



Introduction to

Philosophy

Introduction to Philosophy

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HARDCOVER BOOK ISBN-13

978-1-711470-79-5

B&W PAPERBACK BOOK ISBN-13

978-1-711470-78-8

DIGITAL VERSION ISBN-13

978-1-951693-59-6

ORIGINAL PUBLICATION YEAR

2022

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 RS 22

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Preface

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About *Introduction to Philosophy*

Introduction to Philosophy provides an overview of a common range of philosophical topics for a first- or second-year general education philosophy course. It is organized thematically, following the principal categories of academic philosophy (logic, metaphysics, epistemology, theories of value, and history of philosophy). A recurring theme of *Introduction to Philosophy* is its incorporation of multicultural and global perspectives. Texts, thinkers, and concepts from Middle Eastern, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Latin American, Indigenous, and African philosophy are fully integrated into discussions of concepts and topics, broadening the study of philosophy beyond the Western tradition. Another goal of the text is to help students develop critical thinking, reading, and writing skills.

Reflecting the Full Diversity of Human Understanding

A multicultural and global perspective is a central organizing principle of *Introduction to Philosophy*. This text explores Eastern, African, and Indigenous perspectives in concert with and, in some cases, in juxtaposition to classical Western thinkers. Additionally, the authors have made a special effort to highlight the philosophical work of women, who have made important contributions to the history of philosophy in numerous traditions. This broader emphasis introduces students to approaches that open up traditional philosophical questions in provocative ways, offering fresh possibilities for social and individual understanding. As just one example, alongside discussion of the individualistic ways that Hume and Locke attempted to answer the question “what is the self” appears discussion of the African concept of *ubuntu*, sometimes translated as “a person is a person through other persons.” Discussions of the four noble truths of Buddhism as a path to achieve liberation from suffering, the four interrelated concepts at the heart of Mohist ethical theory, and Carol Gilligan’s care ethics are other examples of well-established answers to deep philosophical questions that provide fresh additions to classical Western ways of thinking.

Providing Students with Transferable Skills

Introduction to Philosophy is intentionally organized to develop critical thinking, research, reading, and writing skills. There is an entire chapter devoted to these transferrable skills associated with philosophy. Another chapter addresses logic and reasoning. Additionally, interspersed throughout the text are features providing guidance on how to read philosophy effectively, how to conduct research and evaluate sources, and how to write philosophy papers. These features aim to be very explicit about the habits and practices that enable one to be a good student of philosophy and, by extension, a good critical thinker.

Reminding Readers that Philosophy Is a Living Discipline

Calling attention to the fact that philosophy is not just a feature of our human past, *Introduction to Philosophy* discusses the ways contemporary academic philosophers address some of our most pressing ethical and moral issues. Examples include discussions of bioethics, emerging issues surrounding genetic engineering and communication technologies, what brain science can and cannot tell us about human consciousness, and morality pertaining to human treatment of the natural world. Through discussion of these topics and others, readers will gain awareness of the range of answers that contemporary philosophers offer to current issues and learn to appreciate the type of reasoning that philosophers use. Throughout the text, students are also encouraged to critically reflect on philosophical points of view and develop their own philosophical positions.

Enriching and Engaging Features

“Doing” Philosophy

While there is certainly not one method of “doing” philosophy, there are practices and habits that make someone a better reader, writer, researcher, and thinker in philosophy. A set of recurring features makes these skills explicit and concrete, with guidance geared toward the introductory student.

- **Think Like a Philosopher.** These features adopt one of two approaches. Some instances prompt students to engage with concepts key to philosophical argument, and thus to critical thinking, either in the form of interactive online exercises or as written guidance. Others guide students in formulating their own approaches to philosophical questions.
- **Write Like a Philosopher.** These features challenge the reader to articulate their own written responses to philosophical prompts or to craft their own philosophical arguments. Clear guidance is given on both the considerations that should appear in the response and the most effective structure for written philosophical discourse.
- **Read Like a Philosopher.** These features prompt students to engage with portions of key primary texts, such as Plato’s *Apology* or the *Daodejing*. Clear structure is provided, guiding the reader on what elements of the text to pay close attention to and what questions they should hold in their minds while reading.

“How It All Hangs Together”

Philosophy is an inherently interconnected undertaking that speaks to universal human concerns. The broad questions philosophers ask (e.g., what makes a good life, how does one define morality, how should people treat one another, what rights should be accorded individuals within society) touch many aspects of our social and individual existences. A number of features address the interconnectedness of philosophical inquiry and philosophical thought, as well as its relevance to all lives.

- **Connections features.** Throughout the text, callouts direct students to additional coverage of both important theories and key thinkers in other chapters.
- **Videos.** Video features provide supplemental information from trusted contemporary sources, such as the BBC Radio 4 series *A History of Ideas* and the e-series *Wi-Phi Philosophy*.
- **Podcasts.** Podcast links are provided from engaging series, such as *The History of Philosophy without Any Gaps* and *Philosophy Bites*.

Pedagogical Framework

An effective pedagogical framework helps students structure their learning and retain information.

- **Chapter Outlines.** Each chapter opens with an outline and introduction, familiarizing students with the material that will follow. Throughout the chapter, material is chunked into manageable sections of content within each of the larger main heads.
- **Learning Objectives.** Every main section begins with two to five clear, concise, and measurable learning objectives, tagged to Bloom’s levels. These objectives are designed to help the instructor decide what content to include or assign and to guide student expectations. After completing the textual sections and end-of-chapter exercises, students should be able to demonstrate mastery of the learning objectives.
- **Chapter Summaries.** Organized by section heads, chapter summaries distill the information presented in each chapter to key, concise points.
- **Key Terms.** Key terms are bolded and followed by in-text definitions. A glossary of key terms also appears at the end of each chapter.
- **Critical Thinking Questions.** Each chapter ends with 10 to 20 critical thinking questions, also organized by section head. Some of these questions assess recall of key concepts, while others ask students to think, read, and write like a philosopher. These more complex questions might prompt students to formulate thoughtful critiques of existing philosophical positions or to begin to articulate their own thoughts on philosophical questions. Any of these components can be used by instructors to build assessments and assignments for their courses.
- **“Further Reading” Suggestions.** Each chapter ends with suggested resources for students who wish to dive deeper into the thinkers and thoughts discussed in the chapters.

About the Authors

Senior Contributing Author



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Nathan Smith has a PhD in philosophy from Boston College and the University of Paris, Sorbonne. His dissertation was on René Descartes's early scientific and mathematical work. He has been a full-time instructor of philosophy at Houston Community College (HCC) since 2008. He has published on Descartes, phenomenology, and topics in Open Educational Resources (OER), including chapter contributions to an OER textbook through the Rebus Foundation. At HCC, he served as Chair of the Philosophy, Humanities, and Library Sciences Department from 2015 to 2017 and has served as the Open Educational Resources Coordinator since 2017. In this capacity he has secured and managed over \$500,000 in grants for the institution and leads a cross-disciplinary, district-wide effort to provide "zero cost books" courses and degree plans for students.

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Additional Resources

Student and Instructor Resources

We've compiled additional resources for both students and instructors, including an instructor's manual, test bank, and lecture slides. Instructor resources require a verified instructor account, which you can apply for when you log in or create your account on OpenStax.org. Take advantage of these resources to supplement *Introduction to Philosophy*.

- **Comprehensive Instructor's Manual.** Designed to provide maximum guidance for delivering content in an interesting and dynamic manner, each chapter of the instructor's manual includes an in-depth lecture outline, a key terms list, a set of "questions for further thought," and a list of recommended resources for further reading and exploration. Authored by Kyle Hirsh, *Community College of Aurora*.
- **Test Bank.** With 500 true/false and multiple-choice questions in our test bank, instructors can customize tests to support a variety of course objectives. The test bank is available in Word format. Authored by Steve Wyre, *American Public University*.
- **PowerPoint Lecture Slides.** The PowerPoint slides provide outlines, images, and an overview of chapter topics as a starting place for instructors to build their lectures. Authored by Gregory Browne, *Eastern Michigan University*.

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FIGURE 1.1 Philosophy begins with dialogue—with friends, with yourself, with other philosophers, and with the past. (credit: “Conversations Time moves slowly when talking with old friends” by Sagar/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- 1.1** What Is Philosophy?
- 1.2** How Do Philosophers Arrive at Truth?
- 1.3** Socrates as a Paradigmatic Historical Philosopher
- 1.4** An Overview of Contemporary Philosophy

INTRODUCTION For most college students, an Introduction to Philosophy course is their first encounter with the study of **philosophy**. Unlike most of your other courses, philosophy is not something usually covered in high school. Yet you are probably familiar with the term *philosophy* and may have some preconceived notion about what philosophy is and what philosophers do. Perhaps you have stayed up late at night talking with friends or family about topics like free will or the existence of God. Maybe you have a friend who always talks about big ideas or asks tough questions that sound like riddles. Perhaps you think of them as “philosophical”; you might be right.

In this chapter, we will provide a brief introduction to the field of philosophy as a historical and academic discipline. This first chapter should prepare you for your philosophy course and give you a better idea of what it means to be a philosopher. As with all introductions, this one is just a start. Your job is to explore more, think more, read more, and write more like a philosopher. Soon you may even find that you are doing philosophy.

1.1 What Is Philosophy?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify sages (early philosophers) across historical traditions.
- Explain the connection between ancient philosophy and the origin of the sciences.
- Describe philosophy as a discipline that makes coherent sense of a whole.
- Summarize the broad and diverse origins of philosophy.

It is difficult to define philosophy. In fact, to do so is itself a philosophical activity, since philosophers are attempting to gain the broadest and most fundamental conception of the world as it exists. The world includes nature, consciousness, morality, beauty, and social organizations. So the content available for philosophy is both broad and deep. Because of its very nature, philosophy considers a range of subjects, and philosophers cannot automatically rule anything out. Whereas other disciplines allow for basic assumptions, philosophers cannot be bound by such assumptions. This open-endedness makes philosophy a somewhat awkward and confusing subject for students. There are no easy answers to the questions of what philosophy studies or how one does philosophy. Nevertheless, in this chapter, we can make some progress on these questions by (1) looking at past examples of philosophers, (2) considering one compelling definition of philosophy, and (3) looking at the way academic philosophers today actually practice philosophy.

Historical Origins of Philosophy

One way to begin to understand philosophy is to look at its history. The historical origins of philosophical thinking and exploration vary around the globe. The word *philosophy* derives from ancient Greek, in which the philosopher is a lover or pursuer (*philia*) of wisdom (*sophia*). But the earliest Greek philosophers were not known as philosophers; they were simply known as **sages**. The sage tradition provides an early glimpse of philosophical thought in action. Sages are sometimes associated with mathematical and scientific discoveries and at other times with their political impact. What unites these figures is that they demonstrate a willingness to be skeptical of traditions, a curiosity about the natural world and our place in it, and a commitment to applying reason to understand nature, human nature, and society better. The overview of the sage tradition that follows will give you a taste of philosophy's broad ambitions as well as its focus on complex relations between different areas of human knowledge. There are some examples of women who made contributions to philosophy and the sage tradition in Greece, India, and China, but these were patriarchal societies that did not provide many opportunities for women to participate in philosophical and political discussions.

The Sages of India, China, Africa, and Greece

In classical Indian philosophy and religion, sages play a central role in both religious mythology and in the practice of passing down teaching and instruction through generations. The Seven Sages, or Saptarishi (seven rishis in the Sanskrit language), play an important role in ***sanatana dharma***, the eternal duties that have come to be identified with Hinduism but that predate the establishment of the religion. The Seven Sages are partially considered wise men and are said to be the authors of the ancient Indian texts known as the Vedas. But they are partly mythic figures as well, who are said to have descended from the gods and whose reincarnation marks the passing of each age of Manu (age of man or epoch of humanity). The rishis tended to live monastic lives, and together they are thought of as the spiritual and practical forerunners of Indian gurus or teachers, even up to today. They derive their wisdom, in part, from spiritual forces, but also from *tapas*, or the meditative, ascetic, and spiritual practices they perform to gain control over their bodies and minds. The stories of the rishis are part of the teachings that constitute spiritual and philosophical practice in contemporary Hinduism.

[Figure 1.2](#) depicts a scene from the Matsya Purana, where Manu, the first man whose succession marks the prehistorical ages of Earth, sits with the Seven Sages in a boat to protect them from a mythic flood that is said to have submerged the world. The king of serpents guides the boat, which is said to have also contained seeds,

plants, and animals saved by Manu from the flood.



FIGURE 1.2 This painting, from the late eighteenth century, depicts the first man, Manu, guiding seven sages through floodwaters, with the aid of the king of serpents. (credit: “Manu and Saptarishi” by unknown author/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

Despite the fact that classical Indian culture is patriarchal, women figures play an important role in the earliest writings of the Vedic tradition (the classical Indian religious and philosophical tradition). These women figures are partly connected to the Indian conception of the fundamental forces of nature—energy, ability, strength, effort, and power—as feminine. This aspect of God was thought to be present at the creation of the world. The Rig Veda, the oldest Vedic writings, contains hymns that tell the story of Ghosha, a daughter of Rishi Kakshivan, who had a debilitating skin condition (probably leprosy) but devoted herself to spiritual practices to learn how to heal herself and eventually marry. Another woman, Maitreyi, is said to have married the Rishi Yajnavalkya (himself a god who was cast into mortality by a rival) for the purpose of continuing her spiritual training. She was a devoted ascetic and is said to have composed 10 of the hymns in the Rig Veda. Additionally, there is a famous dialogue between Maitreyi and Yajnavalkya in the Upanishads (another early, foundational collection of texts in the Vedic tradition) about attachment to material possessions, which cannot give a person happiness, and the achievement of ultimate bliss through knowledge of the Absolute (God).

Another woman sage named Gargi also participates in a celebrated dialogue with Yajnavalkya on natural philosophy and the fundamental elements and forces of the universe. Gargi is characterized as one of the most knowledgeable sages on the topic, though she ultimately concedes that Yajnavalkya has greater knowledge. In these brief episodes, these ancient Indian texts record instances of key women who attained a level of enlightenment and learning similar to their male counterparts. Unfortunately, this early equality between the sexes did not last. Over time Indian culture became more patriarchal, confining women to a dependent and subservient role. Perhaps the most dramatic and cruel example of the effects of Indian patriarchy was the ritual practice of *sati*, in which a widow would sometimes immolate herself, partly in recognition of the “fact” that following the death of her husband, her current life on Earth served no further purpose (Rout 2016). Neither a widow’s in-laws nor society recognized her value.

In similar fashion to the Indian tradition, the sage (*sheng*) tradition is important for Chinese philosophy. Confucius, one of the greatest Chinese writers, often refers to ancient sages, emphasizing their importance for their discovery of technical skills essential to human civilization, for their role as rulers and wise leaders, and for their wisdom. This emphasis is in alignment with the Confucian appeal to a well-ordered state under the guidance of a “philosopher-king.” This point of view can be seen in early sage figures identified by one of the greatest classical authors in the Chinese tradition, as the “Nest Builder” and “Fire Maker” or, in another case, the “Flood Controller.” These names identify wise individuals with early technological discoveries. *The Book of Changes*, a classical Chinese text, identifies the Five (mythic) Emperors as sages, including Yao and Shun, who are said to have built canoes and oars, attached carts to oxen, built double gates for defense, and fashioned bows and arrows (Cheng 1983). Emperor Shun is also said to have ruled during the time of a great flood, when all of China was submerged. Yü is credited with having saved civilization by building canals and dams.



FIGURE 1.3 The Chinese philosopher and historian Han Feizi identified sages with technological discoveries.
(credit: “Portrait of Han Fei” by unknown author/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

These figures are praised not only for their political wisdom and long rule, but also for their filial piety and devotion to work. For instance, Mencius, a Confucian philosopher, relates a story of Shun's care for his blind father and wicked stepmother, while Yü is praised for his selfless devotion to work. In these ways, the Chinese philosophical traditions, such as Confucianism and Mohism, associate key values of their philosophical enterprises with the great sages of their history. Whether the sages were, in fact, actual people or, as many scholars have concluded, mythical forebearers, they possessed the essential human virtue of listening and responding to divine voices. This attribute can be inferred from the Chinese script for *sheng*, which bears the symbol of an ear as a prominent feature. So the sage is one who listens to insight from the heavens and then is capable of sharing that wisdom or acting upon it to the benefit of his society (Cheng 1983). This idea is similar to one found in the Indian tradition, where the most important texts, the Vedas, are known as *shruti*, or works that were heard through divine revelation and only later written down.

Although Confucianism is a venerable world philosophy, it is also highly patriarchal and resulted in the widespread subordination of women. The position of women in China began to change only after the Communist Revolution (1945–1952). While some accounts of Confucianism characterize men and women as