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Preface

FOR INSTRUCTORS

An Introduction to Philosophy: Knowledge and Reality is an introductory philosophy textbook designed to give students their first taste of philosophy by exposing them to problems in metaphysics and epistemology. It can serve as the sole text for a one-semester course in those areas, or as one component of a general full-year introduction to philosophy. The text takes a problem-centred, argument-driven approach to teaching philosophy, balancing features of an introductory anthology with the advantages of a single-author text.

Objective and Approach

Neither Anthology nor Single-Author Text

Philosophy textbooks tend to follow one of two models. First, there are anthologies of primary sources, containing readings from original and influential philosophical works with which the editor judges every serious student of philosophy must become familiar. This is how almost everyone in my generation learned philosophy, usually in classes of 20–25 students, where our teachers watched our faces for expressions of confusion and desperation and came to our rescue just before we went under for the last time. With motivated students, a good instructor, and a pedagogical environment with ample tolerance for attention to individual student needs, I believe this is still the best way to learn philosophy. But anthologies have the well-known disadvantage of making students almost entirely dependent on their instructor, and the classroom environments that once made them the best tool for learning philosophy are either gone or are rapidly disappearing.

The alternative—a single-author textbook—reduces the dependency of the student on the teacher, and gives students more opportunities for learning on their own. But they also deprive students of the pleasure of hearing the great philosophers speak in their own voices, and of the opportunity to practice the full range of skills they will need to consume philosophy raw. Perhaps the worst failing of single-author texts is that, in the effort to be fair, they tend to create a false equivalency among alternative philosophical positions and to encourage students in the view that, after all the arguing is done, students are free to pick and choose among philosophical positions—and even among the supporting arguments they will use to prop up their preferred positions. Although I have seen some excellent examples of single-author textbooks that avoid these pitfalls, there are too many cases where the usual complaints are accurate.

This book occupies one of many positions intermediate between an anthology of primary sources and a single-author textbook. Roughly one-third of the text consists of selections from primary sources, so students will have ample opportunity to face the challenges of working through original philosophical texts. The remainder of the text both discusses and participates in the debates in which those primary sources are involved. To purists, this will either seem to be an anthology with too much editorial intervention,
or a single-author textbook that is too liberal in its use of extended quotation. But more important than the ratio of author-to-primary-source material is the principle according to which the primary material is selected.

**Problems and Arguments**

While insisting on the historical depth of each problem, the text takes a problem-centred and argument-driven approach to introducing philosophy. Students are introduced to familiar and longstanding philosophical problems in metaphysics and epistemology—the so-called Big Questions about personal identity, death, certainty and doubt, God, evil, and so on. In each chapter they will read selections from a number of philosophers. The reading selections are made entirely in light of their contribution to the discussion of some particular philosophical problem. My guiding thought is that students will fare much better with the readings if they can see where each fits in a discussion that the student has already been invited to join. When students are involved in the debates to which each reading contributes, they are better able to discern, to follow, and to engage the ideas and arguments in those readings. Roughly two-thirds of the book is designed to draw students into the discussion of philosophical problems, provoking them into joining the arguments; assisting them with an understanding of context; introducing the vocabulary, logic, and conceptual tools they will need; and making them aware of options to consider and objections they are bound to face. The philosophers themselves—from Heraclitus and Plato to Derek Parfit and Helen Longino—are encountered as fellow participants.

In the chosen excerpts, a philosopher might develop a substantial proposal for addressing a problem, construct an argument for or against a proposal, or offer a rebuttal of such an argument. One example illustrates how this shaped the selections in the text. René Descartes appears in more than a dozen places throughout, where he contributes to the discussion of six different philosophical problems. Most of those contributions are relatively minor (e.g., in Chapter 5, Descartes provides one of three variations on a classic argument for the immortality of the soul), but some are more substantial (e.g., his contributions to debates about mind-body dualism in Chapter 6, his theory of justification in Chapter 9, and his theory of perception in Chapter 11). Thus, in some places Descartes makes his contribution in only a single paragraph while in others he is given several uninterrupted pages to develop his arguments. In each case, I made a selection from Descartes's writings that positions his ideas in a larger discussion about a philosophical problem. Students will hear what Descartes has to say about mind and body, his views about justification and the nature of knowledge, and so on, but nowhere will they find an extended reading designed to display "the philosophy of Descartes."

In addition to being problem-centred, the direction of the discussion is driven by philosophical arguments. The discussion in which the primary source texts are embedded is heavily focused on the clarification, presentation, and evaluation of philosophical arguments. The basic resources students will need—for example, explanations of the components of arguments, the notions of validity and soundness, and an introduction to a range of fallacies as well as valid argument forms—are provided in the text as the need arises. In numerous places, mini lessons in logic are
separated from the main text in Logic Boxes. At every stage, concern with logic or argumentation arises naturally out of the need to address the philosophical problems under discussion. For teachers who prefer to provide students with a single, more extended lesson in informal logic early in the course, Appendix A makes suggestions for re-assembling the Logic Boxes into a resource for that purpose. The hope is to increase students’ logical facility both by exposing them to a wide array of arguments and by supplying them with tools that will help them articulate responses to the arguments they encounter.

My larger hope is that the text will decrease student dependence on their teachers and increase their engagement with philosophy without diluting the challenges that are an essential part of learning to philosophize.

**Chapter Organization**

*The Topics and their Arrangement*

There may be too many topics covered in the text for a one-semester introduction to metaphysics and epistemology, so the text has some flexibility for alternative course designs built into it. In their current arrangement, many chapters build on others in ways I believe to be helpful, but only a willingness to make modest use of the glossary is needed to implement alternative arrangements of the material.

Some chapters can be skipped over without loss of continuity. For example, you might ignore the general considerations about identity and change (Chapter 2) and go directly to the problem of personal identity ( Chapters 3 and 4 ); you might prefer to skip the topics of death and immortality (Chapter 5 ); or, if you think functionalism is too challenging for first-year students, you can skip Chapter 7 . The problem of freedom and determinism ( Chapter 8 ) can also be passed over. For those who prefer to do less philosophy of religion, the chapter on the epistemology of testimony ( Chapter 13 ) or the one on the problem of evil ( Chapter 14 ) can be left out.

You might also choose to avoid certain sections of an assigned chapter. Thus, the metaphysical arguments for immortality—the first major section of Chapter 5 —can be read and discussed without taking up the question whether a person’s death is a bad thing for her—the second major division of that chapter. Or Chapter 8 , on freedom and determinism, can be read without the section that accuses causal determinism of committing a scope fallacy, or without the section that asks whether quantum indeterminacy accounts for freedom. Not every section is optional for understanding the issues in a given chapter, but every chapter has some sections that can be made optional.

Finally, you might prefer to re-order some of the chapters. You may wish to take up epistemology ( Chapters 9 to 11 ) before covering the philosophy of mind ( Chapters 6 to 7 ), or to discuss the philosophy of religion ( Chapters 12 to 15 ) before taking on the problem of personal identity ( Chapters 2 to 3 ). Perhaps you would like to introduce the philosophy of religion by addressing the problem of evil ( Chapter 15 ) first, and then explore experiential ( Chapter 13 ) and cosmological ( Chapter 12 ) arguments. The table of contents reflects my preferred arrangement of these topics, but the text easily accommodates other configurations.
FOR STUDENTS

This is an introductory textbook in philosophy, so no previous background is presupposed in the topics discussed. This does not mean that the problems addressed are easy—philosophical problems rarely are. But it does mean that when we find the philosophical waters growing too deep, we will need to turn back to shore. It will often be necessary to break off discussion when there is still more that needs to be said. The hope, however, is that you will soon have the knowledge and skills you need to venture further on your own.

Do not let this lead you to the common misunderstanding that no progress is ever made in philosophy. Even without getting to the bottom of the problems we take on you will see that this not true. Progress is made in philosophy whenever a new idea, a new argument, or a new way of seeing things pushes our thinking one step further down the road, leaves one bad idea behind, illuminates one previously dark corner, or brings one new possibility into view. By these measures, you will easily see that philosophy has made, and continues to make, genuine progress. And you will also make the same kinds of progress in the development of your own philosophical views.

There are two matters you should be warned about in advance. First, some of the selections from philosophers in the text were written long ago, in styles that will seem old-fashioned, just as your style will seem antiquated to your grandchildren. It takes patience and practice to become accustomed to the flow of words and ideas. The greatest challenges you will meet in reading philosophy—even when the style presents no special challenges—are from the nature of philosophy itself. The writings of philosophers are best understood if you proceed slowly and thoughtfully, whenever possible looking for ways to restate the central ideas in your own vocabulary, and always being alert to the paths that carry a philosopher from one idea to another. The text can assist you with that process, but nothing can replace the effort you must make on your own. You will be surprised how rapidly your understanding improves.

Second, the spirit in which philosophical ideas are discussed is the spirit of critical engagement—no idea is treated as sacred. That means that when ideas are presented in philosophy, we are all invited to scrutinize and evaluate them. A good idea has only one way to establish its worth: by showing that it can survive careful scrutiny. If we shelter an idea from critical examination, we only make it look suspicious and contribute to doubts about its value. One result is that philosophical ideas are never presented as the final word on any topic—they should all come labelled as open to further reflection and continued discussion. Never forget that this goes for what I say in the text as well. For example, when I raise objections to a philosopher’s ideas, you are expected to understand those objections, but not to treat them as the last word. Their purpose is to provoke and assist you in taking your own thinking a few steps further, not to bring your thinking to a close. In many places throughout the text I present arguments on behalf of ideas for which I have no sympathy, and I sometimes even let them have the final word in the discussion of a topic. I believe those ideas and arguments can contribute to your understanding of the issues, and I encourage you to take them seriously. But when I end my discussion of a topic, it is not because I have arrived at the views that are right, or even
the views that I accept. It is because I have arrived at the place from which you should proceed on your own.

**Features**

Throughout the text, a number of resources help you learn philosophy. These are designed to make your life easier, so don’t neglect to take advantage of them. Pay special attention to the following:

**Learning Objectives**

Each chapter begins with a list of objectives. Look these over before you read the chapter, and let them guide your thinking about what to look for. You can also use them to test your comprehension of the material.

**Logic Boxes**

Logic Boxes are scattered throughout the text. These are mini lessons in logic to help you acquire the vocabulary and tools to evaluate philosophical reasoning. They are essential for helping you achieve distance from your own reasoning in order to see and discuss it with more objectivity. (The Logic Boxes should be supplemented with information provided in Appendix A.)

**Key Terms and Figures**

A list of important vocabulary terms and key thinkers appear near the end of each chapter. Each term on the list is highlighted in the chapter and defined in the margin. When you have read the chapter, review the key terms to make sure you understand the new vocabulary and can give quick summaries of the relevant ideas of the thinkers listed.

**Additional Readings**

You will also find a short bibliography of additional readings at the end of each chapter. Turn to these when you want to learn more about the topics discussed in the chapter. Keep in mind that each chapter contains selections from the writings of well-known philosophers. When you want to enhance your appreciation of the issues raised, you might turn first to the works from which these selections have been made. (The source of each selection can be found in the references section at the end of the text. Many are available online.) If you want to pursue a particular idea to learn more about a branch of philosophy or a philosopher, the following online sources are recommended:


These sources can sometimes be challenging, but they are very reliable. The recommended additional readings at the end of each chapter vary in degree of difficulty—some are relatively advanced, but most will be accessible after you have studied the material in the chapter.
Appendices
There are two short appendices to the text. Appendix A provides important additional information about the evaluation of inferences and premises. It also introduces a key idea in logic—the idea of logical, or argument, form—that will help make arguments and their evaluation more intuitive. Appendix B briefly discusses the two kinds of writing—expository and critical—that go into a typical philosophy essay. The mechanics of a beginning philosophy essay—what format to use for citations, whether to use footnotes or endnotes, whether to use the first-person pronoun—are matters on which your instructors will differ. Appendix B is silent about such things. But the spirit in which philosophy essays are written is very nearly universal, so the appendix tries to address those matters of the spirit.

RESOURCES

Pearson Custom Library
For enrollments of at least 25 students, you can create your own textbook by choosing the chapters that best suit your own course needs. To begin building your custom text, visit www.pearsoncustomlibrary.com. You may also work with a dedicated Pearson Custom editor to create your ideal text—publishing your own original content or mixing and matching Pearson content. Contact your local Pearson Representative to get started.

CourseSmart for Instructors
CourseSmart goes beyond traditional expectations—providing instant, online access to the textbooks and course materials you need at a lower cost for students. And even as students save money, you can save time and hassle with a digital eTextbook that allows you to search for the most relevant content at the very moment you need it. Whether it’s evaluating textbooks or creating lecture notes to help students with difficult concepts, CourseSmart can make life a little easier. See how when you visit www.coursesmart.com/instructors.

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