

# Preface

The overriding rationale behind this book is the desire to enrich the lives of college students by introducing them to philosophical thinking in an accessible and engaging manner. The classic selections were chosen to provide personal moments of reflection as students embark upon a journey into philosophy.

The opening section, “The Role of Philosophy,” provides a general introduction to philosophy. It uses real-life examples to illustrate how philosophical thinking touches all aspects of our lives, and how it is connected to other academic disciplines. Thereafter, each philosophical area, such as the nature of reality, knowledge, God, free will, and morality, has its own introduction offering further framework and context. These features allow students to connect with the content in an intuitive, natural manner. The surrounding narrative is designed to be conversational and comprehensible. The intent is to furnish a clear path through the material that enables readers to get started in understanding each philosopher’s ideas and arguments. The table of contents presents each instructor with the opportunity to choose a set of readings that matches the individual needs of each class.

The goal of any introduction to philosophy anthology should be a selection of readings that stimulate us. Since there are thousands of possible readings that one can choose from, every anthology must make choices. The editing process for this anthology was driven by the need to include material that is challenging, yet accessible. The emphasis on classical readings reveals the rich and varied history of philosophy, and it provides a foundation for understanding modern philosophers’ ideas and writings. The readings are long enough to develop important philosophical issues, yet short enough to concentrate on a few topics. The readings are meant to stimulate immediate reflection and offer a platform for discussion.



# Part One: The Role of Philosophy

Lively conversations often jump from one topic to another. You probably have experienced being part of a spirited discussion where, at some point, you wondered how the conversation wound up talking about something that seemed to have no connection to where the discussion started. On another occasion, perhaps you were looking for one thing on the Internet and, after several links, you found yourself reading something that seemed far away from where you began. This common occurrence points to the interrelatedness of knowledge.

Philosophy has been defined in many ways, such as “the quest for knowledge,” “the love of wisdom,” “the search for truth,” or “the asking of ultimate questions.” Since philosophers do ask questions and propose answers, in a general sense they are similar to scientists, physicians, lawyers, engineers, economists, psychologists, and those in many other professions. Since each of those fields developed its own methods and criteria for acquiring knowledge, in one sense the knowledge of one field is independent of the others. However, even though each field has its particular area of questions and phenomena that it studies, ultimately all knowledge is connected. In fact, interdisciplinary studies attempt to build bridges between different academic fields by recognizing that research in one area can often provide what is missing in another area, or shine a new light on the outstanding questions, or even open up completely new avenues of research.

Philosophy plays an important role in all aspects of intellectual activity. In fact, every major scientific discipline was once part of philosophy. Physics, chemistry, biology, and astronomy are studied by those we now call “scientists,” but they were originally called “natural philosophers” (meaning that they studied the *nature* of the physical universe). While many people may imagine Albert Einstein working in a laboratory or gazing through a telescope, his theory of relativity was born from a “thought experiment” that was inspired when he envisioned flying through space at the speed of light.

After graduating from college, Einstein worked as a clerk in the Swiss government patent office. One day, while he was riding home on a streetcar, Einstein noticed the time on a large clock tower. He knew that the information he received from the clock—let’s say the time was 6:05—travelled to his eyes by light rays. From this simple everyday event, Einstein made a leap of imagination. He wondered what would happen if he “jumped on the light ray” that carried the time information. He realized immediately that, for him, the time on the clock tower would always be 6:05, because no other light rays could catch up to him. But even more remarkable, Einstein knew that the time on his pocket-watch would keep running as normal. Against the prevailing view of the concept of time, Einstein’s radical new idea was that *time* is not absolute; it is relative to our perspective.

Philosophy also played an important part in the development of many of the most recent social science disciplines. For example, philosophers’ writings have been the source of psychology, sociology, political science, and economics, to name just a few subjects. Given this, it is not surprising that philosophical questions still echo throughout most modern academic fields.

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It is not difficult to see the interrelatedness of knowledge. Let's look at just one example—the problem of crime. Imagine that your brother was rushed to a hospital after collapsing at home. At the hospital you are informed that he has died, and an autopsy is going to be performed in order to find the physical cause of death. The results of the autopsy can be used to help answer your question, “Why did my brother die?”

Scientific advances in forensics, human pathology, chemical analysis, and many other fields allow medical examiners to often pinpoint a precise cause of death. Now suppose that you are told that a lethal dose of an illegal drug was found to be the cause of your brother's death. Your initial reaction might be one of astonishment, especially if you had no knowledge of any drug use by your brother. Perhaps you would need more assurance that there was not some mistake made by the medical examiners, or with the lab results.

When you ask how the physical cause of death has been determined, you are asking questions about knowledge. The area of philosophy that investigates these kinds of questions is called “epistemology.” The root word “episteme” means “to know,” and the suffix “-logy” means “the study of,” so *epistemology* is simply the *study of knowledge*. This branch of philosophy has developed a close relationship with science because scientific advances have become the hallmark of knowledge of the physical world. Therefore, questioning how we know the cause of death would get at the scientific reliability and validity of forensic science, which in this case determines the physical cause of death.

We ask epistemological questions whenever we ask questions such as these:

- How do you know that he died of a drug overdose?
- How do you know that the plane crash was caused by pilot error?
- How do you know that cigarettes can cause lung cancer?
- How do you know that increasing literacy and education reduces racism?
- How do you know that massive doses of Vitamin C have no effect on the common cold?

The epistemological foundation of scientific knowledge of the physical world is also part of the next stage in our investigation—to determine how the drug entered your brother's bloodstream. At this point, law enforcement will get involved in the investigation in order to determine whether the drug was self-administered or whether your brother was the victim of a murder. If the police suspect foul play, then evidence is sought that might lead to the perpetrator. Centuries ago, proving murder was quite difficult. If there were no eyewitnesses to a crime, then objective evidence was hard to gather. And even eyewitness accounts are often unreliable evidence.

In the late 1800s, an interesting hypothesis was developed to help in crime detection. It was known that the eye acts like the lens of a camera; in fact, cameras and film were developed to mimic the way our eyes work. When our eyelids are raised, light strikes the outer part of our eyes and signals are sent to the brain. In a camera, when the shutter opens, light strikes the lens and is projected onto film, which records the picture. It was conjectured that since our eyes act like cameras, then they might “record” the last image seen by a murder victim. The murderer's image should be recorded somewhere in the victim's eye. The problem was how to “develop” the image. Various techniques were developed, none of which worked. Although the hypothesis proved to be unfounded, the idea has been used in novels and was given a humorous depiction in the movie *Wild, Wild West*.

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Over the course of the last one hundred years, advancements in crime detection were developed. Fingerprint evidence was one of the first tools used successfully in criminology. Scientific methods for determining blood type proved valuable, and recently, DNA analysis has been introduced. Of course, all these inventions had to be validated as being reliable objective evidence. If a method does not pass scrutiny in the scientific community, it will probably not be admissible in a court of law. For example, lie detector results are typically not admitted as evidence because the process has not been proven to be a reliable source of objective evidence.

Now suppose that after a thorough investigation, it has been determined that your brother was murdered, and someone is arrested. The next step is the murder trial, the legal aspect of the crime. Criminal trials rely on both the physical evidence (the epistemological questions) and the *logical* arguments of the prosecution and the defense. Here we can see the difference between the concept of *proof* and that of *beyond a reasonable doubt*. Criminal trials do not offer proof in the mathematical and logical sense of valid arguments, which are defined as arguments where the conclusion *follows with necessity* from premises. Instead, the prosecution must establish guilt “beyond a reasonable doubt,” a concept that has within it the idea of uncertainty. In fact, the concept is not precisely defined by judges when they give directions to juries. Jurors are told to use their consciences when deliberating. (In contrast, civil trials rely on a weaker standard, referred to as “the preponderance of evidence,” which is based on the probable truth or accuracy of the evidence.) The jury must decide the strengths and weaknesses of both the defense and prosecutor’s arguments. This is both an *epistemological issue* (e.g., the physical evidence and expert testimony) and a *logical issue* (e.g., deciding which is stronger—the prosecution’s argument or the defense’s argument). In other words, the amount of doubt that exists in the minds of the jurors.

If the trial ends with a guilty verdict, then it enters the punishment phase. Here the philosophical questions concern the areas of *ethics* and *political philosophy*. Any determination of punishment must be grounded in morality, and, since this is a legal case, philosophical questions regarding laws and governments play a big part as well.

There is a fictional story that cleverly illustrates some of these related issues. A man has been found guilty of a crime and is about to be sentenced. The judge asks the defendant if he has anything to say before she announces the sentence. The man says the following:

I admit that I committed the crime. However, I took an introduction to philosophy course and we studied the issue of free will. If humans have free will, then they have ethical choices for which they are responsible. So, if I freely chose to commit the crime, then my punishment can be justified. But, if humans have no free will, if our behavior is completely determined, like everything else in the physical universe, then we do not choose to commit crimes—we cannot help ourselves. If that is so, then we should not be punished for doing something we were predetermined to do. I have come to believe that we do not have free will. Therefore, judge, you should not punish me.

Upon hearing this, the judge says the following:

I also took an introduction to philosophy course, and I have thought about the same issues. In fact, I even came to the same conclusion as you—I believe

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that we do not have free will. Therefore, I am sentencing you to life in prison—but I am *not choosing to do it*, my decision has been completely determined.

The story also introduces another area of philosophy—*metaphysics*. This branch of philosophy deals with what are often called “the ultimate questions of reality.” These include questions regarding the nature of reality, the existence of God, whether or not humans have free will, and whether mind and matter exist.

There are other types of philosophical questions that are connected to this case. For example, suppose after your brother’s death, you go to your religious leader and ask the same question you asked in the hospital—“Why did my brother die?” If your religious leader responds by saying that your brother died from a lethal dose of an illegal drug, you would be surprised. Even though the question is the same, you are *not* seeking a *physical cause answer*, you already have that. Rather, you are now seeking some guidance regarding the *reason* or *purpose* of your brother’s death; you need to make some sense of the *meaning* of his death. You might even begin asking yourself some important questions: Does life have any meaning, or is it absurd? Would a good God allow suffering and evil to exist? As you can see, these questions are quite different from those we have been considering.

Philosophy touches on all aspects of life. Our hypothetical example, about a death and a crime, illustrates the philosophical aspects of *epistemology, science, law, logic, ethics, politics, government, metaphysics, and the meaning of life*. On any given day you will find many additional examples of philosophical issues at work in your local and global community. To understand the interrelated aspects of the important questions of life requires contemplating the philosophical questions that lie at the heart of all human understanding. This contemplation involves challenging personal assumptions and conventional wisdom—very powerful skills. The ancient Athenian government found them so powerful and threatening that it condemned Socrates to death by drinking a cup of hemlock. There is no hemlock in the following chapters, just nourishing food for thought that is valuable for all career paths and other worldly pursuits.

## Part Two: The Value of Philosophy

The goal of this book is to lay the groundwork for appreciating philosophy and its ideas. To help us, Bertrand Russell's "The Value of Philosophy," provides a clear and useful way to understand philosophy's value. Although Russell placed this piece at the end of his short book, *The Problems of Philosophy*, we will use it to begin understanding how philosophy is intimately connected to everything we do and experience throughout our lives. In that sense, Russell addresses our futures.

The problems of philosophy are timeless. They touch all our lives. In the hustle and congestion of life—especially in the information age in which we live—the profound philosophical questions can get lost amidst the torrent of data immediately available every instant. But sooner or later quiet introspection reaches all of us. It may be triggered by a tragedy, or by a sense of loneliness; it can even happen in moments of happiness and bliss. At those times, having an intimate connection to the important ideas that have been thought about, wrestled with, and argued over for centuries, provides a way of appreciating the complexity of life and the incredible human capacity for understanding.





# Bertrand Russell

## THE VALUE OF PHILOSOPHY

It will be well to consider what is the value of philosophy and why it ought to be studied. It is the more necessary to consider this question, in view of the fact that many men, under the influence of science or of practical affairs, are inclined to doubt whether philosophy is anything better than innocent but useless trifling, hair-splitting distinctions, and controversies on matters concerning which knowledge is impossible.

This view of philosophy appears to result, partly from a wrong conception of the ends of life, partly from a wrong conception of the kind of goods which philosophy strives to achieve. Physical science, through the medium of inventions, is useful to innumerable people who are wholly ignorant of it; thus the study of physical science is to be recommended, not only, or primarily, because of the effect on the student, but rather because of the effect on mankind in general. This utility does not belong to philosophy. If the study of philosophy has any value at all for others than students of philosophy, it must be only indirectly, through its effects upon the lives of those who study it. It is in these effects, therefore, if anywhere, that the value of philosophy must be primarily sought.

But further, if we are not to fail in our endeavor to determine the value of philosophy, we must first free our minds from the prejudices of what are wrongly called “practical” men. The “practical” man, as this word is often used, is one who recognizes only material needs, who realizes that men must have food for the body, but is oblivious of the necessity of providing food for the mind. If all men were well off, if poverty and disease had been reduced to their lowest possible point, there would still remain much to be done to produce a valuable society; and even in the existing world the goods of the mind are at least as important as the goods of the body. It is exclusively among the goods of the mind that the value of philosophy is to be found; and only those who are not indifferent to these goods can be persuaded that the study of philosophy is not a waste of time.

Philosophy, like all other studies, aims primarily at knowledge. The knowledge it aims at is the kind of knowledge which gives unity and system to the body of the sciences, and the kind which results from a critical examination of the grounds of our convictions, prejudices, and beliefs. But it cannot be maintained that philosophy has had any very great measure of success in its attempts to provide definite answers to its questions. If you ask a mathematician, a mineralogist, a historian, or any other man of learning, what definite body of truths has been ascertained by his science, his answer will last as long as you are willing to listen. But if you put the same question to a philosopher, he will, if he is candid, have to confess that his study has not achieved positive results such as have been achieved by other sciences. It is true that this is partly accounted for by the fact that, as soon as definite knowledge concerning any subject becomes possible, this subject ceases to be called philosophy, and becomes a separate science. The whole study of the heavens, which now belongs to astronomy, was once included in philosophy; Newton’s great work was called “the mathematical principles of natural philosophy.” Similarly, the study of the human mind, which was a part of philosophy, has now been separated from philosophy and has become the science of psychology. Thus, to a great extent, the uncertainty of philosophy is more apparent than real: those questions which are already capable of definite answers are placed in the sciences, while

those only to which, at present, no definite answer can be given, remain to form the residue which is called philosophy.

This is, however, only a part of the truth concerning the uncertainty of philosophy. There are many questions—and among them those that are of the profoundest interest to our spiritual life—which, so far as we can see, must remain insoluble to the human intellect unless its powers become of quite a different order from what they are now. Has the universe any unity of plan or purpose, or is it a fortuitous concourse of atoms? Is consciousness a permanent part of the universe, giving hope of indefinite growth in wisdom, or is it a transitory accident on a small planet on which life must ultimately become impossible? Are good and evil of importance to the universe or only to man? Such questions are asked by philosophy, and variously answered by various philosophers. But it would seem that, whether answers be otherwise discoverable or not, the answers suggested by philosophy are none of them demonstrably true. Yet, however slight may be the hope of discovering an answer, it is part of the business of philosophy to continue the consideration of such questions, to make us aware of their importance, to examine all the approaches to them, and to keep alive that speculative interest in the universe which is apt to be killed by confining ourselves to definitely ascertainable knowledge.

Many philosophers, it is true, have held that philosophy could establish the truth of certain answers to such fundamental questions. They have supposed that what is of most importance in religious beliefs could be proved by strict demonstration to be true. In order to judge of such attempts, it is necessary to take a survey of human knowledge, and to form an opinion as to its methods and its limitations. On such a subject it would be unwise to pronounce dogmatically; but if the investigations of our previous chapters have not led us astray, we shall be compelled to renounce the hope of finding philosophical proofs of religious beliefs. We cannot, therefore, include as part of the value of philosophy any definite set of answers to such questions. Hence, once more, the value of philosophy must not depend upon any supposed body of definitely ascertainable knowledge to be acquired by those who study it.

The value of philosophy is, in fact, to be sought largely in its very uncertainty. The man who has no tincture of philosophy goes through life imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense, from the habitual beliefs of his age or his nation, and from convictions which have grown up in his mind without the co-operation or consent of his deliberate reason. To such a man the world tends to become definite, finite, obvious; common objects rouse no questions, and unfamiliar possibilities are contemptuously rejected. As soon as we begin to philosophize, on the contrary, we find, as we saw in our opening chapters, that even the most everyday things lead to problems to which only very incomplete answers can be given. Philosophy, though unable to tell us with certainty what is the true answer to the doubts which it raises, is able to suggest many possibilities which enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of custom. Thus, while diminishing our feeling of certainty as to what things are, it greatly increases our knowledge as to what they may be; it removes the somewhat arrogant dogmatism of those who have never travelled into the region of liberating doubt, and it keeps alive our sense of wonder by showing familiar things in an unfamiliar aspect.

Apart from its utility in showing unsuspected possibilities, philosophy has a value—perhaps its chief value—through the greatness of the objects which it contemplates, and the freedom from narrow and personal aims resulting from this contemplation. The life of the instinctive man is shut up within the circle of his private interests: family and friends may be included, but the outer world is not regarded except as it may help or hinder what comes within the circle of instinctive wishes. In such a life there is something feverish and confined, in comparison with which the philosophic life is calm and free. The private world of instinctive interests is a small one, set in the midst of a

great and powerful world which must, sooner or later, lay our private world in ruins. Unless we can so enlarge our interests as to include the whole outer world, we remain like a garrison in a beleaguered fortress, knowing that the enemy prevents escape and that ultimate surrender is inevitable. In such a life there is no peace, but a constant strife between the insistence of desire and the powerlessness of will. In one way or another, if our life is to be great and free, we must escape this prison and this strife.

One way of escape is by philosophic contemplation. Philosophic contemplation does not, in its widest survey, divide the universe into two hostile camps—friends and foes, helpful and hostile, good and bad—it views the whole impartially. Philosophic contemplation, when it is unalloyed, does not aim at proving that the rest of the universe is akin to man. All acquisition of knowledge is an enlargement of the Self, but this enlargement is best attained when it is not directly sought. It is obtained when the desire for knowledge is alone operative, by a study which does not wish in advance that its objects should have this or that character, but adapts the Self to the characters which it finds in its objects. This enlargement of Self is not obtained when, taking the Self as it is, we try to show that the world is so similar to this Self that knowledge of it is possible without any admission of what seems alien. The desire to prove this is a form of self-assertion and, like all self-assertion, it is an obstacle to the growth of Self which it desires, and of which the Self knows that it is capable. Self-assertion, in philosophic speculation as elsewhere, views the world as a means to its own ends; thus it makes the world of less account than Self, and the Self sets bounds to the greatness of its goods. In contemplation, on the contrary, we start from the not-Self, and through its greatness the boundaries of Self are enlarged; through the infinity of the universe the mind which contemplates it achieves some share in infinity.

For this reason greatness of soul is not fostered by those philosophies which assimilate the universe to Man. Knowledge is a form of union of Self and not-Self; like all union, it is impaired by dominion, and therefore by any attempt to force the universe into conformity with what we find in ourselves. There is a widespread philosophical tendency towards the view which tells us that Man is the measure of all things, that truth is man-made, that space and time and the world of universals are properties of the mind, and that, if there be anything not created by the mind, it is unknowable and of no account for us. This view, if our previous discussions were correct, is untrue; but in addition to being untrue, it has the effect of robbing philosophic contemplation of all that gives it value, since it fetters contemplation to Self. What it calls knowledge is not a union with the not-Self, but a set of prejudices, habits, and desires, making an impenetrable veil between us and the world beyond. The man who finds pleasure in such a theory of knowledge is like the man who never leaves the domestic circle for fear his word might not be law.

The true philosophic contemplation, on the contrary, finds its satisfaction in every enlargement of the not-Self, in everything that magnifies the objects contemplated, and thereby the subject contemplating. Everything, in contemplation, that is personal or private, everything that depends upon habit, self-interest, or desire, distorts the object, and hence impairs the union which the intellect seeks. By thus making a barrier between subject and object, such personal and private things become a prison to the intellect. The free intellect will see as God might see, without a here and now, without hopes and fears, without the trammels of customary beliefs and traditional prejudices, calmly, dispassionately, in the sole and exclusive desire of knowledge—knowledge as impersonal, as purely contemplative, as it is possible for man to attain. Hence also the free intellect will value more the abstract and universal knowledge into which the accidents of private history do not enter, than the knowledge brought by the senses, and dependent, as such knowledge must be, upon an exclusive and personal point of view and a body whose sense-organs distort as much as they reveal.

The mind which has become accustomed to the freedom and impartiality of philosophic contemplation will preserve something of the same freedom and impartiality in the world of action and emotion. It will view its purposes and desires as parts of the whole, with the absence of insistence that results from seeing them as infinitesimal fragments in a world of which all the rest is unaffected by any one man's deeds. The impartiality which, in contemplation, is the unalloyed desire for truth, is the very same quality of mind which, in action, is justice, and in emotion is that universal love which can be given to all, and not only to those who are judged useful or admirable. Thus contemplation enlarges not only the objects of our thoughts, but also the objects of our actions and our affections: it makes us citizens of the universe, not only of one walled city at war with all the rest. In this citizenship of the universe consists man's true freedom, and his liberation from the thralldom of narrow hopes and fears.

Thus, to sum up our discussion of the value of philosophy: Philosophy is to be studied, not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions, since no definite answers can, as a rule, be known to be true, but rather for the sake of the questions themselves; because these questions enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation; but above all because, through the greatness of the universe which philosophy contemplates, the mind also is rendered great, and becomes capable of that union with the universe which constitutes its highest good.