

THE PHILOSOPHER'S WAY

Thinking Critically About Profound Ideas

JOHN CHAFFEE

A TEXT WITH READINGS
FIFTH EDITION



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The Philosopher's Way

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Thinking Critically About Profound Ideas

FIFTH EDITION

John Chaffee
City University of New York

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Preface

I was midway into my freshman year of college—and my very first philosophy course—when I suddenly announced to everyone’s astonishment (including my own) that I was changing my major to philosophy. It didn’t concern me that I had never taken a philosophy course, nor even read a philosophy book: Somehow I knew that I was destined to study this extraordinary discipline. It is a decision I have never regretted. Philosophy has enriched my life in countless ways, both personally and professionally, and I have witnessed it change the lives of many of my own students. I am confident that its study will do the same for you.

We are all the artists of our lives, with our brushstrokes being the choices we make each day as we gradually create our life portraits. Philosophy encourages us to follow Socrates’ exhortation to examine our lives and to “know ourselves” so that we can make the most informed choices possible and create the most enlightened portraits. The study of philosophy provides the impetus and the thinking tools to confront the most fundamental questions in life: *Who am I? Who should I become? What is the meaning of my life?* More significantly, philosophy helps us craft an approach to living and develop a reflective attitude toward every aspect of our lives. These are invaluable, life-transforming gifts that only philosophy can provide. On a personal level, philosophy has served as a beacon in my life, helping to illuminate a path for me to follow while clarifying and informing my choices.

Professionally, philosophy has provided me with a framework for thinking critically and creatively. This has helped me perform my best in every job that I’ve held, ranging from cabinetmaking to teaching to writing. The study of philosophy trains our minds to think in powerful and analytical ways, enabling us to understand complex issues, reason cogently, and make intelligent decisions. These are foundational abilities that enhance our success in whatever career we choose.

My goal in writing *The Philosopher’s Way* is for you to capture the spirit of philosophy, to experience the passion and adventure of engaging in the philosophical exploration of the core dimensions of our lives. In Western culture, philosophy traces its roots to ancient Greece where philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle engaged in thoughtful reflection and energetic, rigorous discussions. Your “Introduction to Philosophy” course is your opportunity to become a part of this philosophical conversation that has spanned millenia, as you engage in philosophical discourse with your professor and your classmates.

Features

The Philosopher’s Way has been designed to help you become a more accomplished critical thinker and to develop the analytical tools needed to think philosophically about important issues. It engages you in the process of doing philosophy in multiple ways: through reading, writing, discussing, and looking.

The Philosopher’s Way Introduces You to the Big Questions of Philosophy

- Organized by the questions central to the main branches of philosophy, *The Philosopher’s Way* examines the profound ideas of philosophers both past and present. Each chapter offers a historically organized survey of perspectives on the chapter question, while encouraging you to use these perspectives to develop your own philosophical answers. The chapters have a modular organization so that your instructor can assign parts within a chapter or follow a different sequence than that of the text. Because the sections are self-contained, the instructor has greater flexibility in choosing readings for his or her syllabus.

The Philosopher’s Way Deepens Your Understanding of Primary Texts

- This book combines substantial readings from major philosophical texts with commentary that guides you through the readings. The commentary is designed to help you think your way through the philosophers’ texts; it doesn’t substitute for reading them. You will be able to come to class ready to understand your instructor’s discussion of the works and contribute your own ideas.
- **Reading Critically** boxes offer questions that challenge you to think deeply about the philosopher’s writing. Some questions ask you to critically evaluate a philosopher’s claim while others help you improve your comprehension of difficult passages. Some ask you to compare the ideas of philosophers or apply their ideas to different situations. Instructors may use these questions to generate class discussions or writing assignments.

The Philosopher’s Way Invites You to “Do Philosophy”

- **Thinking Philosophically** boxes challenge you to critically examine your own beliefs and assumptions while

applying the ideas of philosophers to your experiences. The study of philosophy takes on greater meaning when it changes the way you see the world. Some “Thinking Philosophically” questions ask you to consider a recent event or experience through a philosophical lens. Other questions ask you to articulate your ideas about a philosophical problem or think about the source for your assumptions. By working through the questions in the “Thinking Philosophically” boxes, you will clarify your ideas and learn how to think philosophically.

- **Making Connections** essays at the conclusion of each chapter suggest how the chapter themes can apply to your own life. From Viktor Frankl’s search for meaning in the midst of a Nazi concentration camp to Robert Coles’s story of a young woman’s frustration with the unethical behavior of her fellow students, these essays underscore the value of philosophy beyond the classroom.

The Philosopher’s Way Uses Images to Communicate Philosophical Ideas

- The images in *The Philosopher’s Way* are meant to add another layer of meaning to your study of philosophy. Selected from the world of art and journalism, the images go beyond mere illustration, offering instead a kind of “visual philosophy.” In addition, portraits put a face with the words of classic and contemporary philosophers.

The Philosopher’s Way Offers Resources to Help You Learn

- Each chapter opens with a **Concept Map**, which shows how the ideas and thinkers in each chapter relate to each other. In addition, interior concept maps illustrate relationships among ideas and provide a conceptual framework for visual learning.
- An annotated list of **Literature and Film** offers engaging ways to further explore chapter concepts. This feature, which is at the end of every chapter, suggests works of fiction that dramatize philosophical themes and questions.
- **Writing About Philosophy** sections challenge you to express your ideas about philosophy in writing. An assignment, suggestions for approaching the topic, and a sample student response offer support as you develop critical thinking skills through writing.

What’s New in This Edition?

- **Learning Objectives Added:** Each major section of every chapter correlates to a specific Learning Objective.

- New sections have been added to expand the scope of the text. For example, the new section “Philosophical Perspectives During the Middle Ages” in Chapter 3, “Who Are You?: Consciousness, Identity, and the Self,” includes expanded treatment of St. Augustine and a new section on St. Thomas Aquinas.
- An already deep and comprehensive exploration of freedom in Chapter 4, “Are You Free? Freedom and Determinism” has been further enhanced. There is an expanded treatment of Compatibilism adding the authors R E. Hobart and David Hume to W T. Stace. Contemporary work in philosophy continues to be highlighted with a new section on “A Feminist Analysis of Freedom” focusing on the work of Marilyn Frye and Sandra Lee Bartky; and a new section on “Neuroscience and Free Will” which examines the work of Alva Noe among others.
- A new section on “Plato’s Ladder of Love” has been included in Chapter 5, “How Do We Know the Nature of Reality” in which Plato uses an affective and aesthetic allegory to describe the learning journey depicted in his more visual and light oriented “Allegory of the Cave.”
- A new section on “A Feminist Perspective on Epistemology” is included in Chapter 6, “What is Real? What is True?” which includes a chapter from the book “Women’s Ways of Knowing.”
- The comprehensive coverage of Ethics in Chapters 8 and 9 has been further expanded. In Chapter 9, “What Are Right Actions?” a new section on “The Ethics of Care” has been added focusing on the work of Virginia Held and others. In addition, there is a new section on “Environmental Ethics” built around a number of thinkers, and a new section on “Narrative Ethics” has been added, focusing on Martha Nussbaum, Zachary Newton, and others.

Resources for the Instructor

Test Bank [www.pearsonhighered.com/irc] This resource includes hundreds of sample test questions.

My Test Test Generator [www.pearsonhighered.com/irc] This computerized software allows instructors to create their own personalized exams, to edit any or all of the existing test questions, and to add new questions. Other special features of this program include random generation of test questions, creation of alternate versions of the same test, scrambling question sequence, and test preview before printing.

PowerPoint™ Presentation Slides [www.pearsonhighered.com/irc] New to this edition, these slides contain chapter outlines, critical thinking and philosophical statements that

can be used for classroom discussion. Also included will be some selected images from the book and links to lively sketch art videos that serve as chapter overviews, integrating the most important concepts.

New Supplemental Chapter: What is the Nature of Art? Aesthetics. [www.pearsonhighered.com/irc] This chapter provides an in-depth overview of this fascinating field, and deals with the core questions of the nature of beauty and the philosophy of art.

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When students are engaged deeply, they learn more effectively and perform better in their courses. This simple fact inspired the creation of REVEL: an immersive learning experience designed for the way today's students read, think, and learn. Built in collaboration with educators and students nationwide, REVEL is the newest, fully digital way to deliver respected Pearson content.

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Acknowledgments

I have been privileged to work on this new edition with a stellar team of people at Pearson who are exemplary professionals and valued friends. Dickson Musslewhite infuses every edition with his creative vision and his patented inexhaustible energy, insistent that the book achieve excellence in every area. I would like to acknowledge the support of Craig Campanella of Product Operations who with the other executives at Pearson has made *The Philosopher's Way* one of Pearson's flagship texts. The Senior Acquisitions Editor, Debbie Coniglio, was in many ways the heart and soul of this edition, providing both passion and strategic guidance, especially necessary to meet the challenges of the new REVEL environment, and her assistant, Veronica Grupico, contributed invaluable support throughout the process as well. This edition's Development Editor, Maggie Barbieri, was once again a delight to work with: fully committed, deeply effective, and warmly professional. I wish to give special thanks to the Program Manager, Nicole Conforti, who brought wisdom and experience to every key decision in the production of the manuscript, and I am

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This 5th edition includes a number of new sections that add to the scope and depth of the text in powerful, enriching ways. These new sections were contributed by colleagues of mine whose philosophical expertise is rivaled only by their generosity of spirit. Listed below, the contributed sections reflect areas of special interest and professional expertise, and I am deeply grateful for their involvement in this book.

Richard Brown contributed the essay, *Contemporary Issues in Philosophy of Mind* in Chapter 3.

Emmanuel Nartey contributed the section, *Philosophical Perspectives During the Middle Ages* in Chapter 3.

Shannon Proctor contributed the section, *A Feminist Analysis of Freedom* in Chapter 4.

Dana Trusso contributed the section, *Plato's Ladder of Love* in Chapter 5.

Cheri Lynne Carr contributed the section, *The Ethics of Care* in Chapter 9.

Leslie A. Aarons contributed the section, *Environmental Ethics* in Chapter 9.

Minerva Ahumada contributed the section, *Narrative Ethics* in Chapter 9.

Vera Albrecht contributed the entire chapter on *Aesthetics* in the online Appendix.

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Although this is a published book, it continues to be a work in progress. In this spirit, I invite you to share your experiences with the text by sending me your comments. I hope that this book serves as an effective support for your own philosophical explorations in living an examined life. You can contact me online at JCthink@aol.com.

John Chaffee

About the Author



John Chaffee, Ph.D., is Professor of Philosophy at The City University of New York, where he has developed and directs a Philosophy and Critical Thinking program that annually involves 30 faculty and 4,500 students. He is a nationally recognized figure in the area of Critical Thinking,

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Chapter 1

what is philosophy?

Thinking Philosophically About Life



WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO LEARN? These monolithic figures from Easter Island suggest the contemplative nature of philosophy, which can help you grapple with the big questions of life. This chapter introduces the scope and methods of the discipline.



✓ Learning Objectives

At the completion of this chapter you will be able to:

- 1.1** Explain why philosophy should be studied.
- 1.2** Define philosophy and discuss its ultimate aim.
- 1.3** Describe how a person can become a critical thinker.
- 1.4** Understand and explain the nature and structure of arguments.
- 1.5** Explain the goals of the various branches of philosophy.
- 1.6** Understand how to read critically and work with primary sources.

1.1 Why Study Philosophy?

You are about to embark on a thrilling journey: the study of philosophy. Reading this book and taking a philosophy course is likely to be a memorable, life-altering experience for you. Why? One student explains:

In general, we as people don't usually think critically about the important areas of life, but it's these areas that help us to create a meaningful life. As an individual I was also one of those who didn't take the time to examine, ask questions, and think deeply about different perspectives on serious issues. As a result, studying Philosophy has helped me to become more open-minded and reflective about everything in my life.

Tanya Louis

As Tanya notes, many of us get so caught up in the details and demands of life—deadlines, responsibilities, all the little tasks of living—that we don't make the time

to step back and look at the whole picture. Why am I doing the things that I'm doing? In what direction am I headed? What does it all mean? Who am I? Who do I want to become? These questions penetrate the surface of life to confront the deeper currents lying beneath. But to achieve this more profound level of understanding, we need to recognize the need to go beyond the obvious. And we also need to be willing and open-minded enough to do this.

That's the unique mission of philosophy. Philosophy provides us with the motivation and the intellectual abilities required to explore life's most challenging issues. What *is* the meaning of my life? To what extent am I free and responsible for my choices? Facing moral dilemmas, what is the "right" thing to do? What is the relationship between my religious beliefs and other areas of my life? How do I gain genuine knowledge and ascertain truth? These questions, and others like them, are the core questions of life, and philosophy provides the map, compass, and tools needed to explore them.

In what ways will taking this philosophical journey affect your life? Here's one student's analysis:

Before taking this course I really never explored my thinking abilities: I only explored the obvious. Now that I've almost completed this introductory course in Philosophy, I feel I am more sophisticated in both thought and action. I realize that I react differently to situations; I think twice and evaluate circumstances more closely before I make decisions. Philosophy has helped me in my other courses, as it helped me to express myself more clearly in essays and speeches. From taking this course, I have grown as a person, and my mind is definitely not what it used to be.

Ryan Malley

Studying philosophy in a serious and reflective way will *change you as a person*. Learning to think philosophically will inspire you to be more thoughtful, more open-minded, more attuned to the complexities and subtleties of life, more willing to think critically about yourself and all of life's important issues, and less willing to accept superficial interpretations and simplistic answers. It is very tempting for people *not* to think, to remain submerged in reality rather than aware of it, to be carried along by the current of events rather than creating their destiny through thoughtful, independent choices. Philosophy is a training guide for your mind, showing you how to think in clear, analytic, and powerful ways. And, as Ryan notes, this high-level, sophisticated thinking will enable you to make thoughtful decisions, communicate more effectively, and grow as a person.

Studying philosophy will help you develop the understanding and insight you will need to make intelligent choices and fulfill your potential as an individual. To use a metaphor, you are an artist, creating your life portrait, and your paints and brushstrokes are the choices you make each day. How do you feel about the portrait you have created so far? Have you defined yourself as the person you always wanted to be, or are you a "work in progress"? Are you achieving your full potential as a human being, "actively exercising your soul's powers"—the ancient Greek definition of happiness (*eudaemonia*)? Do you possess a clear philosophy of life that acts as a guiding beacon, illuminating the whole of your life and showing you the path to wisdom and personal fulfillment? Creating an enlightened self-portrait is your preeminent responsibility in life, and though it is challenging work, it is well worth the effort. Your portrait is your contribution to the world, your legacy to present and future generations.

This is the special power of philosophy: to provide the conceptual tools required to craft a life inspiring in its challenges and rich in its fulfillment. Philosophy is *not* intended to limit your options or dictate your choices. Your responsibility as a student

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?

Hamlet, one of William Shakespeare’s most famous characters, illustrates the philosophical mind at work. The character poses questions and searches for answers throughout the play. In this scene, he reflects upon the meaning of life and death. What gives your life meaning?



of philosophy is to explore, to reflect, to think critically—and then to create yourself in the image you have envisioned.

“Man is asked to make of himself what he is supposed to become to fulfill his destiny,” the theologian Paul Tillich wrote. But how do we discover our destiny, the unique meaning of our lives? We must embark on a philosophical journey, a process of self-exploration and discovery, seeking answers to profound questions about our lives and illuminating the mysteries of our existence. Each of us strives to live a life of purpose, to fulfill our unique potential, and to achieve stellar accomplishments. It is the remarkable capability of our minds to reflect deeply and thoughtfully—to *think philosophically*—that enables us to pursue these goals. As the philosopher Bertrand Russell passionately expressed, “Thought is great and swift and free, the light of the world, and the chief glory of man.”

1.2 Defining Philosophy

Providing a precise definition of philosophy is not a simple task, in part because of the complex nature of philosophy’s mission and in part because that mission has evolved over time. As we have begun to see, philosophy deals with the most complex, challenging, and profound questions in human life, questions that by their nature resist simple answers. In addition, the scope of philosophy has changed over the centuries. It began in ancient Greece as the “mother of all disciplines,” encompassing the entire breadth of inquiry about humans and the universe they inhabit. Over time, as human knowledge expanded, distinct disciplines were established that specialized in understanding various dimensions of human experience. In the natural sciences, physics, biology, chemistry, and geology seek understanding of the natural world. The social sciences (psychology, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, political science, economics) seek to analyze, explicate, and propose better models for individual and collective human behavior. Philosophy has retained distinct areas of study that we will explore later in the chapter: *metaphysics*, *epistemology*, *ethics*, *social-political philosophy*, *aesthetics*, and *logic*. In addition, the evolving role of philosophy has been to continue examining the underlying principles and methodologies of other academic disciplines through the study of “philosophy of science,” “philosophical psychology,” “medical ethics,” and so on.

Wonder

“All philosophy has its origins in wonder”
—Plato

A Dynamic Process

“The beginning of philosophy is . . . the conflict between opinions”
—Epictitus


Defining Philosophy
Wisdom

“Philosophy is simply the love of wisdom”
—Cicero

Truth

“Philosophy is the science that considers the truth”
—Aristotle

Philosophy Is the Pursuit of Wisdom

The actual word *philosophy* is Greek in origin, and it is the composite of two Greek roots: *philein*, a Greek word for “love,” and *sophia*, the Greek word for “wisdom.” Taken together, they mean “the love or pursuit of wisdom.” This definition is a good starting point for understanding the distinctive nature of philosophy. Philosophy is not merely a static compendium of great thoughts espoused by great thinkers—it is an activity that reflects passion, commitment, and intellectual ambition. The ultimate goal of this passionate activity is not mastering a certain amount of information but rather the achievement of “wisdom.” What exactly is “wisdom”? Think of several people you know whom you would consider to be “wise”: What qualities do they possess? It’s likely that although they are knowledgeable regarding certain areas of life, it’s their ability to *use* and *apply* this knowledge with great intelligence that distinguishes them. They are likely the kind of people who can get to the heart of a complex issue, who are able to generate genuinely creative solutions to challenging problems, who exhibit an insightful understanding of what it means to be human. These are undoubtedly people who are thoughtful and reflective, who are not afraid to confront the most difficult questions in life, who strive every day to develop themselves as astute thinkers and honorable individuals. These are people whom you admire and whom you would like to emulate. At the same time, wise people are usually intellectually humble: They don’t fall under the spell of believing that they have all the answers, and instead approach the world with a childlike curiosity and eagerness to learn.

Viewing philosophy as the pursuit of wisdom was given eloquent expression by the female philosopher Perictione, who is thought to have lived around 300 B.C.E.:

Humanity came into being and exists in order to contemplate the principle of the nature of the whole. The function of wisdom is to gain possession of this very thing, and to contemplate the purpose of the things that are. Geometry, of course, and arithmetic, and the other theoretical studies and sciences are also concerned with the things that are, but wisdom is concerned with the most basic of these. Wisdom is concerned with all that is, just as sight is concerned with all that is visible and hearing with all that is audible. . . . Therefore, whoever is able to analyze all the kinds of being by reference to one and the same basic principle, and, in turn, from this principle to synthesize and enumerate the different kinds, this person seems to be the wisest and most true and, moreover, to have discovered a noble height from which he will be able to catch sight of God and all the things separated from God in serial rank and order.

In this inspiring passage, Perictione gets right to the heart of being human and the nature of wisdom. Human life has a central purpose—to contemplate the profound essence of the universe—and wisdom is, in her mind, the divine gift we have to

“Rightly defined, philosophy is simply the love of wisdom.”

CICERO

“[Y]our wisdom gave rise to an endless desire.”

SOLOMON IBN GABIROL

“He who knows he is a fool is not a great fool.”
CONFUCIUS

“Let no young man delay the study of philosophy, and let no old man become weary of it; for it is never too early nor too late to care for the well-being of the soul.”
EPICURUS

“Philosophy means liberation from the two dimensions of routine, soaring above the well known, seeing it in new perspectives, arousing wonder and the wish to fly.”
WALTER KAUFMANN

“The feeling of wonder is the touchstone of the philosopher, and all philosophy has its origins in wonder.”
PLATO

“For it is owing to their wonder that people both now begin and at first began to philosophize.”
ARISTOTLE

“Philosophy is not a theory but an activity.”
LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

“Philosophy is man’s quest for the unity of knowledge: it consists in a perpetual struggle to create the concepts in which the universe can be conceived as a universe and not a multiverse.”
WILLIAM H. HALVERSON

accomplish this. While various disciplines such as mathematics and science are concerned with determining specific knowledge of the universe, wisdom has a grander mission: understanding how and why the universe is the way it is, the core principles that underlie and govern the whole of experience. This Western concept of philosophy originated in ancient Greece in the work of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. We will be exploring their ideas in some depth as we journey through the history of philosophical thinking.

Of course, there have been many important thinkers since Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, and there were even a number of insightful thinkers before them, the “pre-Socratics” who were known as *Sophos*, wise men and women who posed sophisticated and penetrating questions regarding the essential principles of human life and the natural world. In addition, there have been many significant thinkers in non-Western cultures. Although the primary focus of this text is on Western philosophy, we will also be examining key ideas from philosophers in non-Western cultures.

The *School of Athens*, painted by the Renaissance artist Raphael for the Vatican in Rome, depicts the ancient Greek philosophers who first embodied the spirit of philosophy in the West. In the center of the painting, under the arch, Plato points toward the heavenly realm of the ideal while Aristotle gestures toward the earth. On the left, Socrates debates Xenophon. The “pre-Socratics” are also represented, including Epicurus, Pythagoras, Diogenes, and Ptolemy. These individuals are considered to be “heroes of philosophy” by professionals in the discipline. Although the “wise” people you know may not be professional philosophers, they may very well embody the *spirit* of philosophy that we will be considering in this book. Who are your intellectual heroes?

Philosophy Begins with Wonder

Some definitions of philosophy focus on the *source* of philosophical thinking, the way philosophy encourages us to look both *deeper* and *wider*. Philosophy stimulates us to penetrate beneath the surface of daily experience while seeking a comprehensive, inclusive vision of reality.

The catalyst for thinking philosophically about one’s life is often *wonder*, a search for *unity of knowledge*, a desire to answer the *great questions* of life. As Plato and Aristotle observe, philosophy begins with *wonder*, speculation, considering “what if?,” asking that powerful question, “Why?” Instead of simply accepting life as it presents itself, philosophy seeks to probe beneath the surface, question the familiar, challenge “accepted wisdom.” Where can we look for models of philosophical wonder? Children! Young children are brimming over with intellectual energy, blending innate curiosity, passionate convictions, and imaginative speculation: not coincidentally, the essential ingredients required for thinking critically and developing a philosophical perspective on the world. “Why?” is perhaps the most penetrating question in human language and thought, and children use it liberally, sometimes driving adults to distraction. Asking “Why?” shakes up complacent attitudes, forcing us to expose hidden assumptions and to articulate the rationale for our conclusions. And other questions can help us probe beyond the surface of everyday consciousness. Here’s a brief sampler provided by my children, Jessie and Joshua, at very young ages: *Why did God create life? What is at the end of space? What happens after forever? Do people still love after they die? Suppose that animals could think just as well as we could, what would the world be like? Imagine that stuffed animals had feelings, how would you treat them? Why are bad people bad?*

Another catalyst for philosophy is the human desire for *synthesis* and *integration*, to “put all of the pieces together.” As the contemporary American philosopher William

Halverson observes, this drive toward integration is reflected in our concept of our world as a *uni* verse, the conviction that there are underlying principles of thought and reality that form the structure of our experience. Philosophy has always been driven by the desire to discover these primal principles and then to apply them to make human existence more intelligible. All of us have the responsibility to confront and try to answer these profound questions as we work to craft lives of meaning and purpose.

Philosophy Is a Dynamic Process

This definition probes the *dynamic* nature of philosophical thinking, a process that is *dialectical* in the sense that ideas are continually analyzed in terms of their opposites, with the ultimate goal of creating a more enlightened *synthesis*.

As Epictetus observes, the philosophical process is powered by conflict, bringing divergent opinions together into a dynamic interaction. Which ideas make most sense? Which are clearer? Best supported? Have greater explanatory power? Are consistent with other beliefs we know to be true? Are most comprehensive? *Why?* As we will see in the next chapter, this ongoing process of comparing and contrasting, analyzing and synthesizing, is at the heart of the Socratic Method, a powerful approach developed and used by Socrates that is characterized by relentless questioning, clear definitions, dialectical analysis, and critical evaluation. It is the process by which we can disentangle complex issues and distinguish more informed ways of thinking from less informed. Language is a key partner of thinking, as Wittgenstein notes: A confused, illogical, and sloppy use of language leads to confused, illogical, and sloppy thinking—and vice versa. Analogously, clarity and precision in our use of language contributes to clarity and precision in our thinking—and vice versa.

In its crusade to enlighten minds and inform choices, philosophy is not confined to the classroom or “ivory towers.” The conclusions we reach by thinking philosophically have direct applications for how we live our lives in the real world. And because philosophy is committed to the truth rather than popular opinion, prevailing norms, or conventional wisdom, it means that we may indeed find ourselves, in the words of

“I do not know how to teach philosophy without becoming a disturber of the peace.”
BARUCH SPINOZA

“The beginning of philosophy is the recognition of the conflict between opinions.”
EPICTETUS

“Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.”
LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN



ARE YOU WILLING TO BECOME A “DISTURBER OF THE PEACE”? Philosophy gives us the tools to analyze complex issues and develop informed beliefs. These beliefs have direct applications for how we want to effect change in the world. What social issues are important to you? Are you ready to subject them to critical analysis and discussion?

“Philosophy means the complete liberty of the mind, and therefore independence of all social, political, or religious prejudice.”
HENRI FRÉDÉRIC AMIEL

“Philosophy asks the simple question, what is it all about?”
ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD

Spinoza, as “disturbers of the peace.” In the case of Socrates, and other truth-seekers like him throughout the centuries, this passion for intellectual integrity and authentic lives had grave personal consequences.

The Ultimate Aim of Philosophy

Finally, philosophy can be defined in terms of the goal of philosophical thought, which is to improve the quality of our lives by enlightening our minds. Philosophy has grand and lofty aspirations, and this undoubtedly accounts for the fascination and high regard with which it has been held. Here is a brief sampling of some of the goals proposed by philosophers:

- The complete liberty of the mind
- Freedom from all social, political, or religious prejudice
- To care for the well-being of the soul
- Answer the question, “What is it all about?”

Can philosophy really deliver on this ambitious promise? Perhaps a better question is, “Can any other discipline or approach to life do a more effective job than philosophy?” Philosophers—and many others—believe that philosophy is the one best hope we have to discover the truth to these profound questions and intimidating challenges. Philosophy is uniquely qualified, because of the historical scope of its vision and the conceptual and language tools that it employs, to help each person find his or her way to the truth of these issues. Virtually all people desire a liberated mind, an enlightened consciousness, a well-cared-for soul, a rich and fulfilling life. Philosophy provides the equipment you need to construct such a path for yourself: You need only to commit yourself to taking the philosophical journey.

1.3 Thinking Philosophically: Becoming a Critical Thinker

Socrates probably came closest to capturing the essence of philosophy when he issued a startling challenge that has reverberated through the centuries: “The unexamined life is not worth living.” The ability to reflect on one’s life and one’s self is a distinctly human ability. Philosophy provides us with the intellectual tools to reflect with clarity and discipline, to critically evaluate the choices we have made, and to use this knowledge to make more enlightened choices in the future. The stakes are high: If we fail to make use of this unique ability to think philosophically about ourselves, then, according to Socrates, our lives have diminished potential.

To begin our journey of philosophical discovery, we must first distinguish between “having” a philosophy and “doing” philosophy. Every person “has” a philosophy of life—a collection of beliefs used to guide his or her thoughts and actions. For example, you may believe that it’s wrong to needlessly kill living things, or you may believe that it’s good to be kind to people in difficult circumstances. Such beliefs—and countless others that you have formed over the years of your life—influence the way you see the world and the choices that you make. You may not be aware of all your beliefs—some may be deeply buried in your unconsciousness—but they can still influence you. For instance, you may instinctively help an elderly person cross the street, without being consciously aware that your action reflects a deeply imbedded belief of yours.

“... [W]e should insist that philosophy may, indeed should, be responsive to human experience and yet critical of the defective thinking it sometimes contains.”
MARTHA NUSSBAUM

“Philosophy is the science which considers the truth.”
ARISTOTLE

Of course, an individual's philosophy of life can also contain beliefs that are wildly inaccurate, biased, or destructive. For example, racist or sexist beliefs can be factors in a person's philosophy of life—although many people would consider such beliefs to be unenlightened and destructive. Or someone might be convinced that aliens are living among us, planning to take over the human race—a belief that most of us would consider highly questionable.

“Doing” philosophy—thinking philosophically—means thinking critically about your beliefs to ensure that they are the most accurate and enlightened beliefs possible. For example, if your philosophy of life includes stereotyped beliefs about other races or genders, thinking critically about them would involve asking such questions as:

- What is the factual evidence or reasons for these beliefs? Do I have a compelling rationale for saying that I “know” them to be true?
- How did these beliefs originate? What circumstances gave rise to these beliefs?
- Are these beliefs logical or illogical, rational or irrational?
- If I were a member of this racial group or gender, would I still endorse these beliefs? Why or why not?
- Are there more enlightened, accurate beliefs than mine that I should consider?

“The first step toward philosophy is doubt.”

DENIS DIDEROT

Thinking philosophically—“doing” philosophy—involves many advanced forms of thinking that we will be exploring in this book and that you will be developing in your philosophy class. But a productive place to begin is with *your* philosophy of life. The questions included in the following “Thinking Philosophically” box are designed to help you articulate some of the basic building blocks of your philosophy of life. You should record your responses in a philosophy journal or notebook that you keep for this course. Or your professor may request that the activity be completed in a form to be handed in or e-mailed. Here is a sample student response to the question, “What moral beliefs influence your choices?”

I firmly believe that all animals are sentient beings, and therefore I am opposed to their being used as inanimate raw material in our mass-production agricultural system. This matter spans a much broader area than simply eating meat.



“WHO AM I?” “WHAT IS SELF?” The philosophical journey requires self-examination. Your responsibility as a critical thinker is to explore, reflect, and then create yourself in the image you have envisioned.