us the opportunity to make several important changes. The first part dealing with the nature of philosophy now includes a selection showing how philosophical themes appear in popular culture, especially in television and motion pictures. In response to suggestions from several reviewers, a new chapter on philosophy of science appears in the section on logic. The section on social and political thought now includes an extended discussion of the philosophical foundations of the secular state, a topic now much in the news given the enthusiasm in many parts of the world for theocratic states of various types. Reviewers stressed the importance of the section on non-Western thought, so we have added discussion and readings from Indian thought.

A major addition to this edition is concluding every section with a discussion of recent developments in the particular area of philosophy treated in that part of the book. This feature is important in showing that philosophy is not just a re-examination of the work of thinkers from the previous generations but is a living and developing discipline. Each generation of philosophers raises its own questions and, where possible, provides its own answers.

We thank the following people, who reviewed the previous edition and whose comments greatly aided us in this revision and regret that not all of their excellent suggestions could be incorporated: Charles Cassini, Barry University; Barbara Solheim, William Rainey Harper College; Prakash R. Chenjeri, Southern Oregon University; and Mark L. Thomas, Blinn College. We also thank Ross Miller and Wendy Yurash for their help and support.

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Contents

Preface ix

Part 1 What is Philosophy? 1

Chapter 1	The Activity of Philosophy 3		
	Philosophy and Popular Culture	11	
Reading	David Stewart, Philosophical Themesin Popular Culture12		
Chapter 3	Philosophy's History 25		
Chapter 4	Philosophy and the Examined Life	33	
Reading	Socrates: In Defense of Philosophy	35	
Recent Developments in Philosophy 41			

Part 2 Thinking About Thinking (Logic) 45

Chapter 5	The Life of Reason 47	
Chapter 6	Argument Forms 54	
Chapter 7	Induction and the Philosophy of Science	68
Chapter 8	Strategies for Philosophical Arguments	80

Reading	Thomas A. Shipka: <i>Are You a Critical Thinker?</i> A Test 96
Recent Dev	elopments in Logic 98
Part 3 W	hat is Real? (Metaphysics) 101
Chapter 9	Introduction to Metaphysics 103
Chapter 10	Materialism 114
Reading	Epicurus: First Principle of Materialism 122
Chapter 11	Idealism 132
Reading	George Berkeley: Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous 135
Chapter 12	The Mind-Body Problem 145
Reading	Richard Taylor: Materialism and Personal Identity 149
Chapter 13	Metaphysics and Language 157
Reading	Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophical Investigations 161
Recent Deve	elopments in Metaphysics 163
	ow Do We Know? pistemology) 167
Chapter 14	Introduction to Epistemology 169
	Appearance and Reality 176
Reading	Plato: <i>The Visible and the Invisible</i> 181

Contents v

Chapter 16 Reading	The Quest for Certainty190René Descartes: Meditations193
Chapter 17 Reading	Trust Your Senses203David Hume: Skeptical Doubts Concerning the Operations of the Understanding206
Chapter 18 Reading	A Compromise211Immanuel Kant:Two Sourcesof Knowledge217

Recent Developments in Epistemology 221

Part 5 What Ought We to Do? (Ethics) 227

Chapter 19	Introduction to Ethical Reasoning 229
Chapter 20	The Need for Morality 236
Reading	Thomas Hobbes: Leviathan 242
Chapter 21 Reading	The Morality of Self-Realization252Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics258
Chapter 22	Morality Depends on the Consequences 265
Reading	John Stuart Mill: Utilitarianism 272
Chapter 23 Reading	Morality Depends on Motives277Immanuel Kant: Foundations of the
Decemt Deve	Metaphysics of Morals 280

Recent Developments in Ethics 285

VI Content	vì	Content
------------	----	---------

Part 6 Philosophy of Religion 291

Chapter 24	Introduction to Philosophy of Religion 293
Chapter 25	Religion and Life's Meaning 299
Reading	Leo Tolstoy: A Confession 302
Chapter 26	Arguments for God's Existence: The OntologicalArgument308
Reading	St. Anselm: Proslogion 311
Chapter 27	Arguments for God's Existence: The Cosmological Arguments 319
Reading	St. Thomas Aquinas: The Five Ways 322
Reading	William Paley: Natural Theology330
Chapter 28	The Problem of Evil 340
Reading	John Hick: <i>The Vale of Soul-Making Theodicy</i> 342
Recent Deve	lopments in Philosophy of Religion 347

Part 7 Philosophy of Art (Esthetics) 353

Chapter 29	Introduction to the Philosophy of Art	355
Chapter 30	The Value of Art 364	
Reading	H. Gene Blocker: The Esthetic Attitude	365
Chapter 31	Art as Ideal 373	
Reading	Kenneth Clark: The Naked and the Nude	374
Chapter 32	Esthetics and Ideology 384	
Reading	Jennifer Jeffers: The Politics of Represented	ation:
	The Role of the Gaze in Pornography	385
	_	

Recent Developments in Esthetics 395

Introduction to Social and PoliticalPhilosophy401
The Liberal, Secular State 409
John Locke: <i>A Letter Concerning Toleration</i> 415
The Individual and the State 421
John Stuart Mill: On Liberty 423
Individual Happiness and Social Responsibility 430
M. Andrew Holowchak: Happiness and Justice in "Liberal" Society: Autonomy as Political Integration 431
Minority Group Rights 440
Elizabeth Smith and H. Gene Blocker:
Minority Groups and the State 441

Chapter 38	Philosophy East and West 455
Chapter 39	Chinese Theories of Human Nature 459
Reading	Mencius: The Book of Mencius 466
Reading	Xun Zi: The Nature of Man is Evil469
Reading	Dong Zhongshu: Man's Nature is Neither Good Nor Evil 473
Reading	Lao Tzu, <i>The Tao Te Ching</i> 475

viii Contents

Chapter 40	Indian Theories of Human Natu	ire	477
Reading	The Bhagavad Gita 479		
Reading	The Upanishads 480		
Reading	Shankara, The Vedanta Sutras	484	
Reading	Ramanuja, The Vedanta Sutras	485	
Recent Developments in Eastern Philosophy		48	8

Glossary of Terms 495

Jndex 505





Chapter 1

The Activity of Philosophy

It is difficult to define philosophy with precision, and the attempt to do so forms an interesting and important part of philosophy itself. Even though we should not expect a pat definition, one way to define philosophy is to see what it is that philosophers do.

Sometimes people use the word philosophy to refer in a very general way to a person's overall theory or outlook. For example, you might refer to someone's attitude toward doing business as a "business philosophy" or an individual's general outlook as that person's "philosophy of life." "My philosophy is: honesty is the best policy," a recent advertisement said. Used in this way, the term philosophy is a kind of synonym for outlook or general viewpoint. You will sometimes find philosophers using the term in this general sense, but more is implied by the word than that.

In the minds of others, being philosophical means having a passive attitude, taking life as it comes. For these people, to be philosophical would be to accept things without worrying about them. The ancient Stoics, believing that all things are ultimately rational and orderly, argued for a somewhat similar view, but not all philosophers have adopted a passive attitude that calls for a calm acceptance of the troubles of life.

If you look in the dictionary you will discover that the term philosophy is derived from two Greek words that mean "the love of wisdom." Philosophy, then, has something to do with wisdom, but wisdom is also a term that a lot of people use without knowing exactly what they mean by it. When the ancient Greek thinkers referred to wisdom, they usually meant the knowledge of fundamental principles and laws, an awareness of that which was basic and unchanging, as opposed to those things that are transitory and changing. Ever since then, the term philosophy has taken on something of this meaning and refers to attempts on the part of serious thinkers to get at the basis of things. Not the superficial, trivial details, but the underlying fundamentals. Not how many chemical elements there are, but what matter is in general; not what differentiates Baroque from Romantic music, but what art is in general. Unlike the social scientist who specializes in one small area, such as the initiation rites of a South American tribe, philosophy traditionally locks for principles underlying the whole of art, morality, religion, or the physical universe. Putting these meanings together results in a more satisfactory definition of philosophy—the attempt to provide for oneself an outlook on life based on the discovery of broad, fundamental principles.

Rational Reflection: Thinking Hard

First of all, then, philosophy is different from other subjects in its attempt to discover the most general and fundamental underlying principles. But philosophy is also different in its method, a method that can be described as rational reflection. As one contemporary philosopher put it, philosophy is not much different from simply the act of thinking hard about something. Unlike the sciences, philosophy does not discover new empirical facts, but instead reflects on the facts we are already familiar with, or those given to us by the empirical sciences, to see what they lead to and how they all hang together. You can see the connection with the first point about philosophy—that philosophy tries to discover the most fundamental, underlying principles.

From our knowledge of science and our everyday experience, all of us have a great many ideas and opinions before we begin the study of philosophy, for example, about what the world is like and how we come to know it. We also have some opinions, before our first college course in philosophy, about how we ought to live. But by rationally reflecting on this prereflective understanding of things, in philosophy we try to deepen that understanding to see what it implies, what it all adds up to, in short, to see it all in a larger perspective.

Through rational reflection, philosophy offers a means of coming to an understanding of humankind, the world, and our responsibilities in the world. Some of the earliest philosophers inquired into the nature of reality, or the philosophy of nature. Many of their investigations formed the basis of the natural sciences, but there was always a residue of concern that could not be delved into by the natural sciences. For example, what is reality, ultimately? Is it merely matter in continuous motion? Or is reality ultimately more akin to mind and mental processes? Is nature merely a blind and purposeless scheme, or does it exhibit purpose? These and similar questions form the basis of an inquiry known as *metaphysics*.

Metaphysical questions directly lead into questions concerning knowledge. How do we have knowledge? Is it through the five senses alone? Or must the senses be corrected by reasoning and judgment? Which is more reliable, the senses or reason? These concerns are among those of the *theory of knowledge*. Closely allied with the theory of knowledge is the study of correct thinking, known as *logic*. Logic deals with the difference between a valid and an invalid argument, how to spot fallacious reasoning, and how to proceed in reasoning so that the conclusion of an argument is justified by the premises.

Another ongoing concern of philosophy is *ethics*, or the analysis of principles of conduct. What makes an action right or wrong? What is my duty to myself and others?