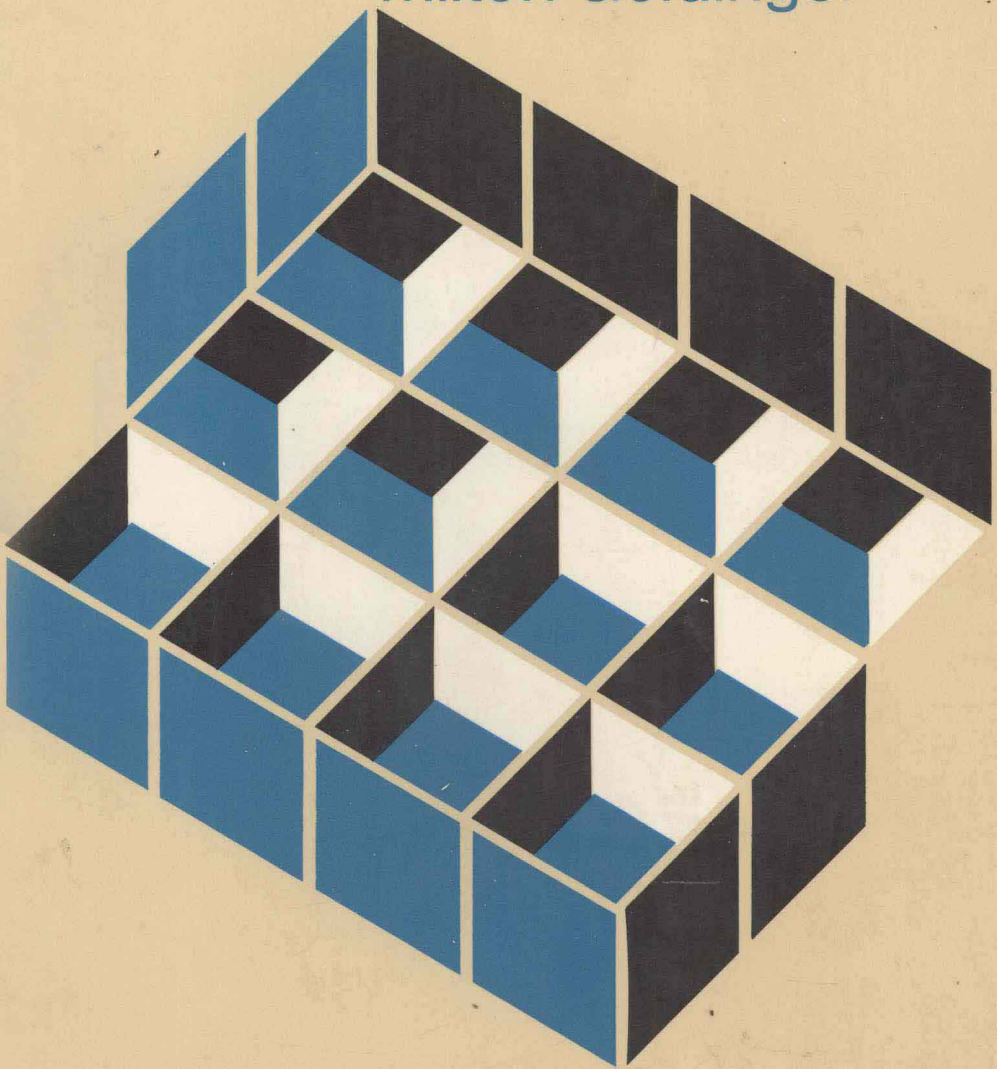
Philosophy and Contemporary Issues

Fourth Edition

John R. Burr
Milton Goldinger



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Preface to the Fourth Edition

The purpose of this anthology is to show how philosophy illuminates and in some measure helps solve some of the important problems troubling contemporary man. The editors intend it to be an introductory text. Unfortunately, many introductory texts in philosophy are flawed by one of two major defects: (1) they are too difficult for the beginning student or (2) they are too simple for the beginning student. Some introductory philosophy texts are introductory in name only because they demand of the philosophically innocent student a mastery of technical philosophical language and a knowledge of the history of philosophy one could reasonably expect only from a professional philosopher. No wonder students struggling to understand such books become convinced of the truth of the popular view that philosophy is a subject wholly unintelligible to all except a few compulsive adepts and completely irrelevant to life outside of the classroom. On the other hand, in an attempt to eliminate excessive philosophical sophistication, other introductory philosophy texts are philosophical in name only because they contain no technical philosophy. Not surprisingly, students reading such books in order to learn about philosophy as a distinct discipline find them hollow and conclude philosophy is not worth serious study.

In designing the structure of this book, in selecting the readings, in writing the introductions to the various parts, and in choosing the books to be listed in the bibliographies, the editors have striven to produce a work avoiding both defective extremes. Throughout, the guiding aim has been to make philosophy interesting and intelligible to students undertaking their first sustained study of the subject and, above all, to encourage them to engage in philosophizing themselves. To achieve this end, each part of this volume contains pro and con articles on provocative contemporary issues, which in turn raise fundamental philosophical issues. In addition to the material dealing directly with contemporary issues, each part includes other selections discussing at length and in depth some of the philosophical problems raised by the contemporary controversies. Therefore, each part forms a coherent unit of mutually relevant sections rather than a miscellaneous grouping. Every effort has been made to pick readings for their substance, their intelligibility, and their freshness for the beginning student of philosophy. Since the editors planned a single volume and not a library, not all philosophical issues, positions, movements, and methods could be included. It should also be pointed out that the readings in one part

often will throw light on the material dealt with in other parts. Of course, the decisions as to what material is covered in this course and in what order it is taken up are those of the individual instructor. Nothing is implied by the order in which the parts of this book are arranged.

This introductory text in philosophy is a mutual enterprise, each editor sharing equally in the work of its production and benefiting from the comments and suggestions of his colleagues.

About a third of the content of this fourth edition is fresh and, we believe, an improvement over that of the last edition. The editors have made every effort to choose philosophically significant selections that beginning students of philosophy will find interesting and understandable. Unfortunately, limitations of length have forced the elimination from this edition of the section on art and society included in the previous editions.

We wish to thank Gene Panhorst, who became philosophy editor of Macmillan while this fourth edition was in preparation, and his immediate predecessor, Kenneth J. Scott, as well as our colleague Marshall Missner; the Oshkosh Public Library, the Library of the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, and Mrs. Nathalie Moore. Finally, we have benefited from the thoughtful comments and criticisms of the many users of the previous three editions of *Philosophy and Contemporary Issues.*

J.R.B.
M.G.

Contents

General Introduction

Many university and college students take their academic courses in the same way that travelers visit Eufaula, Alabama; Sweetgrass, Montana; or Passadumkeag, Maine. They simply pass through and go on their way. After a short passage of time, memory fades out and the experience leaves no detectable trace. Obviously, in such cases the students have wasted their time in class and the professor has squandered his. On the contrary, if a course of study is to be worthwhile, the subject matter must be assimilated by the student. Worthwhile philosophy courses provide no counterinstances to this generalization.

This process of assimilating a subject means more than diligently and doggedly memorizing names, dates, and definitions—more than the accumulating of inert information long enough to pass examinations and then allowing it to scatter, soon to be lost. A student who truly assimilates a subject finds himself changed in significant ways at the conclusion of his course. In this respect, taking a philosophy course should be analogous to undergoing battle in war, getting married, or giving birth to a child. At least some of the beliefs, values, methods of thinking, and general attitudes of the students should be altered.

But altered in what way? The editors of this volume think the change should be from less to more intellectual independence on the part of the student. An introductory philosophy course cannot transform a neophyte into a professional philosopher, a sophomore into a profound thinker. Still, it can strengthen students' courage and skill in thinking for themselves. An introductory philosophy course can advance the enlightenment of students. Immanuel Kant, one of the great philosophers, wrote an essay entitled "What is Enlightenment," in which he defined *enlightenment* in the following words:

> Enlightenment is the emergence of man from the immaturity for which he is himself responsible. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without the guidance of another. Man is responsible for his own immaturity, when it is caused, by lack not of understanding, but of the resolution and the courage to use it without the guidance of another. *Sapere aude!* Have the courage to use your own reason! is the slogan of the Enlightenment.

Of course, Kant was trying to articulate the spirit of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Nevertheless, such "enlightenment" is not something appropriate only to a past historical period. It must be renewed in every age, particularly in our own, which the classical scholar Gilbert Murray has dubbed an "age of lying." And we must remember that in the story it was a youngster who dared to

say out loud that the Emperor was wearing no clothes. Often young people have not become as hopelessly habituated to hypocrisy and intellectual conformity as have their elders. Many university or college students have not degenerated as yet to the state of the average American who reacts to new ideas much like he reacts to the onset of Asian flu and who denounces all critical thinking concerning fundamental assumptions as sheer cynicism. The youthfulness of students, in short, argues a certain plasticity, a willingness to change. At least occasionally many students, however vaguely, recognize their immaturity in Kant's sense of the term. They know they possess the understanding but need the courage and resolution to use their reason "without the guidance of another."

Students tend to distrust authority, be it political, moral, aesthetic, scientific, religious, parental, academic, or that of the adolescent herd. Chaotic visions and confused indignations afflict them. However dimly and erratically, students want "enlightenment," intellectual independence; at least the best among them in their best moments desire to be bold and skeptical, not timid and believing. Therefore, however unconsciously, they desire to philosophize, to clarify and criticize basic assumptions in all fields, to free themselves from conventional pictures of reality by constructing new ones and defending them by argument.

Philosophy has performed many different functions in the course of its long history. Certainly not the least of these in importance has been the encouragement of intellectual independence. Because of their advocacy and practice of intellectual independence, philosophers again and again have appeared dangerous to their fellows and as a consequence have been persecuted by them. The ancient Greeks invented philosophy as they did so many other cultural disciplines. The ancient Greeks also were typical of "good" citizens in all times and places for they distrusted many of their best men, considered them subversive, persecuted them, exiled them, and even executed some of them. All educated people know the fate of Socrates, who questioned the soundness of conventional morality, ironically exposing the bogus "wisdom" of politicians, priests, and prominent citizens, and casting doubt on the superior virtue of democracy. Socrates attempted to substitute the authority of reason in place of the authority of tradition, myth, and majority opinion and to quicken the torpid intellectual life of the community by his probing questions.

However, the task of intellectual vivification to which Socrates devoted himself must be undertaken anew by every generation. Contemporary "good" citizens closely resemble those of ancient Athens in their distrust of unconventional ideas and their opposition to the assertion of intellectual independence. A prominent American educator recently declared:

> There seems to be nothing in the study of chemistry that makes you feel like a superior order of being, but you study Plato and you begin to believe

> you're a philosopher—and a philosopher should be king. This is a dangerous trend, and it jeopardizes the democratic principles on which this country was founded.[1]

In the *Apology,* Plato represents his teacher, Socrates, defending himself against the charges of corrupting the youth and introducing strange gods by saying:

> Men of Athens, I honor and love you; but I shall obey God rather than you, and while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy, exhorting anyone whom I meet and saying to him after my manner: You, my friend,—a citizen of the great and mighty and wise city of Athens,—are you not ashamed of heaping up the greatest amount of money and honor and reputation, and caring so little about wisdom and truth and the greatest improvement of the soul, which you never regard or heed at all?

This is the most fundamental contemporary issue confronting every thinking individual personally: Are you on the side of Socrates or on that of his accusers?

The argument against the development of intellectual independence claims that it will result in anarchy, destroying law and order. Socrates, on the contrary, contended that a society where reason is sovereign will be more stable and just than any other because such a rational collective life will rest on knowledge, not on ignorance, fear, fraud, and force. Socrates further seemed to hold that truth is consistent and unchanging. Therefore, to the extent that men know the truth, they will agree. Men disagree through ignorance. Hence, the ideal or "real" community, being based on full knowledge of all the truth, would be free of internal dissension and perfectly stable, having taken on the characteristics of truth. The hegemony of reason will produce the only enduring social unity and harmony, the only "real" law and order. Appeal to authorities other than reason produces only a temporary and therefore illusory simulacrum of social order and harmony. Socrates was tried and condemned to death for introducing strange gods and corrupting the youth. He was found guilty by a jury of his peers and probably rightly so. Reason is a strange god and corrupts provincial ignorance and complacency.

This book of introductory readings in philosophy now in your hands has been designed in the spirit of Socrates. The readings have been selected and arranged in order to encourage the student to use his own reason. Socrates counted men and women truly his followers, not because they agreed with his conclusions but because they dared to "follow the argument wherever it may lead." The son of a father who was a stonecutter and of a mother who practiced the trade of midwife, Socrates neglected stonecutting, in which he had

[1] Dr. Samuel I. Hayakawa, "The Playboy Panel: Student Revolt," *Playboy,* September 1969, p. 98. Reprinted by permission of *Playboy.*

been trained, and in a sense adopted the vocation of his mother. Socrates called himself an intellectual midwife, helping others to give birth to the new ideas with which their minds already were pregnant. Nearly every day Socrates could be found in the busy public square of ancient Athens, where all day long he buttonholed the rich politicians, poets, generals, businessmen, actors, philosophers, and all the Rotarians and intellectuals and "beautiful people," all the shrewd old men of power and the clever young men of ambition of his time, and asked them searching questions about what they were doing; what they wanted; what they believed; and why they were doing, wanting, believing it. As the great and powerful, the talented, the learned, the old, and the young passed by, Socrates asked them: What do you really want? Riches, power, happiness, knowledge? Is the Good pleasure and Evil pain? Does might really make right? What is love and what is worthy of love? Should children always obey their parents? How do you know your teacher really is wise? What can be taught and learned and what not? Can anything be taught? Who should rule the city: politicians, wealthy families, soldiers, intellectuals, artists? Do the gods really exist? Is there a life after death? Or is religion a confidence game perpetrated by clever priests? Who knows the truth: philosophers, inspired artists, men of practical experience, or drug-crazed oracles? And what is "truth"? In short, Socrates put the questions asked by intelligent, sensitive, civilized people—the questions that always occur to young people—indeed, many of the questions no doubt formulated at one time or another by you, the reader.

It has been well said that philosophy begins in the conflict of opinions. Each part of this book contains a section of readings dealing with certain contemporary issues, with some of the questions asked and discussed in the public life of America today: Can men be made happy by science? Is anyone ever responsible for his acts and deserving of punishment? How do we distinguish science from pseudoscience? Do we live forever or rot when we are dead? Do we need religion to lead a meaningful life? Should we give creationism equal time with evolution in American school curricula? Are men merely complex machines? Can we have a sound sexual morality? Should society promote greater equality, or should it encourage excellence?

The selections chosen for each contemporary issue clearly conflict with one another. Both affirmative and negative sides of the debate are presented on each issue, and every effort has been made by the editors to find equally powerful and persuasive statements both pro and con.

Yet whatever the issue, as men reflect and by argument are driven back to question their fundamental assumptions, as the protagonists discover they were ignorant of their own ignorance, as they realize they know least about that of which they talk most, then debate and discussion mature into philosophical inquiry. Etymologically, *philosophy* means "love of wisdom." This definition may

satisfy the beginning student temporarily. However, more probing queries soon come to mind. What is love? What is wisdom? Does Jean-Paul Sartre really love wisdom? Was William James really wise? Traditionally, philosophy has been surveyed into such general fields as ethics; metaphysics; logic; epistemology; and, more recently, aesthetics or philosophy of art. Library catalogues still divide philosophy in this manner. Yet this approach with its dry and abstract schematism sheds little illumination for the unskilled in philosophy. The editors judge that students will derive the most enlightenment from first encountering philosophy as a congeries of problems or issues invariably met by men when they no longer are content to reflect superficially on human life. As long as men are certain that their fundamental assumptions in morality, politics, religion, art, science, and other cultural enterprises are true and complete, they do not philosophize. If they argue, it is only over matters of detail, over the application to particular cases of commonly accepted principles. In our revolutionary era, no such complacency remains honorable for intelligent and informed people. The Contemporary Issues sections in each part of the book show men being led to question their fundamental assumptions. Grouped with the contemporary issues selections are readings scrutinizing some of the relevant philosophical issues all too often left implicit. One cannot sensibly discuss whether or not religion is necessary to a meaningful life until he has settled for himself the question of whether or not religion is an illusion. How can men be praised or blamed if they are not morally responsible but are complex machines? Is capitalism necessary to preserve our political freedom? Why should we elect car salesmen, country lawyers, chicken farmers, real estate agents, and other such people ignorant of science to the United States Congress if all genuine knowledge comes from science? Faced with questions such as these, one may ignore them and play golf, make money, watch television—in short, act the typical middle-class citizen of the world and be content to be a fatuous, go-getting cipher. Or he may pluck up his courage and think for himself, follow his own reason, and philosophize.

Intellectual independence does not necessitate the repudiation of all tradition. Ample and venerable precedent exists for inaugurating a new enterprise with ten commandments. Here are ten commandments for beginning philosophizers written down by Bertrand Russell, one of the most intellectually independent persons of our day:

1 Do not feel certain of anything.

2 Do not think it worthwhile to produce belief by concealing evidence, for the evidence is sure to come to light.

3 Never try to discourage thinking, for you are sure to succeed.

4 When met with opposition, even if it should be from your husband or your children, endeavour to overcome it by argument and not by authority, for a victory dependent upon authority is unreal and illusory.

5 Have no respect for the authority of others, for there are always contrary authorities to be found.

6 Do not use power to suppress opinions you think pernicious, for if you do the opinions will suppress you.

7 Do not fear to be eccentric in opinion, for every opinion now accepted was once eccentric.

8 Find more pleasure in intelligent dissents than in passive agreement, for, if you value intelligence as you should, the former implies a deeper agreement than the latter.

9 Be scrupulously truthful, even when truth is inconvenient, for it is more inconvenient when you try to conceal it.

10 Do not feel envious of the happiness of those who live in a fool's paradise, for only a fool will think that it is happiness.[2]

[2] Bertrand Russel, *The Independent*, June 1965, p. 4. Reprinted by permission of *The Independent*.

What Philosophy Can Be

1. Philosophy: The Guide of Life C. J. Ducasse

Curt John Ducasse (1881–1969), born in France and educated in the United States, was a distinguished American philosopher and teacher of philosophy. His interests and writings ranged widely from philosophy of religion, metaphysics, and aesthetics to psychical research. He is the author of numerous books, including *Philosophy as a Science: Its Matter and Method; Nature, Mind, and Death;* and *A Critical Examination of the Belief in a Life After Death.*

In *The History of Phi Beta Kappa* by Oscar M. Voorhees we read that *Philosophia Biou Kubernetes,* the Greek phrase that gives the Society its name, was "formed and adopted" by John Heath, a student of Greek classics at the College of William and Mary, on whose initiative the Phi Beta Kappa Society was founded in 1776. This phrase—philosophy, or love of wisdom, the guide of life—and the Latin phrase *Societas Philosophiae,* the initials of which appear on the reverse of the Phi Beta Kappa key, express the five founders' conviction about the right role of philosophy in life.

But although taking philosophy as one's guide through life seemed to John Heath and his fellow students an eminently wise resolve, today the perspective in which educated people view human life is different from that of 1776; and members of Phi Beta Kappa may find themselves challenged to give reasons for adopting philosophy as the guide of life in preference to religion or to science, either of which today enjoys far more general prestige than does philosophy. I propose to consider those reasons here.

Why Not Science as Guide?

At the time of the founding of Phi Beta Kappa any suggestion that man should take science rather than philosophy as his guide in the conduct of his life would have been hardly intelligible. The investigation of puzzling natural phenomena was not commonly thought to be a potential source of counsels for living. The justification, if any, for studying the mysteries of nature was held to lie only in such gratification of idle curiosity as it might yield to the few impractical persons who engaged in that study. The attitude then prevalent towards their research is well exemplified by the reaction that greeted the first observations of electric

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