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PREFACE

This book aims to be a comprehensive and challenging introduction to philosophy for the student who is more comfortable with secondary than with primary sources. Although philosophers do speak in their own words in this text when appropriate, this book consists primarily of summary, explication, and discussion of the major arguments on the issues involved. The writing style is relatively informal. The text is organized in a conventional and straightforward way. It begins with an overview of philosophy (Chapter 1) and an introduction to logical thinking (Chapter 2). It then explores a series of basic issues related to human action and our dealings with each other: determinism and freedom (Chapters 3 and 4), ethics, and its ultimate justification (Chapters 5 and 6). Next, it proceeds to more theoretical issues: the nature of reality and knowledge (Chapters 7 and 8) and the existence of God (Chapter 9). The book concludes with three chapters that examine nontraditional questions or perspectives: whether a dolphin is a "person" (Chapter 10), the different claims by Karl Marx and Albert Einstein that things aren't the way they appear to be (Chapter 11), and the way that Buddhism and Native American thought see the world very differently from a traditional Western perspective.

Spirit of the Book

My first goal in writing this book was to produce a text that students would actually read. Thus, the style, tone, and content aim to make the text easy to read, unintimidating, and intellectually engaging. In the same spirit, I have also included a fair amount of material from other disciplines. One of the most difficult aspects of teaching introductory philosophy is students' limited prior exposure to it. They usually know something about the natural and social sciences, however, so certain chapters may help some students feel more comfortable. The treatment of determinism and freedom (Chapters 3 and 4) employs arguments from psychologists B. F. Skinner and Sigmund Freud and neuroscientist Benjamin Libet. The chapter on dolphins draws from marine biology. Albert Einstein is central to Chapter 11. This book also makes a concerted effort to recognize the important contributions of female thinkers: Carol Gilligan, Virginia Held, Janice Moulton, and Martha Nussbaum.

More than anything else, however, I have tried to write a book that helps students become adept and comfortable with doing philosophy—and doing it at an intellectually respectable level. Central to this book, therefore, is the activity of argumentation and consideration of the intricacies of the arguments we explore.

In the exploration of an argument, you will find that I sometimes hazard my own opinion about the strengths or weaknesses of certain positions. (Whenever I do this, however, I try to make it plain that my opinion is just that—my opinion, not the "correct

answer," and not something with which you or your students will necessarily agree.) I do this primarily to demonstrate that after understanding a philosopher's position we are supposed to react to it, not memorize it. I also do this to stimulate students' thinking and to help generate class discussion. My opinion is usually offered simply in passing comments, but I have also included one extended interpretation of some of the philosophical literature discussed. In Chapter 6, I offer a speculative reading of Socrates's idea that vice harms the doer. Chapter 10 reflects my own research on the question of dolphins and personhood.

I hope that this book achieves these aims, helps you in working with your students, and helps them reach the goals you set for them in your course. I will be grateful for any reactions, positive or negative, that you or your students have to this text and particularly for any suggestions for improving it.

Every book is the product of many hands, so I would like to express my thanks to those who helped with the revision and production of this book: B. Patrick Williams of Chemeketa Community College; Raymond Watkins of Central Carolina Technical College; Jeff Herman, my agent; Jeff Dean, my editor; Liz Wilson, production director; and Lori Rider, copy editor. Of course, any weaknesses in the final product are my responsibility.

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TO THE STUDENT

Western philosophy emerged centuries ago on the shores of the Aegean and in the dusty streets of Athens. To the thinkers of ancient Greece, doing philosophy was a natural part of being human. "What is the nature of the world around us?" they asked. "How do our minds work?" "What is the path to happiness?"

The spirit of philosophy has not changed in the two thousand years that have followed. Philosophy is still devoted to understanding the world around us and within us. It requires that we use our minds to explore reality in general and the human experience in particular. Despite the stereotyped image of the philosopher as someone out of touch with everyday experience, philosophy has the most practical of aims: to understand the basic issues of life. This book is written with the original spirit of philosophy in mind. Its first aim is to show you how natural a part of life philosophy is and that, without knowing it, you have already wrestled with many philosophical problems.

The methodology of philosophy does not come as naturally, however. Accordingly, this book also hopes to introduce you to philosophical argumentation and to skills of analytical and critical thought needed for practicing philosophy. Its second aim, then, is to get you comfortable doing philosophy.

Ultimately, I hope that this book will help you experience firsthand the value, pleasure, and adventure of philosophy. Philosophy enriches our lives in ways that nothing else does. It expands our sense of the nature of our world and of ourselves. It gives us a new universe to explore. It helps us clarify our life's goals and choose the means by which we hope to achieve them. Philosophy strengthens our control over our own lives and thus helps us remain the "captain of our souls." As you experience this for yourself, I hope you will make philosophy an integral part of your life.

Part One: Introduction

Chapter 1

What Is Philosophy?

Most of us have either the wrong idea, or no idea at all, of what studying philosophy is all about. If you're feeling uncomfortable about the prospect of taking a philosophy course, perhaps the following will help ease your mind.

First off, you're probably feeling uncertain because you don't know what to expect from a philosophy course. You've already studied subjects like mathematics, history, English, foreign languages, biology, and chemistry. You may have also done a little anthropology, sociology, or political science. You have worked with computers. You know what art and music are, whether you studied them or not. Your previous experience, then, gives you some idea of what's coming in college courses on these subjects.

But philosophy? That's different. You've heard about philosophy and philosophers, but it's probably not something you immediately relate to. There is something about philosophy and philosophers that's alien to the way average people see themselves. After you graduate, you probably expect to be a lawyer, computer programmer, sales manager, teacher, or corporate executive. But who aspires to be a philosopher? You know the image most of us have—someone impractical, unrealistic, and absentminded, some character with hair flying in every direction, lost in thought while pondering "great ideas."[1]

This image of a philosopher being "out of touch" is even suggested by the very word "philosophy." Literally, the word means "love of wisdom." (It derives from two ancient Greek words: *philia*, "love," and *sophia*, "wisdom.") And who's going to go around saying that they "love wisdom" except somebody who's a little strange?

You will find, however, that philosophy is a natural activity. In one way or another most people either already think like philosophers or can do so with just a little help. That's because when it comes down to it, as you're about to see, philosophy is a way of thinking that comes naturally.

What Is Philosophy About?

What is **philosophy** about?[2] And how is philosophy such a natural thing to do that you're probably already doing it without knowing it?

1. One of the first caricatures we have of a philosopher is that of the Greek thinker Socrates. In the comedy titled *The Clouds*, Aristophanes portrays the philosopher as someone absolutely useless and ridiculous. When we first meet Socrates in the play, he's sitting in a basket suspended in midair and staring at the sky.

2. The first time a word listed in the glossary appears in each chapter, it will be in boldface type.

More than anything else, philosophy is *thinking*. The main instrument that philosophers use in conducting their investigations is the human mind. They don't try to solve philosophical problems by conducting scientific, empirical research. They *think*. So do you. You think just because you're human.

Of course, philosophers don't just think about whatever crosses their minds.

They think about *life's most basic questions*:

- Are our actions free or determined?
- How do we know the difference between right and wrong?
- What is the purpose of life?
- Is there a God?

Who doesn't think about some very basic questions every now and then? You may not make a career out of it, but you have done it.

Philosophers also try to come up with answers to these questions, to explain them to other people, and to defend them against criticism and opposing answers. And you've also done some of that.

philosophy Philosophy is an active, intellectual enterprise dedicated to exploring the most fundamental questions of life.

Philosophy even tries to get something positive out of uncertainty, confusion, and argument. If philosophers who disagree can't prove whose answer is right, they believe that discussion can still produce a greater understanding of the issues at stake. And you have probably had that experience as well.

"Doing" Philosophy in Real Life

Imagine, for example, that your friend asks you to help him cheat on an assignment. You're torn between loyalty to a friend and uneasiness about doing something dishonest. You tell him you would rather not help him cheat. He tries to get you to change your mind, explaining that he doesn't see anything wrong with what he's asking. But you don't see it that way. The two of you get into a long discussion of cheating—why you think it is wrong, why he doesn't, why he thinks friendship is more important, and why you do not. It may surprise you to hear that this fairly typical event in the life of a college student contains all the basic elements of doing philosophy.

How you determine the difference between right and wrong is certainly a basic issue. We base all our actions on our sense of right and wrong. So the subject of your disagreement with your friend is philosophical. In your discussion with him you're forced to explain your decision, so you have to think seriously about your assumptions. In order to handle his objections, you have to think further about the issues and defend your position against his arguments. Let's say that ultimately neither one of you convinces the other. Has the discussion produced anything? Sure—a better understanding of the issue and of each other.

This is what philosophers do too. They think about basic questions and come up with answers, explain why they think that way, and defend their positions against people who

disagree. Philosophers do this in the hope of either settling the matter or at least producing a greater understanding of the issues involved.

Now consider all the times you think about fundamental questions. You wonder whether God exists and if there is any way of proving it. Your best friend discovers she's pregnant and the two of you talk about whether she should have an abortion. You consider taking a drug that's illegal in your state but legal in many others. In all these cases, you're thinking about standard philosophical questions, coming to some personal answers, and growing in your understanding. The only difference between you and a professional philosopher is that he or she thinks about the same questions in a more technical, disciplined, and informed way.

Doing philosophy, then, is one of the most common activities of life, something natural, normal, and, best of all, familiar.

Philosophy—Activity, Not Content

Note in particular that philosophy is an activity. Philosophy is active, not passive. It's a way of thinking, something you do, a skill you get better at as you practice, not a body of facts that you memorize. And there is a good and bad side to that. The good news is that once you get the hang of it, philosophical thinking expands your ability to see things. It also encourages you to think independently. You can entertain all kinds of ideas or theories about an issue then make up your own mind. No philosophy teacher will ever say to you, "I don't care what you think, just give me the correct answer to my question." How you think about the questions and about other philosophers' answers and how you explain and defend what you think are what it's all about.

Moreover, philosophers are not "authorities." They are only as good as their arguments. If their arguments are not convincing, forget it. The ancient Greek thinker Socrates may have been a great philosopher, but you don't just take his word for it. He still must convince you.

The bad news, however, is that since you probably haven't studied anything like this before, you're going to have to learn new ways of handling things. In a philosophy course, you start by understanding a philosopher's ideas. But then you need to come up with your own judgment.

Philosophy is a dynamic process. That is one of the things that makes it so interesting—and hard to get used to. It isn't just learning the answers that earlier philosophers have come up with. It's also coming up with your own. So get used to the idea that you are about to embark on an active enterprise.

The Basic Issues

Because the subject of philosophy is the "basic issues" of life, it's not surprising that we encounter a wide range of topics and problems when we study philosophy. Over time,

philosophy has been divided into several branches, each devoted to different, but still basic, questions. What are these issues and what are the parts of philosophy?

The Most Fundamental Issues

Every philosophical question is basic. But some questions are more basic than others, and philosophy starts with those.

Reality

What's the most elementary thing you can say about yourself? That you're tall? Short? White? Black? No. That you are male or female? Simpler than that. That you are human? Still simpler. Just that you are. What's the most fundamental characteristic of any object you can describe? Distinguishing characteristics? No. Simply that it is real. It exists. Now we've hit bedrock, because the nature of reality, or of existence, is the most basic issue we can talk about. The most fundamental philosophical question, then, is: what is the nature of *reality*?

What do we mean when we say something is "real"? What's the difference between "real" and "not real" or "imaginary"? Does something have to exist physically to be real? Or is it enough that it exists in our minds? Which are more real? Chairs and tables that present themselves to our eyes but that will eventually wear out, break up, and be thrown out precisely because they're material objects? Or the circles and triangles that we see only with our mind's eye, which are "perfect" and haven't changed or decayed a bit since humans discovered the abstract world of mathematics thousands of years ago?

Free Will

Consider another basic aspect of life. Think again about the most fundamental things you can say about yourself. You exist. You're alive. You control your actions. That is, your deeds are not merely automatic products of instinct. You have what philosophers call free will.

But do you really? Sure, we all *feel* free. Yet aren't our choices influenced by our upbringing, the values we're taught, the norms provided by our culture? Perhaps some of our behavior is determined by our genetic makeup. What about the impact of our worst, irrational fears? What about the power of the unconscious mind? Perhaps you believe that God has people's lives all planned out. Perhaps you believe in fate. And if the future is somehow already determined, what room is left for choice? These problems lead us to yet another basic philosophical question: how "free" are we?

Knowledge

Another basic feature you have is intelligence. You can think and know things. Intellectual activity is such a basic part of human life that our species is named for this ability—*Homo sapiens* ("the thinking hominid"). This brings us to another philosophical issue: what is involved in *knowing* something?

At first this might look like a simple question. We say we know something when we have acceptable reasons or proof for what we claim. I can say that I know that my computer is sitting in front of me because I can see it. I also know that the great English humanist Sir Thomas More died in 1535 because I've done research on More for years, and that is what the historical records show. I even know that the sum of the interior angles of every triangle that ever has or ever will exist is 180 degrees. Have I measured them all? Not very likely. How do I know it? Because this is, in fact, the definition of a triangle.

Each of these three examples involves knowledge, but each example is different. I claim to know something in each case, but the reasons I give keep changing. My first claim is based on direct sense experience. The second involves secondhand evidence, ultimately based on someone else's firsthand experience. And the third doesn't rely on sense experience at all. If they're so different, do all these examples involve knowledge? The same kind of knowledge?

Right and Wrong

So far, we've identified basic philosophical issues raised by the simple fact that we exist (reality), that we do things (free will), and that we know (knowledge). Let's move on to something a little less abstract.

When we choose what to do, we use certain standards or values to guide us. We also use these values to evaluate what other people do. Our society, like all societies, suggests some standards for our behavior, the most important of which are laws and customs. Organizations we belong to, schools we go to, religious groups we belong to, and companies we work for also have their rules, regulations, and policies.

But sometimes those are not enough, or they may conflict with each other. For example, even though it is illegal, many underage students use false IDs to buy liquor. Do you think they're doing something wrong? The traffic laws say you should stop at red lights and stop signs. But what should you do if you are rushing a sick friend to the hospital? Your religion tells you that sex before marriage is wrong, but you are deeply in love with someone and you don't feel that anything you do would be wrong. These ethical dilemmas lead us to yet another philosophical question: how do we separate *right* from *wrong*?

Questions about right and wrong can get as complicated as those about reality or knowledge. We need an ultimate standard of conduct. But where do we find something like that? How do you choose between two actions, both of which seem wrong to you? How would you explain the basis of your standard of right and wrong to someone who disagrees with you? Maybe your standard is influenced by your personal religious beliefs. Yet how could you convince an atheist that you were right? Even if you do have some standard for separating right from wrong, why should you act on it? Why should you do right and not do wrong? What if you don't have enough money for books and you can steal it from somebody who's rich? Is there any good reason not to, especially if you can get away with it?

Many questions come up when we look at the everyday problem of evaluating human actions against some fundamental standard. And, it will come as no surprise, these are philosophical questions.

How Do We Organize Our Communities?

Questions of right and wrong come up because we live with other people and need some standard for judging their conduct as well as our own. But the fact that we live in communities also creates some issues on a larger scale—and still more philosophical questions. How should decisions be made that affect the common good? Does everybody vote about every little thing? Or do you assign some of these decisions to others—that is, do you create a government? What kind of government do you want? Who gets to make the rules that everybody in the group must live by? What if the group's rules force some people to do things they find wrong according to their personal standards? Are they entitled to disobey those rules? How do you decide if a law is "just" or not?

"Big" Issues: The Meaning of Life

Philosophers are nothing if not curious, so it shouldn't surprise you that they can't resist tackling the really "big" questions.

We didn't create our universe, so how did it get here? Is it the result of natural processes operating over billions or trillions of years? Or did someone create it? Are we alone in this universe, or is there a *God* as well? Not surprisingly, proofs for the existence of God have been debated by philosophers for thousands of years.

These sorts of questions raise still more. If there is a spiritual dimension to reality, does that mean that we have "souls" or "spirits" that continue to exist after our bodies wear out? Is there life after death? For that matter, have we lived other lives before this one? More people on this planet believe in reincarnation than reject the idea. Who is right?

Also, what is the *purpose of life*? Is it a test of some sort? If so, what counts as "passing"? Making a lot of money and becoming rich and famous? Doing some kind of important work? Devoting our lives to helping people less fortunate than ourselves? Growing personally or spiritually as much as possible? Questions of the ultimate purpose of life, then, are also common grist for the philosopher's mill.

The Subject Matter of Philosophy

This quick survey of a few basic questions should give you a decent idea of what philosophy is all about. It is not some arcane study that has nothing to do with real life. It is an intellectual activity devoted to understanding the most basic dimensions of what it means to exist as a human being alone and in community with others. As such, it has everything to do with real life.

Philosophical Questions

The questions that philosophers ask are obviously varied. One thing they have in common is that all these questions arise from thinking about the fundamental aspects of life. But they also share something else that is distinctive of a philosophical question—their *conceptual* nature.

If I ask you if it's raining, how do you find out the answer? You look outside. And if I ask you how many students are in a particular classroom at noon on Monday? You go and count the people. In each case, you get the facts. Many questions are like this. They're answered by doing some empirical investigation.

Or what if you want to know if you can leave your car somewhere overnight without getting a ticket? You call the police. What if you want to know if you can take a particular deduction on your taxes? Contact the IRS. In these cases, you're still getting facts, but they're facts of a different kind. There are specific answers that will settle your questions, but you must find the right person, book, or body of law that tells you what they are. You must seek the judgment of an authority.

Philosophical questions, by contrast, involve conceptual issues. Think about the account of the philosophical topics you just read. All those philosophical questions boil down to basic concepts or principles. And that is the defining feature of a philosophical question. Reality, knowledge, right, wrong, justice, and the like are all concepts. The challenge of a philosophical investigation is exploring the principles and concepts at issue and applying the results to situations that involve those ideas.

Philosophical "Answers"

Similarly, the "answers" to these questions share an important property that also characterizes philosophy. Because of the conceptual nature of the fundamental issues philosophy considers, philosophers can never give absolute proof that they are right.

Philosophical questions do not get "solved" as empirical questions do. The empirical question "How many inches are in a foot?" has a single, correct answer; all others are wrong. But a philosophical question like "Is abortion wrong?" has more than one plausible answer. Depending on the positions taken on such debatable issues as "life," "personhood," and "rights," we can find even completely opposing arguments that are reasonable and believable. Similarly, we can make a plausible case for saying that we're free to choose anything we want whenever we want to. On the other hand, we can also make an intelligent case for saying that our sense of freedom is an illusion—that we fool ourselves into thinking we're free when our behavior is actually determined. It is simply a characteristic of philosophical issues that we fall short of absolute certainty. And this means that philosophical thinking generally deals more in probability and plausibility than absolute truth and falsehood.

The Parts of Philosophy

You now have an understanding of the subjects that philosophy discusses and something of the nature of philosophy. However, without realizing it, you also have acquired a sense of the primary branches of philosophy.

Very fundamental and abstract issues relating to existence in general (like the nature of reality) and human existence in particular (such as free will) are taken up in the part of philosophy called **metaphysics**. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle called this branch of philosophy "first philosophy," and that's a good way to think about it. Metaphysics concentrates on the first or most fundamental questions we encounter when we begin studying the most basic issues of life.[3]

metaphysics Metaphysics is the part of philosophy concerned with the most basic issues, for example, reality, existence, personhood, and freedom versus determinism. Metaphysics was originally referred to by Aristotle as "first philosophy."

epistemology Epistemology, also called "theory of knowledge," is the part of philosophy concerned with "knowledge" and related concepts.

ethics Ethics, also called "moral philosophy," is the part of philosophy concerned with right, wrong, and other issues related to evaluating human conduct.

political philosophy Political philosophy is the part of philosophy that addresses the philosophical issues that arise from the fact that we live together in communities. These issues include the nature of political authority, justice, and the problem of harmonizing freedom and obligation.

Another fundamental part of philosophy is theory of knowledge, or **epistemology**, which takes up the questions we saw earlier related to the nature of knowledge. "Epistemology" combines two Greek words, *epistéme* and *logos,* and literally means "the study of knowledge." *Epistéme* means "knowledge." *Logos* has many meanings, but in this context it means "the study of." The suffix "-logy" can be found at the end of many English words: "biology" (the study of life), "geology" (the study of the earth), and so on.

When we encounter the practical issues of philosophy, we move into **ethics**, or *moral philosophy,* and **political philosophy**. "Ethics" is the part of philosophy that discusses right and wrong, and the word is derived from the Greek word for "custom, habit, or character," *ethikos.* ("Moral" comes from the Latin word for "character," *mores.*) "Political philosophy" takes up the wider issues that arise from our living together, such as legitimate authority, justice, and speculation about the ideal society. Its root is *polis,* another Greek word, which means "city."

3. "Metaphysics" comes from two ancient Greek words, *meta* "after," and *physika* "physics." In light of contemporary usage, where "metaphysical" usually means "abstract" or "abstruse," you might think that "metaphysics" takes its name from the fact that it studies highly abstract issues "beyond the physical realm." While such questions are "metaphysical," the word is actually a historical accident. The Greek philosopher Aristotle gave a series of lectures dealing with the most basic questions in philosophy; as I mentioned, he called this "first philosophy." The treatise containing these lectures was never given a title, but after Aristotle's death his students traditionally filed it after Aristotle's lectures on nature, which the philosopher called "the physics." Thus, *METAPHYSICS* meant something more like "the scroll filed after *The Physics*" than "lectures on transcendental questions." That is why the best way to understand metaphysics is to remember that Aristotle called it "first philosophy." That is, think of it as the part of philosophy that asks the "first" or most basic questions.

Aristotle (384–322 BCE) was born in the small town of Stagira in Macedonia, just to the north of Greece proper, into a family with a strong medical tradition. His father was the court physician to the king of Macedonia, and this medical heritage strongly influenced Aristotle's intellectual development. Aristotle's philosophical investigations covered an extraordinary range of topics and were characterized by a largely empirical approach, but he also did work in such natural sciences as biology and astronomy.

Aristotle arrived in Athens at the age of eighteen and studied at Plato's Academy until the death of his teacher some twenty years later. Leaving Athens, Aristotle traveled to Asia Minor, where he seems to have spent a few years studying marine biology. He was then recalled to the Macedonian court in order to tutor the son of King Philip. The boy was Alexander, whose military conquests subsequently left him remembered as "Alexander the Great." Aristotle returned to Athens in 334 BCE and established his own school, the Lyceum, where he taught for the next eleven years. The death of Alexander in 323 BCE, however, unleashed a wave of anti-Macedonian sentiment in Athens, and a charge of impiety, a capital offense, was leveled against Aristotle. Rather than allow Athens to "sin twice against philosophy," as Aristotle put it (the philosopher Socrates had been executed on the same charge in 399 BCE), Aristotle left Athens for an island north of the city, where he died the following year.

Metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and political philosophy are the main divisions of philosophy. But given the wide range of topics that philosophers study, it should come as no surprise that there are also many important but more narrowly focused branches of philosophy, like philosophy of art, philosophy of science, and philosophy of language. Finally, in a class by itself, there is **logic**, the part of philosophy devoted to studying reason itself and the structure of arguments. Logic is the foundation on which any philosophical investigation is built, and modern philosophy of logic explores some highly technical philosophical questions.

Why Studying Philosophy Is Valuable

So far you have seen that philosophy stems quite naturally from thinking about life's basic questions. And you have been introduced to some of those questions and to the different branches of philosophy. You should now be ready for what we're going to study in the chapters ahead.

Before we move on, however, we should address one more issue—why studying philosophy is worthwhile. Whatever you imagine you will get out of a philosophy course, let me assure you that if you work hard through this course, you will develop skills, abilities, and insights that will help you for the rest of your life.

Analytical Abilities

The skills you will pick up are easy to describe. You will develop stronger analytical abilities. You will handle abstract problems better. You will learn how to argue more effectively.

And you will have a stronger imagination. Philosophy helps to shape in a positive way what we might call the "general cut of your mind." This is invaluable in whatever career you choose to follow. The most successful people use analysis and argument all the time. Successful people make their mark by solving difficult problems and convincing other people they're right.

In preparing this book, I asked several successful executives to tell me what they thought students should study if they wanted to succeed in business. They listed only a few technical subjects—accounting and finance, for example. (The technical end of business, they said, you learn mainly on the job.) Otherwise, they suggested courses that help develop your ability to think about problems analytically and to communicate your analysis and recommendations to other people. Time and again, these executives identified philosophy as one of the most important areas you can study for learning how to think in a disciplined, analytical, and imaginative way.

Vision and Insight

The way that philosophy helps you see the world is no less real than its practical benefits to your career. Studying philosophy exposes you to a wide range of problems that you wouldn't meet otherwise. It simply lets you see more of the world. It stretches your imagination. It challenges you to come up with your own answers to tough issues that do not have ready-made solutions. If you take it seriously, philosophy teaches you different ways of looking at the world.

Studying philosophy helps you develop insight into some of life's great puzzles and fashion your own vision of what life is all about. As you go through life, you will be challenged all along the way to make decisions about who you are and what's important to you. What will you do with your life? What career will you pursue? Will you marry? And if so, what kind of person? Will you have children? How will you rear them? What will you tell them is important? What are you willing to do for money and success? How will you cope with the crises you will encounter in your own life or in the lives of those you love—illness, accidents, problems on the job or at home, death? Philosophy helps you develop a sense of what life is all about and where you're going.

In fact, Socrates, one of the first great philosophers, thought that philosophy is the single most important element in making our lives worthwhile. "The unexamined life," he said, "is not worth living." The habit of thinking philosophically lets us scrutinize our values, our goals, and the means we've chosen to achieve them, and it helps us keep our lives on course. In Socrates's mind, at least, philosophy makes it possible for us to control our own destiny. And that's no small matter.

As you now know, philosophy is simply thinking systematically about life's most basic issues. When it comes down to it, there is no way that thinking about these questions cannot make you better prepared to live your life.

Previews of Coming Chapters

Now that you have a sense of what philosophy is, you're ready to plunge in yourself. What's coming up in the rest of this book? We cannot cover every important aspect of such a large subject in an introductory text. We will, however, talk about most of philosophy's basic topics and a few specialized ones.

We'll start preparing ourselves by "tuning the instrument," that is, the mind. Since we do philosophy by thinking, the best place to begin is by studying some of the "rules of reason" alluded to earlier. Chapter 2, "Thinking Like a Philosopher," will introduce you to the ground rules regarding logic and critical thinking.

In the next section, "Exploring the Basics of Who We Are and Dealing with Others," we look at some of the most fundamental characteristics of our existence. We start with two chapters that consider opposing points of view about the issue of human freedom. In "The Case for Determinism" (Chapter 3), we look at the arguments in favor of determinism, and we explore the case for free will in Chapter 4 ("The Case for Freedom"). Then we examine basic issues related to our living with other people. We look at how philosophers talk about "right" and "wrong" in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6, "Why Be Ethical?", we ask why we should make the effort to do what's right.

In the chapters that make up "Fundamental Theoretical Issues," we explore basic philosophical problems of a more abstract nature. We start with absolute bedrock—"What Is Real and How Do We Know It?" Chapters 7 and 8 give us competing answers, the former emphasizing the physical senses (empiricism) and the latter the mind (rationalism). In Chapter 9, "Does God Exist?", we examine the main "proofs" for the existence of God.

We'll conclude with "Perhaps Things Aren't Really the Way They Appear": three chapters that question a variety of claims most people think are too obvious to doubt. Chapter 10 ("Dolphins—Personhood, Rights, and Flourishing") argues that humans aren't the only animal on the planet with advanced intellectual and emotional abilities. Chapter 11 looks at the provocative but very different ways in which Marx and Einstein argue that things aren't what they appear to be. Our final chapter ("Alternative Perspectives") examines two serious challenges to a traditional, Western perspective—Buddhism and Native American thought.

This book, then, will give you a basic but solid understanding of what philosophy is all about. It will serve as a road map for what many of us think is one of life's most exciting, enriching, and engaging adventures—discovering philosophy. You will see new sights, explore new worlds, expand your horizons, and, most importantly, learn much about yourself. As with any journey, what you get out of it is mainly up to you. But if you give philosophy half a chance, it just might take you to a place you never want to leave.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you already thought about any of the philosophical questions identified in this chapter? What spurred this? Another course? A debate about a controversial issue? A dramatic or life-changing experience? Your own proclivity to think deeply?
2. Later chapters of this book will explore in depth the main philosophical issues identified previously. But try your hand at taking a position and fashioning an argument on any of the following questions: How free are our actions? What makes an action morally wrong? Does God exist?
3. What do you expect to get out of studying philosophy? What will make it worth all the time and effort you will put in? Will just a good grade do it? If philosophy doesn't help you become more successful in your career, does that mean it has no value?

Selected Readings

A superb source for detailed information about almost every philosopher and philosophical issue is *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Paul Edwards, 8 vols. (New York: Collier-Macmillan / Free Press, 1967, reprinted 1972). An excellent online source is the Stanford *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (https://plato.stanford.edu/). Also see *The Philosopher's Index* (https://philindex.org/).