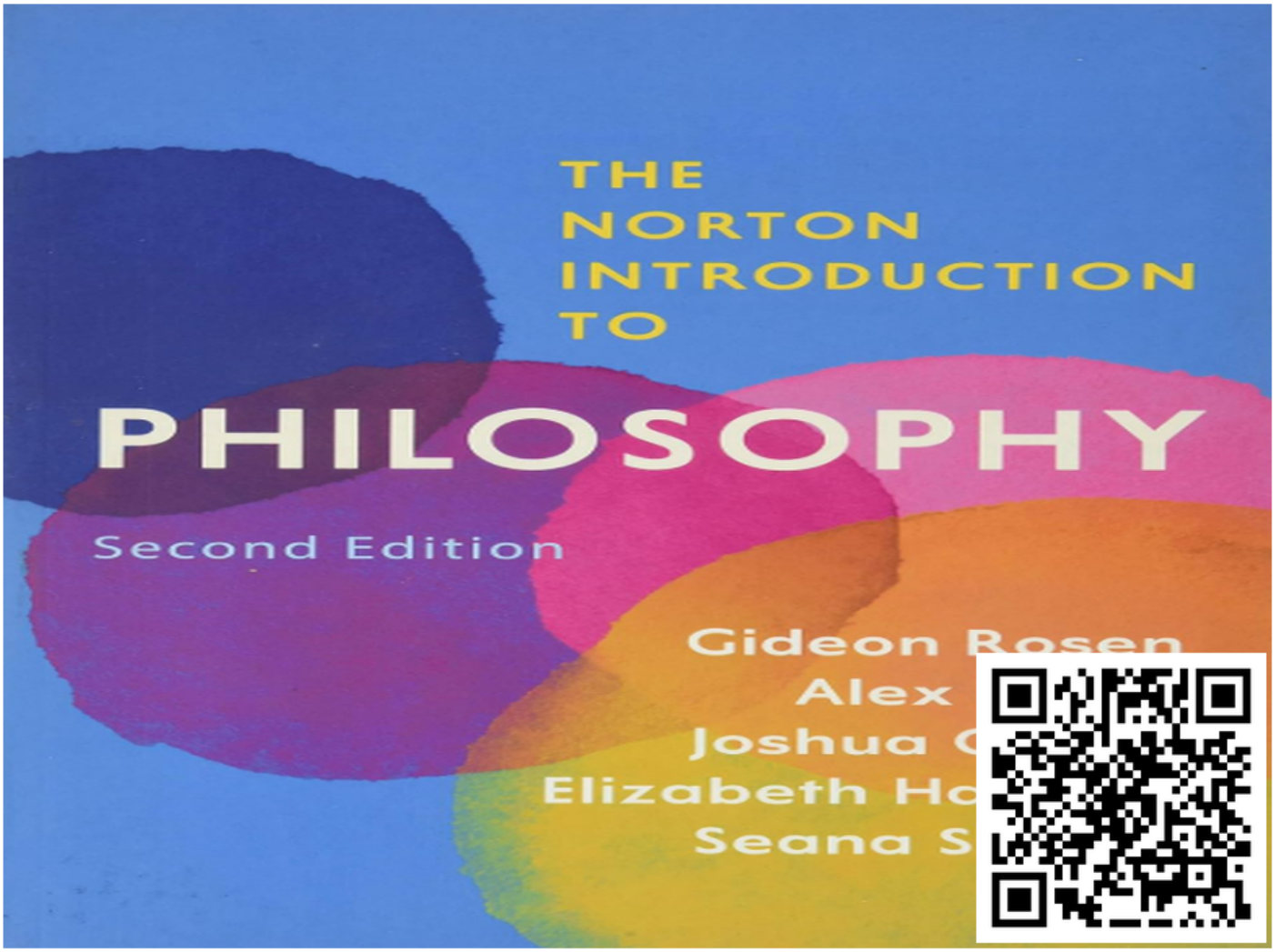

THE NORTON INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

Second Edition

Gideon Rosen
Alex Byrne
Joshua Cohen
Elizabeth Harman
Seana Shiffrin

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PHILOSOPHY

Second Edition

GIDEON ROSEN
Princeton University

ALEX BYRNE
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

JOSHUA COHEN
Apple University; University of California, Berkeley

ELIZABETH HARMAN
Princeton University

SEANA SHIFFRIN
University of California, Los Angeles

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PART VI POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Preface

Philosophy is an ancient subject, and an important one. The great philosophers—Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, and the rest—have shaped the way people think about the world. Philosophy is also a peculiar subject. Philosophers focus on fundamental questions: Do we know anything at all? Does the material world exist? Are actions really right or wrong? In everyday life, and in every other academic discipline, we take the "obvious" answers to these questions for granted. In philosophy, we pause over these answers and subject them to exacting scrutiny.

Such scrutiny can be unsettling, making what was once familiar seem puzzling. As confident understanding gives way to perplexity, a tempting response is to turn away from the questioning that gives rise to it. In philosophy, we make it our business to face the perplexity head-on, and ask whether and how our basic assumptions about knowledge, existence, and morality can be defended.

Because philosophy focuses on fundamental questions of this sort, it can seem to operate at a great distance from life's practical concerns. In *The Clouds*, the great Athenian playwright Aristophanes portrays his contemporary Socrates as a manic babbler who spouts (and sells) manifestly useless nonsense. Such mockery can seem like the right response to people who spend their time puzzling over our basic assumptions when life constantly confronts us with urgent questions that need answers here and now.

We too feel the force of this dismissive stance, especially in those frustrating moments when we struggle to get a grip on the hardest philosophical questions. But we resist it. It is possible to live a life that is both engaged and reflective, focused simultaneously on practical concerns as well as on the basic assumptions that guide our thoughts and choices. Socrates famously said that "the unexamined life is not worth living." This is one of the great overstatements in the history of philosophy, but there is truth in it. Philosophical reflection can inform and enhance the value of any life. Philosophy is rooted in the deep—and deeply practical—human aspiration to live reflectively. In this book, we aim to keep faith with that aspiration and to provide readers with materials that will help them pursue it for themselves.

The Norton Introduction to Philosophy is designed for use in introductory courses in philosophy and as a resource for readers approaching the subject for the first time. Philosophy does not have a well-defined structure or settled boundaries—nothing

is obvious—so composing an introductory book for this large field has required numerous editorial decisions. To explain the shape of the book, we would like to say a few words about our guiding editorial ideas.

We start from the premise that philosophy is best learned and taught from primary sources. The first formulations of great ideas and arguments are not just historically significant; they are rich with nuances that are easily lost as the ideas are distilled and refined by others. More importantly, to learn how to read a complex and nuanced philosophical text is (to a very significant extent) to learn how to do philosophy. The challenge in reading is to approach the text with the right mix of openness and critical scrutiny, and this is the same challenge students face with respect to their own ideas as they begin to do philosophy on their own. An introduction to philosophy should expose students to important philosophical ideas, while also helping them to read and think like philosophers. The best way to achieve this is to engage with the original texts.

That engagement, however, presents a challenge. The great books in the history of philosophy were not written for contemporary readers, and the important works of contemporary philosophy were not written for beginning students. In almost every case, the original texts assume more than anyone new to the subject can be expected to know.

The Norton Introduction to Philosophy is designed to address this challenge. The historical and contemporary selections in the book have been supplemented with substantial editorial materials that are designed to supply relevant background and to focus the readers' attention on central themes. But they are mainly designed to enable readers to approach philosophical texts as philosophers do: to restate the thesis in plain terms, to reconstruct the arguments, to illustrate them with fresh examples, and to engage with the arguments, sympathetically and critically. These supporting materials are informed by our belief that the central purpose in reading philosophy is not only to learn what other philosophers have thought but to work out what we should think, and thus to live more reflectively.

Most introductions to philosophy draw their materials exclusively from previously published books and articles. We have done something very different. Philosophy is not a collection of settled findings or a canon of established texts. It is a living subject. While contemporary philosophers engage directly with many of the issues that animated their predecessors, their approaches (and in some cases, their questions) are new, informed by recent developments in the sciences, in other scholarly disciplines, and within philosophy itself. To convey the current vitality of the discipline, we have commissioned 29 essays from contemporary philosophers specifically for inclusion in this book, 9 of which are new to the Second Edition.[1] In each case, the author was asked to write an essay on an active research problem in his or her field, and to present the issue in terms that

1. In addition to the 29 commissioned essays in this book, there are 5 more commissioned essays available online: Stewart Cohen, *Contextualism*; Ned Hall, *Causation and Correlation*; David Lyons, *Utilitarian Justification of the State*; Tim Maudlin, *Science and Metaphysics*; and Jonathan Wolff, *Equality as a Basic Demand of Justice*. See "Additional Essays" at digital.wwnorton.com/introphilosophy2.

someone new to the subject can understand. These commissioned essays are not neutral summaries or surveys. They are works of original contemporary philosophy cast in an idiom that any reader of this book will find accessible. Taken together, they paint a vivid (though inevitably partial) picture of what philosophers are doing now. They are:

Louise Antony, *No Good Reason—Exploring the Problem of Evil*
Nomy Arpaly, *Why Moral Ignorance Is No Excuse*
Elizabeth Barnes, *The Metaphysics of Gender*
Lara Buchak, *When Is Faith Rational?*
Alex Byrne, *Skepticism about the Internal World*
David Chalmers, *The Hard Problem of Consciousness*
Alan Hájek, *Pascal's Ultimate Gamble*
Elizabeth Harman, *Is It Reasonable to "Rely on Intuitions" in Ethics?*
Barbara Herman, *Impermissibility and Wrongness*
Rosalind Hursthouse, *Virtue Ethics*
Rae Langton, *Ignorance of Things in Themselves*
Penelope Maddy, *Do Numbers Exist?*
Sarah McGrath, *What Is Weird about Moral Deference?*
Martha Nussbaum, *Political Equality*
Sarah Paul, *John Doe and Richard Roe*
Gideon Rosen, *Numbers and Other Immaterial Objects*
T. M. Scanlon, *When Do Intentions Matter to Permissibility?*
A. John Simmons, *Rights-Based Justifications for the State*
Angela M. Smith, *Implicit Bias, Moral Agency, and Moral Responsibility*
Quayshawn Spencer, *Are Folk Races Like Dingoes, Dimes, or Dodos?*
Galen Strawson, *Free Will*
Sharon Street, *Does Anything Really Matter or Did We Just Evolve to Think So?*
Judith Jarvis Thomson, *Why Ought We Do What Is Right?*
Michael Tye, *The Puzzle of Transparency*
Jonathan Vogel, *Skepticism and Inference to the Best Explanation*
R. Jay Wallace, *Moral Subjectivism*
Roger White, *The Argument from Cosmological Fine-Tuning*
Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and Belief*
Stephen Yablo, *A Thing and Its Matter*

In choosing materials for this book, we have been guided to a significant degree by a shared philosophical orientation. We are all trained in and identify with the so-called analytic tradition in philosophy, the dominant tradition in Anglo-American philosophy since the early twentieth century (and powerfully represented outside the Anglo-American world as well). Analytic philosophy does not have a well-defined method or a distinctive set of topics. Insofar as it is unified at all, it is so by an intellectual style that emphasizes clear, precisely stated theses and explicit arguments. Most of the modern selections we have included, and all of the newly commissioned essays, are in the analytical tradition.

Organization and Readings

The Norton Introduction to Philosophy includes 109 selections, more than any other text of its kind; of these, 81 are drawn from previously published work. These present central arguments and classic formulations of important problems from the most influential works in the history of philosophy, including Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, Descartes's *Meditations*, Kant's *Groundwork*, and Mill's *Utilitarianism*. Selections from previously published work have been edited for length and lightly annotated to supply definitions of key terms and needed background. Because our aim is to provide a text suitable for a first course in philosophy, we have omitted classic readings that assume substantial acquaintance with the field or are in other ways too challenging for beginners.

We have organized these selections into six major parts: Philosophy of Religion, Epistemology, Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind, From Metaphysics to Ethics, Ethics, and Political Philosophy. Each part is divided into chapters, and each chapter is headed by a question. Few of these questions will be familiar to students (e.g., Does God exist?), but others may be new (e.g., How Can the State Be Justified?). We title each chapter with a question to emphasize that philosophy is a form of inquiry, and that the first step in any inquiry is to ask the right questions.

We have focused on a selection of central topics in philosophy. To do them justice and to give a sense of competing perspectives, we had to exclude other rich and exciting parts of the field, including the philosophy of language, aesthetics, the philosophy of physics, the philosophy of mathematics, action theory, and the philosophy of biology. Work in these areas often presupposes the material covered here, and so we are confident that after working through this book, readers will be in a good position to approach these and other important topics.

That said, we should note that unlike many introductory texts, *The Norton Introduction to Philosophy* devotes substantial space to moral theory, metaethics, and political philosophy. These are areas that have been central to philosophy from its beginnings but not always represented in introductory texts on the ground that they are specialized subjects that require prior training. We disagree. Philosophical questions about the good life, the nature of morality, the demands of moral responsibility, and the requirements of justice provide a natural and compelling point of entry into philosophy.

To ensure that students read the primary texts as thoughtfully as possible, each chapter opens with an introduction that frames the questions in accessible and compelling terms and provides essential background about the essays and the arguments presented in them. Each primary text is followed by a "Test Your Understanding" section designed to help students determine whether they have read the text carefully. The answers to these questions are provided in the back of the book, so students can immediately gauge whether they have grasped the main ideas. Few of the more difficult essays in the book—18 in all—are accompanied by "Reader's Guides," which explain a central argument from the text in accessible terms.

For every reading in the book, there is a set of "Notes and Questions" to encourage students to analyze the arguments more carefully, to respond to problems raised by the text, to reply (on the author's behalf) to apparent counterexamples to central claims, and so on. Each chapter then closes with an "Analyzing the Arguments" feature, which prompts students to bring the readings into dialogue with one another. This closing section also points to problems that merit further study and, in many cases, to open questions of current interest.

The book begins with a brief guide to logic and argumentation, some guidelines for writing philosophy papers, and four brief personal essays on the nature and value of philosophy. And it concludes with an extensive discursive glossary in which technical terms are explained and illustrated, and in which some of the main issues that arise in the interpretation of these technical distinctions are addressed.

Despite its long history and the intrinsic difficulty of its problems, philosophy is that rare academic field in which it is possible for beginning students not only to learn the discipline but to practice it. Our hope is that this book will be especially useful for readers who approach the study of philosophy with a double aim: to understand the ideas of great philosophers past and present and to use those ideas as a resource in their own philosophical investigations.

Gideon Rosen, *Princeton University*
Alex Byrne, *MIT*
Joshua Cohen, *Apple University; University of California, Berkeley*
Elizabeth Harman, *Princeton University*
Seana Shiffrin, *UCLA*
(November 2017)

Acknowledgments

Each of us loves philosophy. That common passion drew us together to work on *The Norton Introduction to Philosophy*. It sustained us through seven years, from conception to publication of the First Edition, and through the substantial revisions to this Second Edition. Before letting the book go, we want to acknowledge the many people who have helped us complete it.

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Thank you all.

Getting Started

Why Philosophy? Five Views

ALEX BYRNE

What is knowledge, and why is it valuable? These are characteristic philosophical questions, treated in Plato's *Meno* (see Chapter 3 of this anthology). And, as Socrates says in another of Plato's dialogues, the *Theaetetus*, wonder is where philosophy begins. Philosophers take something that seems of central importance—knowledge, justice, truth, religion, mind, matter—and ask what it is. They then go on to ask other questions about it. Why is knowledge valuable? Is any religion true? How should a just society be organized? Naturally, we can do the same with philosophy, too: What is philosophy, and why is it valuable?

Take the first question first. Philosophers love asking "What is *X*?" The problem is that they very rarely answer it correctly. They are very good at telling us what *X isn't*—Socrates, in *Meno*, explains why knowledge is not "true opinion." They often say helpful things *about X*—Socrates in effect points out that one can't know something that is false. But their attempts to say what *X is*—to give a *definition* of *X*—almost invariably fail. There is unlikely to be an exception when *X* = philosophy. Is philosophy, perhaps, the study of fundamental and general problems that relies on logic and argument? But there are fundamental and general problems in, for example, mathematics, history, and biology; and mathematicians, historians, and biologists certainly rely on logic and argument. Is it, then, the study of fundamental and general *philosophical* problems? Well, yes, but this is almost entirely unenlightening and so not the sort of answer that counts as a *definition*. Still, that doesn't mean we can't say anything helpful about philosophy. Something was already said in the first paragraph, and much more is said over the thousand pages in this anthology.

That is my rather disappointing nonanswer to the first question. What about the second question? What's the value in philosophy? (You might get this from a hostile relative, so it's good to be prepared.)

Will philosophy help you get into law school? True, philosophy majors have very high average LSAT scores, but that probably says more about the kind of person

who chooses to major in philosophy than about any intellectual health benefits of the subject itself.

Does philosophy make you a better person? Some years ago, a philosopher with a spare afternoon crunched some data and concluded that ethicists (philosophers who study right and wrong) were *more* likely to steal library books than other philosophers. Even if that's mistaken, there is no evidence that ethicists are especially ethical. And similarly for philosophers in general: the philosophers I know are mostly fine and admirable people, but I cannot say that they exemplify the good life for humans more than hairdressers, telephone sanitizers, and everyone else.

In his 1912 book *The Problems of Philosophy*, the British philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote that a person "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." Philosophy, he continued, "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."

Is this at least part of the answer to the second question? You might not be persuaded if you don't find doubt particularly liberating and prefer the comfort provided by conventional wisdom. If you're determined to resist the appeal of philosophy, then the forces of logic are powerless to change your mind. But I hope you do see some value in keeping alive your sense of wonder. And if you do, then you are on your way to becoming a philosopher.

JOSHUA COHEN

Because you are reading these words, I know something about you. I know you have a very long book in front of you, with roughly half a million words: a book that is long in words and large in scope, with topics ranging from God and consciousness to knowledge and justice.

I do not *know* that you are reading it for an introductory philosophy course. But I assume you are. So you probably do not know much about philosophy. If you are like most people encountering philosophy for the first time, you are unsure what you will get from it. I took my first philosophy course in 1969, in the fall of my freshman year in college. The professor was a philosopher of science named Paul Feyerabend. I liked the course but was as uncertain about what to expect from philosophy when the course ended as I was when it started.

One thing is clear: what you get from reading philosophy depends on how hard you work at it. But how hard you work at it depends on what you expect to get from it. So what should you expect? Or more exactly, what can you reasonably expect to get from it, on the assumption that you work hard?

Four things.

First, philosophers think *carefully*. They simplify problems and address them one step at a time. That does not mean they get things right. But it does mean that if you work hard at the reading, you will get a better sense of how to wrestle with questions in an intellectually careful way.

Second, philosophers think *deeply*. When a philosopher hears that keeping promises is the right thing to do, he or she wants to know why. And not only why, but what does it mean that it is *right*? What is rightness? Why does rightness matter? And how does it fit into the world? Work hard at the readings, then, and you will get a better sense of how to think about fundamentals.

Third, philosophers think *critically*. As you will see, philosophers disagree with one another, and they sometimes disagree with received wisdom. But they do not simply disagree. They give reasons for their disagreement. Work hard at the readings, then, and you will get a better sense of how to rationally challenge settled assumptions and views you disagree with—and how to challenge yourself.

Fourth, philosophers think *ambitiously*. Look at the table of contents of this anthology. It does not cover every philosophical issue, but we have selected topics that are important—starting with God and ending with equality—and challenging. Work hard at the readings, and you will get a better sense of how to think about large, difficult topics.

That is a lot to expect. But that is the promise of philosophy: to think more carefully, deeply, and critically about issues that are genuinely worth thinking about. We have invested lots of time and energy in this book to deliver on that ambitious promise. We hope you get as much from it as we have given to it.

ELIZABETH HARMAN

I loved philosophy before I knew that the thing I loved was philosophy. What I loved were surprising questions and arguments for surprising conclusions. For me, these questions included: Is a red car in a dark garage still red? If the only way to save your daughter's life is to steal some medicine, is it okay to steal the medicine? If a man who's a barber shaves all and only those men who don't shave themselves, does he shave himself?

There are certain questions that philosophers have tended to think about—many of these questions are posed as the titles of chapters in this book—but philosophy can be *about* anything. Some philosophical questions are not surprising: Is there a God? How should people treat each other? When is a person blameworthy for her actions? What do we know? But within these questions—questions that are basic and central to ordinary human life—we may find surprising further questions: Should I believe in God because that's a *safe bet*? Must I give almost all my money away to fight famine and suffering in faraway places? If someone is wrong about what

his moral duties are, is he thereby blameless when he does terrible things? Do we know we are not mere brains in vats, manipulated to have certain experiences by sophisticated neuroscientists?

A philosophical argument may blow your mind by convincing you of a shocking conclusion. Or it may *almost* convince you, leaving you wondering whether the argument has gone wrong, and if so, where? Thinking it through for yourself, exploring objections, thinking of how the author might respond, and talking all of this through with your friends, classmates, and teachers—in doing all these things, you are doing philosophy. You are a philosopher.

The best thing about philosophy is that, whoever you are, and how much or how little you know of philosophy up to now, the burden is on the authors you are reading to convince *you*. Your reactions to the arguments matter. If the argument has not convinced you, then *it* has failed in something it was trying to do. By probing that failure—taking your own reaction seriously, and seeing what you can say to resist the argument at the crucial point that it loses you—you can stake out the next step forward in examination of the issues at stake. Sometimes one reads a book or an academic paper simply to learn what the author has figured out about the world: one might learn the history of the Japanese samurai; or the basic principles of biochemistry; or why the Pythagorean theorem is true. One cannot read philosophy in this way. The answers to many basic and central philosophical questions are not settled. As you will see, it would be impossible to simply adopt all the views of the authors you will read, because they disagree with each other. In reading philosophy, we are not just taking in information: we are not condemned to passively accept what we read, but nor are we allowed to do so. We must examine each argument and challenge it, and sometimes we learn the most from the arguments that succeed the least in convincing us.

GIDEON ROSEN

In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates famously says that "the unexamined life"—by which he means the unphilosophical life—"is not worth living." This is of course obviously false. Most people manage to lead excellent lives without philosophy. Still, there is a grain of truth nearby. Philosophy can make life better. It can make our individual lives better, and it can make our collective lives better. Indeed for some of us—those of us with a philosophical cast of mind—philosophy can be an indispensable ingredient in the mix of things that make our lives worth living. No doubt Socrates was such a person. Maybe you are, too, though you can't know until you've tried to live a life with philosophy in the mix.

What do I mean by philosophy? It is maddeningly hard to say. Philosophy does not have a distinctive subject matter. Botany is about plants; philosophy is about, well, almost anything. Philosophy does not have a distinctive method. Mathematics, the sciences, and technical disciplines such as law and medicine all have many distinctive methods for solving problems. But philosophy is a magpie: any method from any discipline can be of service, and it is hard to point to a proprietary

method that distinguishes philosophy from other subjects. It is common to say that philosophy is defined by the questions it asks, and there is something to that. The chapters in this book are all headed by questions—"What is consciousness?" "Do we possess free will?" "What is the right thing to do?"—all of which are clearly philosophical. And yet it is quite hard to say what they have in common that makes them philosophical

I think of philosophy, first and foremost, as an intellectual orientation to the (mostly nonphilosophical) problems of life. Human beings inevitably find themselves with problem after problem. Some are practical: Where should we have lunch? Should we launch a revolution? Some are theoretical: Why is the sky blue? What are the laws of nature? In many cases, the problem is clear and the way forward is to take the tools one already has and explore solutions. But it is always possible to pause to reflect on the problem and its presuppositions. You want to know why the sky is blue? Well, what exactly is the *sky* and what is it for something to be *blue*? You want to know whether you should launch a revolution? You wouldn't be asking unless you thought that the current system was unjust. But what is injustice, and what are the morally permissible responses to it? You don't have to ask these reflective questions. But when the problem is difficult, it sometimes helps to ask them. And for some of us, the new questions that emerge from this sort of reflection turn out to be fascinating in their own right.

Over its long history, philosophy has cultivated this habit of reflecting on the terms in which our problems are posed and on the unspoken presuppositions we take for granted as we go about our business. This has occasionally changed the world. It is arguable, for example, that every progressive development in the history of politics—from democracy itself to universal suffrage to the egalitarian ideal of a society without pernicious hierarchies of esteem and power—has been fueled in part by the philosophical reflection on what a just society would be like. But even when it is not immediately useful, it can be worth doing. The scientist takes it for granted that nature is governed by laws and sets out to find them. The philosopher pauses to ask what it could possibly mean to say that nature—a world of mostly mindless things—is "governed" by anything, and how it is that human beings confined to a tiny corner of the universe can possibly know what does the governing. Those of us with a philosophical cast of mind cultivate the habit of asking these questions, both for the pleasure it brings—it deepens the experience of life to know that enormous abstract questions always hover in the background—and because doing so opens up new possibilities. But of course, I don't expect you to take my word for any of this. The only way to know the charms of the examined, philosophical life is to live it, at least for a while, as an experiment. This book is designed to help you do just that.

SEANA SHIFFRIN

Why study philosophy? In short, to have it all: a more successful, fulfilling career; closer friendships; and a fascinating, meaningful life.

How does philosophy work this magic? As a start, philosophical study instills crucial skills useful in all walks and aspects of life. It directs you to pay strict attention to the words an author uses, to investigate their meaning closely, and to pay the same critical attention to what arguments are given (or are missing) and exactly what they establish. You then must devote the same level of care to your own speech and argumentation. In a fairly short time, this practice will lead you to speak and write with greater precision and clarity.

The critical stance philosophical inquiry encourages can be illuminating. Philosophical training inclines you to keep asking and answering the question "why" and "how" with increasing sophistication and ever deepening humility as satisfying answers evade easy efforts. The challenging process helps you identify what you value. When you stop taking the way things are for granted and ask for justifications and explanations, you come to understand yourself and your circumstances better. In some cases, you come to cherish how things are. In other cases, you come to see that things could be different. That realization may be profoundly liberating.

Alongside developing a critical eye, philosophical study also demands that you learn to read and think charitably. When an author's argument appears to fall short of its ambition, it is not enough to identify the failure. You are trained to identify the author's aims, how you could read her effort in its best light, and what contribution you could make to her success. If her argument cannot succeed, there is pressure on you to show another approach that could supply better answers. The practice of charitable interpretation builds skills of mutual understanding and encourages creative and imaginative solutions.

The combination of critical and cooperative perspectives is a powerful cocktail, whether for an advocate, a planner, a counselor, a friend, a citizen, or for one's personal life. Honing your analytical abilities to make critical assessments, to communicate carefully, and to interpret others fairly will improve almost every aspect of your life, including your sense of comedy and your relationships with other people.

These priceless skills work a permanent, transformative effect on one's life. So does the exposure to philosophy's subject matter. The basic issues philosophy tackles involve questions that occur, in one form or another, to most people as early as childhood, such as: What is the connection between your mind and your body? What exists outside your mind, and is it possible to know you perceive it accurately? What makes for a good and meaningful life? How should I relate to other people? How should we live together?

These questions persist throughout one's life. Philosophical study offers structured, articulate ways to grapple with them. In learning how others have answered them, you are connected to other thinkers across history and geography. By elaborating your own answers, you construct and express your character and sense of the meaning of life. Perhaps philosophy's greatest contribution is to offer ideas absorbing and important enough to return to repeatedly over a lifetime of thought.

A Brief Guide to Logic and Argumentation

When a philosopher tackles a question, her aim is not just to answer it. Her aim is to provide an argument for her answer and so to present her audience with reasons for believing what she believes. When you read a philosophical text, your main job is to identify and assess the author's arguments. When you write a philosophy paper, your main job is to offer arguments of your own. And because philosophy is an especially reflective discipline—every question *about* philosophy is a philosophical question—philosophers have turned their attention to this phenomenon. What is an argument? What is a *good* argument? How can we tell whether an argument is a good one? The aim of this brief guide is to introduce some of the tools that philosophers have developed for answering these questions. But be warned: some of what follows is controversial, and many of the most important questions in this area remain wide open. It may be unsettling to discover that even at this elementary stage, philosophy raises questions that centuries of reflection have not resolved. But that is the nature of the subject, and you might as well get used to it.

1. WHAT IS AN ARGUMENT?

An **argument** is a sequence of statements. The last claim in the sequence is the *conclusion*. This is the claim that the argument seeks to establish or support. An argument will usually include one or more **premises**: statements that are simply asserted without proof in the context of the present argument but which may be supported by arguments given elsewhere. Consider, for example, the following argument for the existence of God:

ARGUMENT A

(1) The Bible says that God exists.

(2) Whatever the Bible says is true.

(3) Therefore, God exists.

Here the premises are (1) and (2), and statement (3) is the conclusion.

Now, anyone who propounds this argument will probably realize that his premises are controversial, so he may seek to defend them by independent arguments. In defense of (2) he may argue:

ARGUMENT B

(4) The Bible has predicted many historical events that have come to pass.

(5) Therefore, whatever the Bible says is true.

These two arguments may be combined:

ARGUMENT C

(6) The Bible has predicted many historical events that have come to pass.

(7) Therefore, whatever the Bible says is true.

(8) The Bible says that God exists.

(9) Therefore, God exists.

Here the premises are (6) and (8). Statement (7) is now an *intermediate conclusion*, supported by premise (6), and the conclusion of the argument as a whole is (9), which is in turn supported by (7) and (8). It can be useful to make all of this explicit by writing the argument out as follows:

ARGUMENT C, ANNOTATED

(6) The Bible has predicted many historical events that have come to pass. [premise]

(7) Therefore, whatever the Bible says is true. [from (6)]

(8) The Bible says that God exists. [premise]

(9) Therefore, God exists. [from (7), (8)]

All of this is trivial when the arguments are simple and neatly packaged. But when you are reading a philosophical text with an eye toward identifying the author's argument, it is extraordinarily important (and often quite difficult) to distinguish the author's premises—the propositions she takes for granted as a starting point—from her conclusions. Why is this important? If a statement is meant as a conclusion, then it is fair to criticize the author if she has failed to give a reason for accepting it. If, however, a statement is a premise, then this sort of criticism would not be fair. Every argument must start somewhere. So you should not object to an argument simply on the ground that the author has not proved her premises. Of course, you can object in other ways. As we will see, it is perfectly fair to reject an argument when its premises are false, implausible, or defective in some other way. The point is rather simply this: since every argument must have premises, *it is not a flaw in an argument that the author has not argued for her premises.*

> *Rules of thumb:* If a sentence begins with "hence" or "therefore" or "so," that is a clue that it functions as a conclusion. If a sentence begins with "Let us assume that . . ." or "It seems perfectly obvious that . . ." or "Only a fool would deny that . . . ," this is a clue that it functions as a premise.

Exercise: Consider the following passage. What are the premises? What is the main conclusion?

> Everyone knows that people are usually responsible for what they do. But you're only responsible for an action if your choice to perform it was a free choice, and a choice is only free if it was not determined in advance. So we must have free will, and that means that some of our choices are not determined in advance.

2. VALIDITY

An argument is **valid** if and only if it is *absolutely impossible* for its premises to be true and its conclusion false. In our examples, argument A is clearly valid. If the premises are true—if the Bible is infallible, and if the Bible says that God exists—then God must certainly exist. There is no possible situation—no possible world—in which the premises of the argument are true and the conclusion false. Argument B, by contrast, is clearly **invalid**. It is easy to imagine a circumstance in which the Bible makes many correct predictions about historical events while remaining fallible on other matters. When an argument is valid, we say that the premises **entail** or *imply* the conclusion, or, equivalently, that the conclusion *follows from* the premises.

This concept of validity is a technical one, and some of its applications may strike you as odd. Consider:

ARGUMENT D
All philosophers are criminals.
All criminals are short.
Therefore, all philosophers are short.

ARGUMENT E
God exists.
Therefore, God exists.

ARGUMENT F
The moon is green.
The moon is not green.
Therefore, God exists.

It is easy to see that argument D is valid. The premises are *false*, but that is irrelevant. They *could* have been true, and any possible circumstance in which they *are* true is one in which the conclusion is also true. Argument E is also

valid. Since the premise and the conclusion are identical, it is clearly impossible for the one to be true and the other false. To see that argument F is valid, note that it is obviously impossible for its premises to be true together—the moon cannot be both green and not green! But this means that it is impossible for the premises to be true and the conclusion false, and that is exactly our definition of validity.

As the examples show, a valid argument can be a *lousy* argument. Still, validity is an important property of arguments. Some disciplines—notably, mathematics—insist on valid arguments at every stage. In these areas, a good argument must be a **proof**, and a proof is a valid argument from premises known to be true. Philosophy, like most disciplines, does not insist on proof. Yet philosophers often aspire to produce valid arguments for their conclusions, and there is a good reason for this. Begin by noting that it is always possible to turn an invalid argument, or an argument whose validity is uncertain, into a valid argument by adding premises. Suppose a philosopher offers the following argument:

> ARGUMENT G
> I can imagine existing without my body. (I can imagine my feet slowly and painlessly disappearing, then my knees, then my legs. . . . As my body disappears, I lose all sensation. As my head disappears, everything goes black and silent because my eyes and ears have disappeared, but still I'm thinking about these strange events, and because I'm thinking, I must exist.)
> Therefore, I am not my body.

It may be hard to say whether this is a valid argument, but we can easily turn it into an argument whose validity is beyond dispute:

> ARGUMENT H
> I can imagine existing without my body.
> If I can imagine *X* existing without *Y*, then *X* is not *Y*.
> Therefore, I am not my body.

A philosopher who offers argument G as a proof that human beings are not identical to their bodies probably has argument H in mind. She is probably tacitly *assuming* the premise that is missing in argument G but that H makes explicit. For philosophical purposes, it is often important to make these tacit assumptions explicit so that we can subject them to the bright light of scrutiny. *When you reconstruct the argument implicit in a philosophical text, you should set yourself the task of producing a valid argument for the author's conclusion from the author's stated premises, supplying any missing premises that might be necessary for this purpose, so long as they are premises that the author might have accepted.* If there are many ways to do this, you will find yourself with several competing interpretations of the argument. If there is only one sensible

way of doing this (as with argument G), you will have identified the author's tacit assumptions. This is often a valuable step in your effort to assess the argument.

Exercise: Spot the valid argument(s):

(i) If abortion is permissible, infanticide is permissible.
Infanticide is not permissible.
Therefore, abortion is not permissible.

(ii) It is wrong to experiment on a human subject without consent.
Dr. X experimented on Mr. Z.
Mr. Z consented to this experiment.
Therefore, it was not wrong for Dr. X to experiment on Mr. Z.

(iii) I will not survive my death.
My body will survive my death.
Therefore, I am not my body.

(iv) Geoffrey is a giraffe.
If *X* is a giraffe, then *X*'s parents were giraffes.
Therefore, all of Geoffrey's ancestors were giraffes.

Exercise: The following arguments are not valid as they stand. Supply missing premises to make them valid.

(v) Every event has a cause.
No event causes itself.
Therefore, the universe has no beginning in time.

(vi) It is illegal to keep a tiger as a pet in New York City.
Jones lives in New York City.
Therefore, it would be wrong for Jones to keep a tiger as a pet.

(vii) The sun has risen every day for the past 4 billion years.
Therefore, the sun will rise tomorrow.

Check your understanding. Some statements express *necessary truths*: truths that could not possibly have been false under any circumstances. The truths of pure mathematics are the best examples. There is no possible circumstance in which $2 + 3 \neq 5$, so "$2 + 3 = 5$" is a necessary truth. With this in mind, show that an argument whose conclusion is a necessary truth is automatically a valid argument.

3. SOUNDNESS

A valid philosophical argument is a fine thing. But if the premises are false, it cannot be a good argument. Good arguments, after all, provide us with reasons

for accepting their conclusions, and an argument with false premises cannot do that. Recall argument D:

ARGUMENT D

(1) All philosophers are criminals.

(2) All criminals are short.

(3) Therefore, all philosophers are short

The argument is perfectly valid, but it obviously fails to establish its conclusion.

This means that when you evaluate a philosophical argument, it is never enough to show that the author's conclusions follow from her premises. You must also ask whether the premises are true. A valid argument with true premises is called a **sound** argument.

Check your understanding: Use the definitions of soundness and validity to show that if an argument is sound, its conclusion must be true.

4. HOW TO RECONSTRUCT AN ARGUMENT: AN EXAMPLE

One of the most important skills a philosopher can acquire is the ability to extract an explicit argument from a dense block of prose. There is no recipe for doing this: it is an art. Here we work through an example to illustrate one way of proceeding.

Assignment: Identify and assess the argument in the following passage.

> We see that things which lack intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that not fortuitously, but designedly, do they achieve their end. Now whatever lacks intelligence cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence, as the arrow is shot to its mark by the archer. Therefore some intelligent beings exist by whom all natural things are directed to their end. (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, part I, question 2, article 3)

Step 1: Identify the Conclusion

When you seen an argument like this, your first job is to identify the main conclusion. Unsurprisingly, this will usually come at the end, though many writers will tell you at the start what the conclusion of the argument is going to be. (This is very helpful to the reader, and you should always do it in your own writing.) In this case, the main conclusion is helpfully marked by an explicit "therefore."

(Main conclusion) Some intelligent beings exist by whom all natural things are directed to their end.

Step 2: Interpret the Conclusion

Now that you have identified the conclusion, your next job is to understand it. This can be difficult, especially when the text is old and the language unfamiliar. What is it for a being to be *intelligent*? What is a *natural* thing? In this case, the most pressing issue is to understand what it means for a natural thing to be "directed towards an end." As the context makes clear, a natural thing is anything that is not a person or an artifact—an animal or a plant, or perhaps a rock. What is it for such a thing to have an *end*? This is in fact a profound question, but to a first approximation, the end of a thing is its purpose or function. The *end* of the heart is to pump blood, the *end* of a worker bee is to supply food for the queen, and so on. The conclusion of the argument, reformulated in more familiar terms, is therefore this:

(Main conclusion, reformulated)	There is an intelligent being that ensures that natural objects perform their functions.

This illustrates a general point: when you analyze an argument, you are not required to employ the author's original words in every case. It is sometimes useful to supply more familiar words and grammatical constructions, provided they represent a plausible interpretation of the author's meaning. In this case, we have replaced Aquinas's talk of "ends" with talk of "functions."

Step 3: Reconstruct the Argument

Your next job is to reconstruct the argument for the main conclusion. What are the premises from which Aquinas argues? You might think that the first sentence states a premise: "We see that things which lack intelligence . . . act for an end." But as we read on, it becomes clear that this is, in fact, an intermediate conclusion. The first sentence, taken as a whole, is itself an argument.

> Unintelligent things always or nearly always act in the same way, so as to achieve the best result. [premise]
> Therefore, unintelligent things perform a function.

This is an interesting argument, but the connection between the premise and the conclusion is obscure. As it stands, the argument is not clearly valid. But we can render it valid by interpolating an unstated premise:

(1) Unintelligent things always or nearly always act in the same way, so as to achieve the best result.

(2) If a thing always or nearly always acts in a certain way, so as to achieve the best result, then that thing performs a function.

(3) Therefore, unintelligent things perform a function.

This shows the value of making unstated premises fully explicit. The unstated premise (2) contains an important idea. The function of the heart is to pump blood.

How do we know? Because hearts almost always pump blood, and this is a benefit to the organism as a whole. In general, when we see a natural thing acting in a way that provides a benefit, we infer that its function (or one of its functions) is to provide that benefit. The second premise makes this assumption explicit.

When we turn to the next sentence, we have a puzzle. "Hence it is plain that not fortuitously, but designedly, do they achieve their end." This sentence begins with "hence," so we naturally assume that it is supposed to be a conclusion supported by what precedes it. If we pursue this interpretation, the argument will look like this:

(1) Unintelligent things always or nearly always act in the same way, so as to achieve the best result. [premise]

(2) If a thing always or nearly always acts in a certain way, so as to achieve the best result, then that thing performs a function. [premise]

(3) Therefore, unintelligent things perform a function. [from (1) and (2)]

Therefore, unintelligent things perform their functions by design (and not by accident). [from ?]

The puzzle is that nothing in the argument appears to support this new conclusion. Why shouldn't natural beings perform their functions by accident rather than by design? Nothing in the text speaks to this question, and so it may be unclear whether Aquinas means this to be a new premise or an intermediate conclusion supported by what comes before.

Again, we can interpolate an unstated premise that will render the argument valid. Aquinas apparently finds it obvious that if a thing has a function, it must have been designed to perform that function. If this is right, then the complete argument up to this point runs as follows:

(1) Unintelligent things always or nearly always act in the same way, so as to achieve the best result. [premise]

(2) If a thing always or nearly always acts in a certain way, so as to achieve the best result, then that thing performs a function. [premise]

(3) Therefore, unintelligent things perform a function. [intermediate conclusion, from (1) and (2)]

(4) If a thing performs a function, it does so by design. [implicit premise]

(5) Therefore, unintelligent things perform their functions by design. [intermediate conclusion, from (3) and (4)]

The remainder of the argument is now straightforward. The next sentence states another premise.

(6) If an unintelligent thing performs a function by design, then there exists an intelligent being that ensures that it performs this function. [premise]

And from this, Aquinas moves directly to his main conclusion:

(7) Therefore, there exists an intelligent being that ensures that natural objects perform their functions. [conclusion, from (5) and (6)]

What just happened? We took a dense philosophical text and we turned it into an explicit argument. Along the way, we did our best to make the author's unspoken premises explicit and to understand what they might mean. The result is a *reconstruction* of the original argument.

Step 4

We are now in a position to assess the argument as we have reconstructed it. We have two questions to ask: Is it valid, and are the premises true?

Taking the second question first, we twenty-first-century philosophers will have doubts about premise (1)—Do *most* natural things really act so as to achieve the "best result"?—and also about premise (6). The heart of an animal performs a function. Must it have been designed by an intelligent being for that purpose? Certainly not; natural selection can do the job even if no intelligence is involved. So the premises of the argument are certainly open to question.

But even if we waive this objection and suppose that the premises are true, there is a further problem. The conclusion (7) claims there is a *single* intelligent being that ensures that natural things perform their functions. But the premises only require that each natural thing be directed toward its end by some intelligent being or other. To see the difference, note that it is one thing to say that every clock has a designer and another to say that there is a single master-designer who is responsible for every clock. This means that we can accept Aquinas's premises and much of his reasoning without accepting his main conclusion. Even if every natural thing was designed by an intelligent being, it does not follow that a single intelligent being designed them all. Verdict: *Aquinas's argument, as we have reconstructed it, is not valid.*

This brings up a very important point. We have given a reasonably careful reconstruction of Aquinas's argument, but despite our best efforts, the argument as we have reconstructed it is clearly *bad*. Now of course no one is perfect: good philosophers sometimes give bad arguments. But when you have produced a reconstruction of an argument by a good philosopher and the result is an argument that is clearly flawed, that is a sign that you may have misunderstood the original argument. The philosophers represented in this collection are all good philosophers, so you should approach their arguments with this in mind: *Before you dismiss an argument on the basis of your reconstruction of it, you should*

be sure that your reconstruction is the most charitable interpretation you can find. A charitable reconstruction will present the argument in its best light. It may still involve mistakes, but they will not be gross and obvious mistakes. The most convincing way to object to a philosophical argument is to take the time to identify the best possible version of it, and then to show that *this* version of the argument is still no good.

Exercise: Provide a reconstruction of Aquinas's argument that does not commit the logical error mentioned above in the transition from (6) to (7).

5. FORMAL VALIDITY

Consider:

ARGUMENT I
Every number is an abstract object.
Abstract objects are not located in space.
So numbers are not located in space.

This is a concrete argument with a specific subject matter. It is about numbers, spatial location, and so on. But we can abstract from these specific features of the argument in order to focus on its *form*. One way to do this is to replace all of the subject-specific terms in the argument with *schematic letters*, leaving only the logical skeleton of the argument in place. In the case of argument H, this yields the following *schematic argument*.

Every *F* is a *G*.
*G*s are not *H*.
So *F*s are not *H*.

Once we have identified this schematic argument, it is easy to produce other arguments that exhibit the same form but concern an entirely unrelated subject matter. For example:

ARGUMENT J
Every whale is a mammal.
Mammals do not lay eggs.
So whales do not lay eggs.

In this case, it is clear not just that our original argument is valid but that any argument generated from it in this way must be valid. (The second premise in argument J is false, as every platypus knows. But that does not prevent the argument from being valid. If that puzzles you, review the definition of validity.) When an

argument is an instance of a scheme all of whose instances are valid, the argument is said to be **formally valid**.

Note: An argument can be valid without being formally valid. Consider:

ARGUMENT K
Every crayon in the box is scarlet.
So every crayon in the box is red.

The underlying form of this argument is:

Every *F* is *G*.
So every *F* is *H*.

And it is obvious that many arguments of this form will not be valid. (*Exercise:* Give an example.) Of course, we can make argument K formally valid by adding the premise, "If a thing is scarlet, then it is red." As we have emphasized, this is always worth doing when you are analyzing a philosophical argument. And yet, the original argument is valid as it stands, since it is absolutely impossible for the premise to be true and the conclusion false.

Formal logic is the study of formally valid arguments. It aims to catalog the vast array of formally valid arguments and to provide general principles for determining whether any given argument has this feature. Formal logic is an intricate, highly developed subject at the intersection of philosophy and mathematics, and it can be extraordinarily useful for the student of philosophy. Here we list some examples of formally valid arguments along with their traditional names. In what follows, the schematic letters *P*, *Q*, and *R* stand for complete declarative sentences. For your amusement, we also include the standard symbolic representations of these forms of inference. Here "→" means "if . . . then"; "~" means "it is not the case that"; and "∨" means "or."

MODUS PONENS

If *P* then *Q*	$P \rightarrow Q$
P	*P*
Q	*Q*

MODUS TOLLENS

If *P* then *Q*	$P \rightarrow Q$
It is not the case that *Q*	$\sim Q$
It is not the case that *P*	$\sim P$

DISJUNCTIVE SYLLOGISM

Either *P* or *Q*	$P \vee Q$
It is not the case that *P*	$\sim P$
Q	*Q*

HYPOTHETICAL SYLLOGISM

If P then Q	$P \rightarrow Q$
If Q then R	$Q \rightarrow R$
If P then R	$P \rightarrow R$

CONTRAPOSITION

If P then Q	$P \rightarrow Q$
If it is not the case that Q, then it is not the case that P	$\sim Q \rightarrow \sim P$

All of this may seem obvious, but it can sometimes be quite tricky to determine whether an argument is formally valid. Consider:

A person is responsible for a choice only if it is a free choice.
Every human choice is either caused or uncaused.
If a choice is caused, then it is caused either by prior events or by the agent himself.
If a choice is caused by prior events, then it is not free.
If a choice is uncaused, it is not free.
So a choice is free only if it is caused by the agent himself.
But no choice is caused by the agent himself.
So there is no such thing as a free choice.
So no one is ever responsible for his choices.

Is this a valid argument? You could stare at it for a while, and you might find yourself persuaded one way or the other. Or you could take a logic class and learn enough formal logic to settle the matter conclusively once and for all. One of the great advantages of formal logic is that it permits us to *prove* that an argument of this sort is valid by breaking it down into steps, each of which is indisputably an instance of a valid form.

6. A PUZZLE ABOUT FORMAL LOGIC

Apart from its utility as a tool, formal logic is a source of philosophical perplexity in its own right. Imagine a long row of colored squares on the wall in front of you. The left-most square (square 1) is bright red; the right-most square (square 1000) is bright yellow. The squares in between run from red on the left through orange in the middle to yellow on the right. But there are so many of them that they satisfy the following condition:

(1) Square n and square $n + 1$ are indistinguishable by ordinary means.

If you had a measuring device, you might discover that they differ slightly in color, but you can't tell them apart just by looking, no matter how hard you try. (If you don't think this is possible, get out your paint set and play around. It is easy to produce a sequence of colored patches running from red to yellow that satisfies this condition.)

We now note what appears to be an obvious fact:

(2) If two things are indistinguishable by ordinary means, then if one of them is red, so is the other.

If someone shows you a red rose and tells you, "I've got another rose that's indistinguishable from this one, but it's not red," you would know immediately that he was lying. It's built into our concept of *red* that if two objects look just alike to the naked eye in broad daylight, then either both are red or neither is.

From these two premises, it follows by modus ponens that:

(3) If square n is red, then so is square $n + 1$.

But now we're in trouble. For we can reason as follows:

(4) Square 1 is red.	[premise]
(5) If square 1 is red, then square 2 is red.	[3]
(6) So square 2 is red.	[4, 5, modus ponens]
(7) If square 2 is red, then square 3 is red.	[3]
(8) So square 3 is red.	[6, 7, modus ponens]
. . .	
(1002) So square 999 is red.	[1000, 1001, modus ponens]
(1003) If square 999 is red, then square 1000 is red.	[3]
(1004) So square 1000 is red.	[1002, 1003, modus ponens]

But this is nuts. It was built into our description of the situation that square 1000 is not red; it is bright yellow!

What's gone wrong? If you look closely, you will see that this argument has only three premises. Two of them are stipulated as part of our description of the situation: square 1 is red, and adjacent squares are indistinguishable by ordinary means. The other premise is (2), the claim that there cannot be two indistinguishable things, one of which is red, the other not. The argument uses only one rule of inference: modus ponens. And this leaves us with only two responses to the paradox: either (2) is false and there is a sharp cutoff between red and "not red" somewhere in our

series or modus ponens is not a valid rule of inference after all. What is the best response? The problem is called the *sorites paradox* (pronounced saw-*rye*-tees), and it remains unsolved.

7. WHAT MAKES AN ARGUMENT GOOD?

We have seen (see section 2 earlier) that valid arguments can be lousy arguments. The same goes for sound arguments. The question of God's existence is the most important question in the philosophy of religion. But it is easy to produce a sound argument that settles it:

ARGUMENTS L AND M

L: God exists.
Therefore, God exists.

M: God does not exist.
Therefore, God does not exist.

These arguments are both formally valid, and one of them has true premises. That means that *one of them is sound*. But neither of these arguments is a contribution to philosophy, and neither could possibly provide a reason for believing its conclusion. Why not?

The obvious answer is that these arguments are defective because they are **circular**—their conclusions are included among their premises—and that is certainly a defect. This might tempt us to say that an argument is good if and only if it is sound and noncircular. But this is not quite right. Consider:

ARGUMENT N

God knows when you will die.
Therefore, God exists.

This argument may be sound, and the premise is clearly *different* from the conclusion, so it is not circular. And yet it is perfectly useless for establishing its conclusion. One way to bring this out is to note that anyone who doubts the conclusion will *automatically* doubt the premise. We cannot imagine a reasonable person *coming to believe* that God exists by first believing that God knows when she will die, and then *inferring* the existence of God. If she believes the premise, she must *already* believe the conclusion.

This shows something important. In a good argument, the premises must be credible *independently* of the conclusion. It must be possible for someone who has not already accepted the conclusion to accept the premise first, and to do so reasonably. This point is sometimes put by saying that a good argument must

not **beg the question**. Imagine that you are arguing with someone who doubts your conclusion. Now ask: Could this person reasonably accept my premises if he has not already accepted my conclusion? If not, then the argument is bad in this distinctive way.

It is worth stressing, however, that this idea is not completely clear. Suppose you have read about the platypus, but you are not sure that such things exist. (For all you know, the platypus may be extinct like the dodo or legendary like the hippogriff.) A friend may set you straight as follows:

ARGUMENT O
That thing in the bushes is a platypus.
So platypuses exist.

This is a valid argument, and if it is sound—if your friend really is pointing to a platypus—it might give you an excellent reason for accepting its conclusion. Argument O is thus a good argument: it does not beg the question.

Now suppose that you have been impressed by Descartes's famous suggestion that for all you know, there is no external world at all, and in particular that for all you know, you are a disembodied spirit whose experiences are hallucinations produced in your mind by a malicious demon.[1] At this stage, you are in the market for an argument to show that the material world—the world of rocks and trees and houses—really exists. Trying to be helpful, I hold up a rock and say:

ARGUMENT P
This rock in my hand is a material object.
So material objects exist.

Argument P has exactly the same form as argument O. Both are valid, and both may be sound. And yet it has seemed to many (though not to all) that given the context in which it has been presented, argument P begs the question. If you want to prove the existence of the material world to someone who doubts it, you can't just hold up a rock and say "Voilà!" Your interlocutor, after all, will not believe the rock is real.[2]

1. René Descartes, "Meditation I: What Can Be Called into Doubt," in his *Meditations on First Philosophy,* reprinted in Chapter 6 of this anthology.

2. Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) disagreed. As his biographer reports:

> After we came out of the church, we stood talking for some time together of Bishop Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to prove the nonexistence of matter, and that every thing in the universe is merely ideal. I observed, that though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it—"I refute it *thus*." James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. G. B. Hill (Oxford University Press, 1935), Vol. 1, p. 471.

What is the difference between these two "proofs"? This is a difficult question. It is often easy to tell in practice when an argument begs the question—when it *presupposes* what it seeks to prove. But it is quite hard to provide a general rule for determining when an argument begs the question in this sense. This is one point at which our understanding of the contrast between good and bad arguments is incomplete.

8. NON-DEMONSTRATIVE ARGUMENTS

So far we have been discussing valid arguments and asking, in effect: What is the difference between a good valid argument and a bad one? We have seen that a good valid argument must be sound, and that it must not beg the question. And there is no doubt that philosophers have often sought to provide arguments of just this sort. But it would be a grave mistake to suppose that every worthwhile argument must fit this description.

Consider:

ARGUMENTS Q, R, S, AND T

Q: Everyone who has drunk hemlock has died soon afterward.
∴ If I drink this hemlock, I will die.

R: Despite years of looking, no one has ever seen a unicorn.
∴ Unicorns do not exist.

S: The cheese in the cupboard is disappearing.
We hear scratching sounds in the cupboard late at night.
There is a suspicious mouse-sized hole in the back of the cupboard.
∴ A mouse has come to live with us.

T: It's normally wrong to kill a person.
The bartender is a person.
∴ It would be wrong to kill the bartender.

By ordinary standards, these are all excellent arguments. If you are trying to give me reason to believe that unicorns don't exist, or that I will die if I drink the hemlock, or that a mouse has infiltrated the kitchen, or that I shouldn't kill the bartender, these arguments ought to do the trick. But of course *these arguments are not valid*. In each case, it is logically possible for the premises to be true and the conclusion false. Unicorns may be very good at hiding. I may be a biological freak immune to hemlock. The evidence in the kitchen may be a hoax cooked up by my roommates as a joke. The bartender might be a dangerous fiend who will destroy the world unless I shoot him, and so on.

Arguments such as Q, R, S, and T are called **non-demonstrative** arguments. (A *demonstration* is a valid proof, and since these arguments are not valid, they are not demonstrations.) A good non-demonstrative argument must have true premises, and it must not beg the question. But how do we distinguish a good

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