

PHILOSOPHY

HERE AND NOW

Powerful Ideas in Everyday Life

FOURTH EDITION

Lewis Vaughn

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Philosophy

HERE AND NOW

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PREFACE

This fourth edition of *Philosophy Here and Now* stays true to the aspirations and character of the first and second. From the beginning, the text has been designed to provide an extraordinary amount of encouragement and guidance to students who are encountering philosophy for the first (and perhaps last) time. Its ambitious aim is to get such students to take some big steps toward understanding, appreciating, and even doing philosophy. *Philosophy Here and Now* thus tries to do a great deal more than most other texts or readers. To foster a serious understanding of philosophy, it includes solid coverage of critical thinking skills and argument basics as well as guidance and practice in reading philosophical works. Students of course can appreciate the point and power of philosophy as they comprehend philosophical writings, but their appreciation blossoms when they see how philosophical issues and reasoning play out in contemporary society and how philosophical insights apply to their own lives. So the book's coverage and pedagogical features help students grasp philosophy's relevance and timeliness. Students learn how to *do* philosophy—to think and write philosophically—when they get encouragement and practice in analyzing and critiquing their own views and those of the philosophers they study. To this end, *Philosophy Here and Now* emphasizes philosophical writing, reinforced with step-by-step coaching in how to write argumentative essays and supported by multiple opportunities to hone basic skills.

In addition to these core elements, *Philosophy Here and Now* further engages today's learners with abundant illustrations and color graphics; marginal notes, questions, and quotes; profiles of a diverse array of philosophers; and ample representation of non-Western and nontraditional sources.

TOPICS AND READINGS

Nine chapters cover the existence of God, morality and the moral life, mind and body, free will and determinism, knowledge and skepticism, aesthetics, political philosophy, and the meaning of life. These topics are explored in readings from eighty traditional and contemporary philosophers integrated into the main text, featuring both indispensable standards and newer selections. The standards include Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Pascal, Anselm, Descartes, Hume, Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, Kant, d'Holbach, Paley, James, Sartre, Marx, and others. Among the more recent voices are Searle, Chalmers, Craig, Swinburne, Hick, Mackie, Rowe, Gardner, Blum, Dershowitz, Rahula, Jaggar, Held, Baier, Nagel, Block, Van Inwagen, Taylor, Du Sautoy, Ducasse, Cole, Ainley, Rawls, Fischer, Metz, Okin, and Schopenhauer.

All these selections are juxtaposed with end-of-chapter pieces of fiction or narrative—stories meant to explore and dramatize the philosophical issues

encountered in the chapters. They include some classic stories such as “The Good Brahmin” by Voltaire, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” by Ursula Le Guin, and “They’re Made Out of Meat” by Terry Bisson, as well as lesser-known fiction by notable writers like Arthur C. Clarke and William Golding. Each story is accompanied by discussion/essay questions designed to draw out its philosophical implications.

MAIN FEATURES

- **A comprehensive introductory chapter that lays the groundwork for philosophical thinking.** Through examples drawn from philosophical literature and everyday life, this chapter explains clearly the nature and scope of philosophy and how it relates to students’ lives. This much, of course, is what any good text in this field should do. But this first chapter also shows how to devise and evaluate arguments and guides students in critically thinking, reading, and writing about philosophical issues.
- **Critical thinking questions that correspond to relevant passages in the main text or readings.** These questions, located in the margins of the text, invite students to ponder the implications of the material and to think critically about the assumptions and arguments found there. The questions are numbered and highlighted and easily lend themselves to both writing assignments and class discussion. The point of their marginal placement is to prompt students to think carefully and analytically as they read.
- **Four types of text boxes that demonstrate the value and relevance of philosophy in the modern world:**
 - **“Philosophy Now”**—These boxes contain news items and research reports that illustrate how each chapter’s philosophical issues permeate everyday life. They demonstrate that philosophical concerns arise continually in science, society, ethics, religion, politics, medicine, and more. Each box ends with questions that prompt critical thinking and philosophical reflection.
 - **“What Do You Believe?”**—Prompting student engagement and reflection, these boxes explore issues related to the chapter’s topics and challenge students’ beliefs.
 - **“Philosophers at Work”**—These boxes profile the lives and work of compelling figures in philosophy, past and present, Western and non-Western or nontraditional, men and women. Some feature philosophers from the past whose story adds a human and historical dimension to the ideas discussed in the chapter, and some profile contemporary thinkers who are grappling with the important issues of the day. The point of these features is, of course, to show that philosophy is very much a living, relevant enterprise.
 - **“Philosophy Lab”**—These boxes present simple thought experiments challenging students to think through scenarios that can reveal deeper philosophical insights or perspectives.

- **In-depth coverage of philosophical writing** includes step-by-step coaching in argument basics and multiple opportunities to hone critical thinking skills.
 - **“Writing to Understand: Critiquing Philosophical Views”**—These boxes appear at the end of each section and consist of essay questions that prompt students to critically examine the strengths and weaknesses of the views discussed in the sections.
 - **“Writing to Understand: Arguing Your Own Views”**—These boxes prompt students to explain and defend their own views on the chapter’s topics in short essays.
 - **“How to Write a Philosophy Paper”**—This appendix offers concise, step-by-step guidance in crafting an effective philosophical essay.
- **A final chapter on “The Meaning of Life.”** This chapter discusses how philosophers have clarified and explored the topic of life’s meaning. It covers the main philosophical perspectives on the subject and samples the views of philosophers past and present.

All these features are supplemented with other elements to make the material even more engaging and accessible:

- **Marginal quotes.** These pithy, compelling quotes from an array of philosophers appear throughout the text, inviting students to join the ongoing conversation of philosophy.
- **Key Terms, marginal definitions, and end-of-book Glossary.** Key Terms in each chapter appear in boldface at their first appearance in a chapter, and marginal definitions help students learn the terms within their immediate context. A list of the chapter’s Key Terms appears at the end of each chapter, along with the page numbers on which the term and its definition first appear. Last, a Glossary of those Key Terms and definitions provides an essential reference for students as they review and prepare for tests as well as draft their own philosophical essays and arguments.
- **Chapter Objectives.** This list at the beginning of each chapter helps to scaffold student learning by providing both structure and support for previewing, note taking, and retention of content.
- **End-of-chapter reviews.** Concluding each chapter, this feature revisits the Chapter Objectives, encouraging students to reflect and review.
- **An index of marginal quotes.** This supplemental index helps students locate the words of philosophers that seem especially insightful or inspiring to them.
- **For Further reading.** Located at the end of each chapter, these useful references point students to sources that will enhance their understanding of chapter issues and arguments.
- **Timeline.** Featuring philosophers’ lives and important events, this visual learning tool helps students appreciate the historic significance of philosophical ideas by placing them within a larger context.

- **Charts, tables, and color photos.** Appearing throughout the book, these have been selected or created to deepen student engagement with and understanding of complex ideas and abstract concepts. In addition, captions for these images include brief, open-ended questions to help students “read” visuals with the same critical attention they learn to bring to written texts.

NEW TO THIS EDITION

- **An expanded Chapter 1.** It now includes a section on obstacles to critical thinking, covering confirmation bias, denying contrary evidence, motivated reasoning, the availability error, and the Dunning-Kruger effect.
- **A new section in Chapter 3 (Morality and the Moral Life).** It explores morality based on *prima facie* principles, discusses W.D. Ross’s principlism, examines plausible moral principles, and provides guidance on moral deliberation.
- **An expanded introduction to Chapter 9 (The Meaning of Life).** The new material includes a survey of the new research, new thinking, and new voices in meaning-of-life scholarship, which now takes a much more positive view of the subject than did the philosophical pessimists of earlier decades.
- **An Appendix on evaluating online sources.** It explains the importance of reasonable skepticism and gives guidance on reading laterally and critically, using Google and Wikipedia carefully, and verifying information through trustworthy fact-checkers.
- **More text boxes adding depth to discussions or demonstrating how philosophical thinking can tackle tough, contemporary issues.** These cover survey data on belief in God, feminist critiques of Western religion, the ethics of triage in a pandemic, debates on welfare liberalism and universal basic income, modern Platonism, and perfectionism and the meaning of life.

ANCILLARIES

The Oxford University Press Learning Link (www.oup.com/he/vaughn-phn4e) houses a wealth of instructor resources, including an Instructor’s Manual with sample syllabi, reading summaries, essay/discussion questions, suggested Web links, and a glossary of key terms from the text; an LMS-compatible Test Bank with fifty or more multiple-choice and true/false questions per chapter (also available as a traditional “pencil-and-paper” Test Bank in the Instructor’s Manual); and PowerPoint lecture outlines.

A companion website (www.oup.com/he/vaughn-phn4e) contains study materials for students, including 18 animated media tutorials, level-one and level-two practice quizzes with multiple-choice and true/false questions taken from the Test Bank, essay/discussion questions, reading summaries, flashcards of key terms from the text, and suggested Web links.

All instructor and student resources are also available as cartridges for Learning Management Systems. For more information, please contact your Oxford University Press Sales Representative at 1-800-280-0280.

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CHAPTER

1

PHILOSOPHY AND YOU

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

1.1 PHILOSOPHY: THE QUEST FOR UNDERSTANDING

- Know the practical and theoretical benefits of studying philosophy. Know the practical and theoretical benefits of studying philosophy. Know the practical and theoretical benefits of studying philosophy.
- Take an inventory of your philosophical beliefs.
- Know the four main divisions of philosophy and the kinds of questions they examine.

1.2 SOCRATES AND THE EXAMINED LIFE

- Understand why Socrates declared that “the unexamined life is not worth living.”

- Explain the Socratic method and how Socrates used it in search of understanding.
- Relate how Socrates showed that Thrasymachus’s notion of justice was wrong.
- Explain how *reductio ad absurdum* arguments work.

1.3 THINKING PHILOSOPHICALLY

- Define *argument*, *statement*, *conclusion*, and *premise*.
- Know the two conditions that must be met for an argument to be *good*.
- Define *deductive argument*, *inductive argument*, *valid*, *sound*, *cogent*, *strong*, and *weak*. Understand inferences to the best explanation and

how their strength is evaluated.

- Be able to identify arguments in the form of *modus ponens*, *modus tollens*, affirming the consequent, and denying the antecedent.
- Be able to identify arguments in various contexts and tell whether they are valid or invalid, sound or not sound, strong or weak, and cogent or not cogent.
- Understand the guidelines for reading and appreciating philosophy.
- Be aware of common fallacies and know how to identify them in various contexts.

1.1 PHILOSOPHY: THE QUEST FOR UNDERSTANDING

Science gives us knowledge, but only philosophy can give us wisdom.

—Will Durant

The title of this text, *Philosophy Here and Now*, is meant to emphasize that philosophy is, well, here and now—that is, *relevant* and *current*. This means that philosophy, even with its ancient lineage and seemingly remote concerns, applies to your life and your times and your world. Philosophy achieves this immediacy by being many good things at once: it is enlightening, thought-provoking, life-changing, liberating, theoretical, and practical. The world is full of students and teachers who can attest to these claims. More importantly, you will find proof of them in the remainder of this text—and in the writings of the great philosophers, in your grasping what they say and the reasons they give for saying it, and in your own honest attempts to apply philosophy to your life.

Philosophy is the name that philosophers have given to both a discipline and a process. As a discipline, philosophy is one of the humanities, a field of study out of which several other fields have evolved—physics, biology, political science, and many others. As a process, philosophy is a penetrating mode of reflection for understanding life’s most important truths. This mode is what we may call the *philosophical method*—the systematic use of critical reasoning to try to find answers to fundamental questions about reality, morality, and knowledge. The method, however, is not a master key used exclusively by professional philosophers to unlock mysteries hidden from common folk. The philosophical method is the birthright of every person, for we are all born with the capacity to reason, to question, to discover. For thousands of years, great minds like Aristotle, Plato, Confucius, Descartes, Aquinas, and Sartre have used it in their search for wisdom, and what they found has changed countless lives. But amateur philosophers like you have also used it—and continue to use it—to achieve life-altering understanding that would have eluded them otherwise.

The Good of Philosophy

1 Suppose you had a fundamental belief that the mind, or soul, does not survive the death of the body. What other beliefs would this fundamental belief be likely to support?

Philosophy should be responsive to human experience and yet critical of the defective thinking it sometimes encounters.

—Martha Nussbaum

Philosophy is not just about ideas; it’s about *fundamental* ideas, those upon which other ideas depend. A fundamental belief logically supports other beliefs, and the more beliefs it supports the more fundamental it is. Your belief or disbelief in God, for example, might support a host of other beliefs about morality, life after death, heaven, hell, free will, science, evolution, prayer, abortion, miracles, homosexuality, and more. Thanks to your upbringing, your culture, your peers, and other influences, you already have a head full of fundamental beliefs, some of them true, some false. Whether true or false, they constitute the framework of your whole belief system, and as such they help you make sense of a wide range of important issues in life—issues concerning what exists and what doesn’t, what actions are right or wrong (or neither), and what kinds of things we can know and not know. Fundamental beliefs, therefore, make up your “philosophy of life,” which informs your thinking and guides your actions.

Perhaps now you can better appreciate philosophy's greatest *practical* benefit: it gives us the intellectual wherewithal to improve our lives by improving our philosophy of life. A faulty philosophy of life—that is, one that comprises a great many false fundamental beliefs—can lead to a misspent or misdirected life, a life less meaningful than it could be. Philosophy is the most powerful instrument we have for evaluating the worth of our fundamental beliefs and for changing them for the better. Through philosophy we exert control over the trajectory of our lives, making major course corrections by reason and reflection.

The Greek philosopher Socrates (469–399 BCE), one of Western civilization's great intellectual heroes, says, "An unexamined life is not worth living." To examine your life is to scrutinize the core ideas that shape it, and the deepest form of scrutiny is exercised through philosophy. This search for answers goes to the heart of the traditional conception of philosophy as a search for wisdom (the term *philosophy* is derived from Greek words meaning "love of wisdom"). With the attainment of wisdom, we come to understand the true nature of reality and how to apply that understanding to living a good life.

Philosophy's chief *theoretical* benefit is the same one that most other fields of inquiry pursue: understanding for its own sake. Even if philosophy had no practical applications at all, it would still hold great value for us. We want to know how the world works, what truths it hides, just for the sake of knowing. And philosophy obliges. Astronomers search the sky, physicists study subatomic particles, and archaeologists search for ancient ruins, all the while knowing that what they find may have no practical implications at all. We humans wonder, and that's often all the reason we need to search for answers. As the great philosopher Aristotle says, "For it is owing to their wonder that people both now begin and at first began to philosophize."

For many people, the quest for understanding through philosophy is a spiritual, transformative endeavor, an ennobling pursuit of truths at the core of life. Thus, several philosophers speak of philosophy as something that enriches or nurtures the soul or mind. Socrates, speaking to the jurors who condemned him for practicing philosophy on the streets of Athens, asked, "Are you not ashamed that, while you take care to acquire as much wealth as possible, with honor and glory as well, yet you take no care or thought for understanding or truth, or for the best possible state of your soul?" In a similar vein, the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341–270 BCE) said, "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." And in our own era, the philosopher Walter Kaufmann (1921–1980) declared, "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."

Along with philosophical inquiry comes freedom. We begin our lives at a particular place and time, steeped in the ideas and values of a particular culture, fed



Figure 1.1 Socrates (469–399 BCE).

2 Is it possible to lead a meaningful life without self-examination?

Philosophy is the highest music.

—Plato

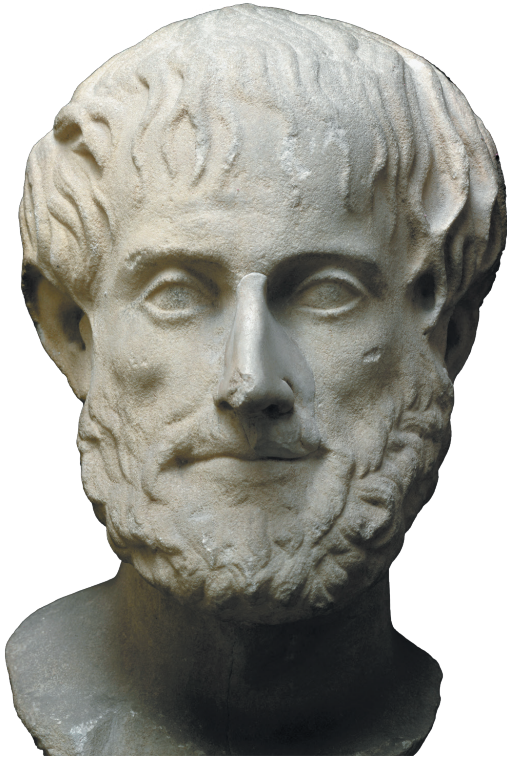


Figure 1.2 Aristotle (384–322 BCE).

To teach how to live without certainty and yet without being paralysed by hesitation is perhaps the chief thing that philosophy, in our age, can do for those who study it.

—Bertrand Russell

3 Has your thinking recently led you to reflect on philosophical questions? If so, how did the thought process begin, and what fundamental belief did you end up contemplating?

Metaphysics is the study of reality in the broadest sense, an inquiry into the elemental nature of the universe and the things in it.

readymade beliefs that may or may not be true and that we may never think to question. If you passively accept such beliefs, then those beliefs are *not really yours*. If they are not really yours, and you let them guide your choices and actions, then they—not you—are in charge of your life. You thus forfeit your personal freedom. But philosophy helps us rise above this predicament, to transcend the narrow and obstructed standpoint from which we may view everything. It helps us sift our hand-me-down beliefs in the light of reason, look beyond the prejudices that blind us, and see what's real and true. By using the philosophical method, we may learn that some of our beliefs are on solid ground and some are not. In either case, through philosophy our beliefs become truly and authentically our own.

Philosophical Terrain

Philosophy's sphere of interest is vast, encompassing fundamental beliefs drawn from many places. Philosophical questions can arise anywhere. Part of the reason for this is that ordinary beliefs that seem to have no connection with philosophy can become philosophical in short order. A physiologist may want to know how our brains work, but she ventures into the philosophical arena when she wonders

whether the brain is the same thing as the mind—a question that science alone cannot answer. A lawyer studies how the death penalty is administered in Texas, but he does philosophy when he considers whether capital punishment is ever morally permissible. A medical scientist wants to know how a human fetus develops, but she finds it difficult to avoid the philosophical query of what the moral status of the fetus is. An astrophysicist studies the Big Bang, the cataclysmic explosion thought to have brought the universe into being—but then asks whether the Big Bang shows that God caused the universe to exist. On CNN you see the horrors of war and famine, but then you find yourself grappling with whether they can be squared with the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good God. Or you wonder what your moral obligations are to the poor and hungry of the world. Or you ponder whether government should help people in need or leave them to fend for themselves.

We can divide philosophy's subject matter into four main divisions, each of which is a branch of inquiry in its own right with many subcategories. Here's a brief rundown of these divisions and a sampling of the kinds of questions that each asks.

Metaphysics is the study of reality in the broadest sense, an inquiry into the elemental nature of the universe and the things in it. Though it must take into account the findings of science, metaphysics generally focuses on basic questions that science cannot address. Questions of interest: Does the world consist only of matter,



What Do You Believe?

Your Philosophical Beliefs

Where do you stand on the fundamental issues in philosophy? Here is your chance to take inventory of your views. After you finish this course, take the survey again to see if your perspective has changed or become more nuanced. Answer with these numbers: 5 = true; 4 = probably true; 3 = neither probable nor improbable; 2 = probably false; 1 = false.

1. At least some moral norms or principles are objectively true or valid for everyone. ____
2. Moral standards are relative to what individuals or cultures believe. ____
3. Mind and body consist of two fundamentally different kinds of stuff—nonphysical stuff and physical stuff. ____
4. The mind, or soul, can exist without the body. ____
5. Our mental states are nothing but brain states (mind states are identical to brain states). ____
6. No one has free will. ____
7. Persons have free will (some of our actions are free). ____
8. Although our actions are determined, they can still be free (free will and determinism are not in conflict). ____
9. The God of traditional Western religions (an all-knowing, all-powerful, all-good deity) exists. ____
10. The apparent design of the universe shows that it had an intelligent designer. ____
11. Right actions are those commanded by God; wrong actions are those forbidden by God. ____
12. God does not make actions right or wrong by commanding them to be so. ____
13. We can know some things about the external world. ____
14. We cannot know anything about the external world. ____
15. The theory of evolution is a better explanation of the apparent design of biological life than the theory of “intelligent design.” ____
16. Truth about something depends on what a person or culture believes. ____
17. Libertarianism is the correct political theory. ____
18. Welfare liberalism is the correct moral theory. ____
19. Meaning in life comes from outside ourselves, from God or some other transcendent reality. ____
20. Meaning in life comes from within ourselves. ____

or is it made up of other basic things, such as ideas or minds? Is there a spiritual, ideal realm that exists beyond the material world? Is the mind the same thing as the body? How are mind and body related? Do people have immortal souls? Do humans have free will, or are our actions determined by forces beyond our control? Can actions be both free and determined? Does God exist? How can both a good God and evil exist simultaneously? What is the nature of causality? Can an effect ever precede its cause? What is the nature of time? Is time travel possible?

And what, Socrates, is the food of the soul? Surely, I said, knowledge is the food of the soul.

—Plato

Main Divisions of Philosophy

DIVISION	QUESTIONS
Metaphysics	Does the world consist only of matter, or is it made up of other basic things, such as ideas or mind? Is there a spiritual, ideal realm that exists beyond the material world? Is the mind the same thing as the body? How are mind and body related? Do people have immortal souls? Do humans have free will, or are our actions determined by forces beyond our control? Can actions be both free and determined? Does God exist? How can both a good God and evil exist simultaneously? What is the nature of causality? Can an effect ever precede its cause? What is the nature of time? Is time travel possible?
Epistemology	What is knowledge? What is truth? Is knowledge possible—can we ever know anything? Does knowledge require certainty? What are the sources of knowledge? Is experience a source of knowledge? Is mysticism or faith a source? Can we gain knowledge of the empirical world through reason alone? If we have knowledge, how much do we have? When are we justified in saying that we know something? Do we have good reasons to believe that the world exists independently of our minds? Or do our minds constitute reality?
Axiology	What makes an action right (or wrong)? What things are intrinsically good? What is the good life? What gives life meaning? What makes someone good (or bad)? What moral principles should guide our actions and choices? Which is the best moral theory? Is killing ever morally permissible? If so, why? Are moral standards objective or subjective? Is an action right merely because a culture endorses it? Does morality depend on God? What makes a society just?
Logic	What are the rules for drawing correct inferences? What are the nature and structure of deductive arguments? How can propositional or predicate logic be used to evaluate arguments? Upon what logical principles does reasoning depend? Does logic describe how the world is—or just how our minds work? Can conclusions reached through inductive logic be rationally justified?

Epistemology is the study of knowledge.

Axiology is the study of value, including both aesthetic value and moral value.

Ethics is the study of moral value using the methods of philosophy.

Logic is the study of correct reasoning.

Epistemology is the study of knowledge. Questions of interest: What is knowledge? What is truth? Is knowledge possible—can we ever know anything? Does knowledge require certainty? What are the sources of knowledge? Is experience a source of knowledge? Is mysticism or faith a source? Can we gain knowledge of the empirical world through reason alone? If we have knowledge, how much do we have? When are we justified in saying that we know something? Do we have good reasons to believe that the world exists independently of our minds? Or do our minds constitute reality?

Axiology is the study of value, including both aesthetic value and moral value. The study of moral value is known as **ethics**. Ethics involves inquiries into the nature of moral judgments, virtues, values, obligations, and theories. Questions of interest: What makes an action right (or wrong)? What things are intrinsically good? What is the good life? What gives life meaning? What makes someone good (or bad)?

What moral principles should guide our actions and choices? Which is the best moral theory? Is killing ever morally permissible? If so, why? Are moral standards objective or subjective? Is an action right merely because a culture endorses it? Does morality depend on God? What makes a society just?

Logic is the study of correct reasoning. Questions of interest: What are the rules for drawing correct inferences? What are the nature and structure of deductive arguments? How can propositional or predicate logic be used to evaluate arguments? Upon what logical principles does reasoning depend? Does logic describe how the world is—or just how our minds work? Can conclusions reached through inductive logic be rationally justified?

In addition to these divisions, there are subdivisions of philosophy whose job is to examine critically the assumptions and principles that underlie other fields. Thus we have the philosophy of science, the philosophy of law, the philosophy of mathematics, the philosophy of history, the philosophy of language, and many others. When those laboring in a discipline begin questioning its most basic ideas—ideas that define its subject matter and principles of inquiry—philosophy, the most elemental mode of investigation, steps in.



Figure 1.3 Plato, pointing upward toward the higher realm of ideas, and Aristotle, gesturing down toward the things of this earth.

There's a difference between a philosophy and a bumper sticker.

—Charles M. Schulz

ESSAY/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

SECTION 1.1

1. What is the philosophical method? Who can make use of this approach to important questions? Can only philosophers use it? Have you used it? How?
2. What are some fundamental beliefs that are part of your philosophy of life? How do these beliefs influence your life?
3. What is philosophy's greatest practical benefit? Do you think studying philosophy could change your life goals or your fundamental beliefs? Why or why not?
4. How can philosophy enhance your personal freedom? What are some of your fundamental beliefs that you have never fully examined? What might be the result of never examining a fundamental belief?
5. Which of the four main divisions of philosophy interests you the most? Why? What philosophical questions listed in this section would you most want to have answers to?

1.2 SOCRATES AND THE EXAMINED LIFE

The point of philosophy is to start with something so simple as not to seem worth stating, and to end with something so paradoxical that no one will believe it.

—Bertrand Russell

4 Socrates says that a good man can never be harmed. What do you think he means by this?

The **Socratic method** is a question-and-answer dialogue in which propositions are methodically scrutinized to uncover the truth.

The chief benefit, which results from philosophy, arises in an indirect manner, and proceeds more from its secret, insensible influence, than from its immediate application.

—David Hume

There is no better way to understand and appreciate the philosophical quest for knowledge than to study the life and work of Socrates, one of philosophy's greatest practitioners and the most revered figure in its history. Socrates wrote no philosophy, but we know about his thinking and character through his famous pupil Plato, who portrayed him in several dialogues, or conversations (notably in *Euthyphro*, *Crito*, and *Apology*). For two and a half millennia Socrates has been inspiring generations by his devotion to philosophical inquiry, his relentless search for wisdom, and his determination to live according to his own high standards. As mentioned earlier, he famously said that “the unexamined life is not worth living,” and he became the best example of someone living his life by that maxim. Thus, at a time when most philosophy was directed at cosmological speculations, he turned to critically examining people's basic concepts, common beliefs, and moral thinking.

For Socrates, an unexamined life is a tragedy because it results in grievous harm to the soul, a person's true self or essence. The soul is harmed by lack of knowledge—ignorance of one's own self and of the most important values in life (the good). But knowledge of these things is a mark of the soul's excellence. A clear sign that a person has an unhealthy soul is her exclusive pursuit of social status, wealth, power, and pleasure instead of the good of the soul. The good of the soul is attained only through an uncompromising search for what's true and real, through the wisdom to see what is most vital in life. Such insight comes from rational self-examination and critical questioning of facile assumptions and unsupported beliefs. To get to the truth, Socrates thought, we must go around the false certitudes of custom, tradition, and superstition and let reason be our guide. Thus he played the role of philosophical gadfly, an annoying pest to the people of Athens, prodding them to wake up and seek the wisdom within their grasp.

We know very little about Socrates's life. He spent all his days in Athens except for a term of military service in which he soldiered in the Peloponnesian War. He was married and had three sons. He spent much of his time roaming the streets of Athens, speaking with anyone who would listen. His habit was to ask people seemingly simple questions about their views on virtue, religion, justice, or the good, challenging them to think critically about their basic assumptions. This sort of question-and-answer dialogue in which propositions are methodically scrutinized to uncover the truth has become known as the **Socratic method**. Usually when Socrates used it in conversations, or dialogues, with his fellow Athenians, their views would be exposed as false or confused. The main point of the exercise for Socrates, however, was not to win arguments but to get closer to the truth. He thought people who pursued this noble aim as he did should not be embarrassed by being shown to be wrong; they should be delighted to be weaned from a false opinion. Nevertheless, the Socratic conversations often ended in the humiliation of eminent Athenians. They were enraged by Socrates, while many youths gravitated to him.

Eventually Socrates was arrested and charged with disrespecting the gods and corrupting the youth of the city. He was tried before five hundred jurors, a majority

Philosophers At Work

Plato

No philosopher—with the possible exception of Aristotle—has had a deeper and more lasting effect on Western thought than Plato (c. 427–347 BCE). He was born in Athens into an influential aristocratic family and grew up during the perilous years of the Peloponnesian War, a struggle between Athens and the Peloponnesian states. He was a student and admirer of Socrates, who turned Plato’s mind toward philosophy and the pursuit of wisdom. He was horrified by Socrates’s execution in 399 for impiety and corruption of Athenian youth, so he left Athens and traveled widely, possibly to Sicily and Egypt. When he returned to Athens, he founded the Academy, a teaching college regarded as the first university, and devoted the rest of his life to teaching and writing philosophy. (The Academy endured for hundreds of years until it was abolished by the Eastern Roman emperor Justinian I.) The Academy’s most renowned student was Aristotle, who entered the school at age seventeen and remained for twenty years.

Plato’s thinking is embodied in his dialogues, twenty-five of which exist in their complete form. They were written during a span of fifty years and have been divided into three periods: early, middle, and late. The early dialogues include *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Meno*, and *Gorgias*. These early works portray Socrates as a brilliant and principled deflater of his contemporaries’ bogus claims to knowledge. The middle dialogues include *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Theaetetus*; the late ones consist of *Critias*, *Parmenides*, *Sophist*, *Laws*, and others.



Figure 1.4 Plato (c. 427–347 BCE).

of whom voted to convict him. His sentence was death or exile; he chose death by poison rather than leave his beloved Athens. In his dialogues *Crito* and *Phaedo*, Plato recounts the events of the trial, including Socrates’s address to the jurors. Socrates is portrayed as a man of brilliant intellect and unshakeable integrity who would not compromise his principles, even to escape death.

In one form or another, the Socratic method has been part of Western education for centuries. It is one of the ways that philosophy is done, a powerful procedure for applying critical thinking to many statements that seem out of reason’s reach. As Socrates used it, the method typically would go like this: (1) someone poses a question about the meaning of a concept (for example, “What is justice?”); (2) Socrates’s companion gives an answer; (3) Socrates raises questions about the answer, proving that the answer is inadequate; (4) to avoid the problems inherent in this answer, the companion offers a second answer; (5) steps (3) and (4) are repeated a number of