

FOURTH EDITION

PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS

SELECTED READINGS



SAMUEL ENOCH STUMPF

PHILOSOPHICAL

SELECTED READINGS
IN SOCRATIC DIALOGUES, ETHICS,
RELIGION, POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY,
EPISTEMOLOGY, AND METAPHYSICS

PROBLEMS



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Samuel Enoch Stumpf

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Selected Readings in Socratic Dialogues, Ethics, Religion,
Political Philosophy, Epistemology, and Metaphysics

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TO
KATY AND JENNIE
who love to learn

PREFACE



This fourth edition of *Philosophical Problems* contains, as have previous editions, readings selected for students beginning their study of philosophy.

In selecting the readings for inclusion, I have aimed for a balanced representation from each major historical period from classical to contemporary and have also sought to achieve a balanced representation of those that present opposing approaches.

The readings are illuminations on some traditional problems of philosophy: the nature of knowledge, matteralism and idealism, the question of God, theories of ethics, freedom of the will, political philosophy, human nature, and human destiny. The introduction to the book contains Plato's three dialogues, the *Euthyphro*, the *Apology*, and *Crito*, to demonstrate for beginning students how a philosopher thinks about philosophical problems. I believe these examples of the Socratic method will be more helpful to students than a simple definition of philosophy.

While brief preludes to each philosophical area touch on the nature of the problem to be explored, and also contain introductions to the readings, the

book's emphasis is on the original writings of those leading thinkers who have offered solutions to these philosophical problems.

Users of previous editions of *Philosophical Problems* have suggested replacing some earlier readings with alternative selections from twentieth-century writers. This fourth edition contains Bertrand Russell on *Appearance and Reality*, John Hick on the problem of evil, Carol Gilligan on a feminine voice in ethics, W. T. Stace on ethical relativism, Simone de Beauvoir and Joyce Trebilcot on the relevance of gender in the assignment of roles in society, and David Swenson and A. J. Ayer on the question of human destiny.

While my arrangement of readings represents a workable order, it is not necessary to follow this plan: The reader or instructor may choose any more desirable sequence.

Samuel Enoch Stumpf

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INTRODUCING PHILOSOPHY: THE SOCRATIC METHOD

There are various reasons for beginning a book designed as an introduction to philosophy with these dialogues of Plato, whose chief character is Socrates. First of all, it is fair to say that it was Plato who in his writings set the basic themes of Western philosophy. Indeed, it has been said that the history of Western philosophy is simply a series of footnotes to Plato (and someone else has added that most of those footnotes were written by Aristotle). If the thought of Socrates and Plato is of such importance in the development of philosophy, then becoming acquainted with these master thinkers is a desirable way to undertake the study of philosophy.

The *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo* are notable not merely because they are among the earliest of Plato's dialogues. They have the additional merit of revealing accurately some of the historical facts about the life, thought, and death of Socrates. Although some of the characters in the dialogues may have been invented, there is apparently no doubt that the events, especially Socrates' famous defense, are accurately portrayed. Plato appears to



have been present when Socrates delivered his speech before the court or jury of five hundred. Moreover, since his dialogue the *Apology* was later circulated when others who were present at the trial were still alive, he could hardly have altered the argument Socrates made in his defense without running the risk of losing credibility.

These short dialogues are particularly important here because they serve as an introduction to philosophy, even as they did in their own time. They do not contain a well-organized system of thought because Plato, even in his later and mature years as a philosopher, did not attempt to create a “system” of philosophy. If his writings can be said to contain a system of Platonic thought, he disavowed such an intention. In one of his letters, Plato wrote that “there does not exist, and there never shall, any treatise by myself on these matters. . . . What now bears the name belongs to Socrates beautiful and rejuvenated.” Plato states that he did not write a treatise on what philosophy is because “the subject does not admit, as the sciences in general do, of exposition. It is only after long association in the great business itself and a shared life that a light breaks out in the soul.”

The *Euthyphro* is a classic example of the method used by Socrates to pursue clarity of thought. For both Socrates and Plato, philosophy meant a personal pursuit of truth and goodness. The *Euthyphro* exemplifies this relentless analysis of ideas not only for the purpose of logical consistency but also to urge that the way one thinks can affect the quality of one’s life. Intellectual and moral integrity, he held, go together. That is why Socrates makes the point (in the *Apology*) not only that the unexamined idea is not worth having but also that “the unexamined life is not worth living.”

Euthyphro is a confident young man whom Socrates encounters on the steps of the courthouse. Euthyphro asks why Socrates is there and learns that Socrates has been charged with the offense of “impiety.” When Socrates discovers that Euthyphro is there because he is suing someone for the same offense, Socrates starts the dialogue with powerful irony. To paraphrase, Socrates asks: How can I be so lucky as to find someone who is bringing such a lawsuit since you, Euthyphro, can be of considerable help to me, because I do not think I know what impiety is. And, by the way, whom are you suing? When Euthyphro says “my father,” Socrates replies: Then you must really know what impiety is. Tell me, what is impiety?

The rest of the dialogue is a perfect example of the “Socratic method.” It is a form of cross-examination, a *dialogue*, a series of searching questions and answers, an intellectual process whose aim is to arrive at clear definitions. In this process, ideas must pass through various people’s minds reflecting different perspectives before an idea becomes clear. But since Euthyphro never had a clear idea of what impiety is in the first place, the cross-examination by Socrates is quite unsettling for Euthyphro, who says, “But Socrates, I really don’t know how to explain to you what is in my mind. Whatever statement we put forward always somehow moves around in a circle, and will not stay where we put it.”

It could be that Socrates was brought to trial as a result of his constant use of his Socratic method. Although the charge against him was “corrupting the youth,” what he really did was to show through his relentless challenge of traditional ideas that most people did not know what they pretended to know. To cast doubt on traditional ideas was interpreted by some as undermining the foundations of society. The heart of Socrates’ defense was that his method of philosophy, that is, his constant personal and fearless pursuit of truth, in short, his behavior as a gadfly on the body politic, was not a threat but was of the greatest value to Athens. That is why, in accordance with the tradition in Athens that permitted a defendant to speak at the end of a trial and suggest his own sentence, Socrates claimed that as an alternative to the death sentence rendered by the court, he should instead be given lifelong privileges in the “prytaneum.” The prytaneum was an institution set up in Athens to honor famous people, athletes, generals, and public benefactors. Socrates asserted, “there is no reward, Athenians, so suitable for me as receiving meals in the prytaneum. It is a much more suitable reward for [me] than for any of you who has won a victory at the Olympic games with his horse or his chariots. Such a man only makes you seem happy, but I make you really happy.”

To some, including Socrates’ friends (especially Crito), Socrates’ death sentence appeared to be a great calamity. However, Socrates did not view his impending death as a martyrdom. For him it was something of a triumph inasmuch as it was the end result of a perfectly consistent life in which basic principles were not compromised. That is why he could not accept Crito’s offer of help to effect an escape. “There are,” says Crito, “men who for no very large sum are ready to bring you out of prison to safety.” Also, admonishes Crito, think of your children. To all these remarks Socrates says, “I cannot cast aside my former arguments because this misfortune has come to me.” After all, Socrates had arrived at his arguments through a rigorous intellectual process and believed that his arguments were sound and true. Here again we see that for Socrates, philosophy was a lifelong pursuit of truth. He believed that the true philosopher not only seeks consistency between various ideas but believes that there should be some consistency between ideas that are found to be true and the way we behave in daily life.

