

Chapter One

WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY

This first chapter is also the last to which one should return after all the others. It gives a preliminary idea of the whole book, and helps make it intelligible. But it becomes fully intelligible only in light of the whole text of which it is the first part. Section I defines the kind of objective truth which human inquiry seeks out. Section II relates philosophy to religion. Section III explains an ancient view as to how philosophy may, most ambitiously, contribute to human fulfillment, to what is now often called "self-realization." Philosophy at its most ambitious pursues the goal of religion by purely rational means. Sections IV and V, the heart of the chapter, explain the method of doing philosophy. This method embraces philosophy both in this ambitious sense and in equally valid less ambitious senses. The final section briefly surveys valid but less ambitious forms of philosophy by which, however, Philosophy is often evaded.

I. Relativism

Philosophy is a subject of which most have already heard. Most of us have had philosophical discussions with friends. By now you may even have developed an idea of what philosophy is or should be. You should read this chapter before the nine chapters that follow in order to solidify some preliminary idea of what the subject of this book is.

But you should not feel frustrated if there is much you do not understand. You should also plan to read this chapter after you have gone through the rest of the book. Whereas in a first reading it will be the most difficult chapter, in your second reading at the end it will be the easiest. Many things that seemed unintelligible before will fall into place.

However, there is one seemingly erroneous expectation among beginning philosophy students that is so common that something should be said about it at the start. This error consists in the belief that your thinking a statement to be true actually makes it true for you. This view is commonly called relativism or, more specifically, subjectivism. The view makes both a negative and a positive claim. Negatively, it denies that statements are true merely by virtue of the facts independently of anyone's opinion. Positively, it replaces the concept of objective truth (i.e., truth independent of your or my opinion) with a concept of truth as subjective as dependent on the changing opinions of different people. Relativism is attractive to people who wish to justify tolerance towards others by blocking any right to bang others over the head based on one's presumed possession of the absolute or objective truth.

The relativism of what is now called post-modernism arose in France in part due to the desire of the intellectual classes to disown the political fundamentalism of the colonial empire, based on the presumed objective truth that France had a civilizing mission in

Africa.

In the 1980s and 1990s some anthropologists turned to an even more radical interpretive perspective on culture, known generally as postmodernism. Postmodernism questions whether an objective understanding of other cultures is at all possible. It developed as a reaction to modernism, which was the scientific and rational approach to understanding the world found in most ethnographies. Postmodern anthropologists suggest that all people construct culture through an ongoing process that resembles the writing, reading, and interpretation of a text. Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002. © 1993-2001 Microsoft Corporation.

It may seem that I am rejecting relativism in a dogmatic way. It will soon be apparent that this dogmatism is not of the ordinary sort with which we are familiar from religion or politics. This dogmatism aims at promoting error correction and discovery. Relativism, which makes everyone content with his or her present belief, has no "heuristic" value: in other words, it fails to promote discovery. The rejection of relativism is necessary if a philosophy is to be a form of inquiry rather than a "rap session" in which everyone expresses himself to everyone else.

The fact that relativism is widespread today is not an historical accident. There appear to be at least three connections between relativism and our historical times. First, relativism satisfies a powerful need in our own culture, generally Western culture, for individual self-expression. This need is apparent in matters of style and taste, but it is also apparent in philosophy. It is a trend marked by a long-standing Christian stress on the infinite importance of each and every individual, and it has been further supported by the more recent preoccupation with individual human rights.

A second historical cause of relativism is that the philosophers have notoriously failed to reach agreement on the most important questions facing them. The question that naturally arises as a consequence is: how can we--you and I--succeed in finding the objective truth when such great minds have failed?

Relativism is often justified as a means of supporting mutual tolerance between people. In past centuries belief in objective (absolute, universal) truth resulted in fanaticism, intolerance, persecution, and devastating religious wars. The religious wars of modern European history were stopped in part through a rising morality of tolerance. But one way to justify tolerance is to hold that truth is relative to each individual or group of individuals. Thinking something is so makes it so for the individual who thinks it. A belief may be true for me if I believe it strongly enough, and false for you if you do not believe it.

But despite its appeal, relativism cannot easily be accepted. The reason is that it makes false belief (error) impossible. If a statement is true simply because it is believed to be true, no statement believed by anyone can be false to that person. If error is impossible, the need to correct it never arises, and any search for the truth becomes pointless. Thus philosophy itself as a search for truth becomes pointless. The simple reason is that we each already have the truth without changing anything in our present beliefs.

There is a further problem. Relativism presented as an objective truth contains what is

called a paradox. It presents the claim that there is no objective truth as an objective truth! How relativism can be an exception to the rule governing all truths is not made clear. The relativist would be more consistent if he or she admitted that relativism is exception to the universal relativism of all truth. In other words, the only consistent relativism seems to be a relatively true relativism, not an absolutely true relativism. But in that case relativism need be taken no more seriously than non-relativism.

It costs the relativist far less than the non-relativist to give up the claim that his or her position is objectively true, however. In fact, the universal relativism of all beliefs can be assumed without difficulty in certain situations. For instance, it can be assumed in what is sometimes called "house" philosophy. This is a kind of philosophizing in which you are each encouraged primarily to express yourself--a kind you may have known before enrolling in this class. Some people do this in order to impress others with the brilliance or oddity of their views, or to challenge others to a discussion. Many do it without any thought of subsequently being knocked down in logical argument and refutation, but simply as a way of privileging others with a revelation of something important about themselves. For if everyone is somehow beautiful in his or her own way, why not suppose that everyone has his or her personal truth, too?

Yet a reservation about all this still comes to mind. Suppose the belief that abortion is wrong to be a personal truth of yours. If you are concerned that your belief be understood, you assume that it is objectively true that you have this personal belief. In other words, you probably would still want to say that it is wrong for others to suppose you support abortion. If so, objective truth slips back in, not perhaps in the basic beliefs by which we define who we are, but in our interpretations of one another's basic beliefs.

Some people talk without any concern to be understood. We know that intoxication sometimes has this effect. Yet the classroom is a rather different context from a bar, or even a coffee house. The objectivist position about truth over the centuries has been assumed and institutionalized in the life of universities. That truth is absolute or objective is a practical assumption of every scientific quest for truth. We cannot commit ourselves to the pursuit of objective truth unless we believe it is there to be found.

The traditional university institutionalizes the objective truth that there is objective truth that error is possible as one of its operating assumptions. Discovery of what seems to many the patriarchal bias of the traditional male-dominated university has recently made the belief that objective truth is actually taught in our universities. When the uncontested opinion of a dominant group is presented as objective truth by that group, the rhetoric of "objective truth" becomes ideological rather than scientific. When ideology dominates the university, the emergence of alternative protest ideologies may be justified. Thus a feminist or Afro-American university might emerge with feminist or Afro-American physics or sociology alongside the traditional "white male sexist" university. And these different subcultures may then present themselves as competing views as to objective truth on a topic: but they may also present themselves as compatible relative truths each true for a different groups.

Abuse of the ideal of objective truth requires criticism of the abuse in the name of the ideal, not rejection of the ideal. The search for objective truth is the task of universities which remain dedicated to freeing individuals from illusion and cultural prejudice. Accepting this task presupposes that there is some objective truth to look for. Overcoming illusion and cultural prejudice in our belief is no doubt an immensely difficult undertaking. Probably it can never be entirely accomplished. But that does not mean that no progress can be made in that direction. It certainly does not mean we should not try to make as much progress as we can. Let us tackle one illusion at a time.

To adopt relativism is to give up on scientific inquiry before one even begins. It may be reasonable to be a skeptic about whether what Lincoln meant in private conversation can be known. But it does not seem reasonable to deny before investigation that there is any objective truth (or possible error) as to what he meant. And this is true regardless of whether you care about the objective truth, or about others knowing it.

Belief in objective truth, as the American philosopher Charles Saunders Peirce held, conditions the very possibility of our search for truth. This belief is not initially justified as an objective truth, but as an assumption whose adoption makes the pursuit of such truth possible. Of course this pursuit may ultimately be justified by its fruit. It may come to be justified by the errors it succeeds in eliminating. The pragmatic justification of the assumption of objective truth may pass into theoretical justification of it only to the extent that science comes up with actual cases of objective truth.



Charles Saunders Peirce (1839-1914)

On the other hand, it might be thought that our quest for objective truth may come up perpetually empty. Objective truth as determined by fact may remain forever unknown despite our most energetic search. This is the position defended by skepticism. Much of course depends on how strict the criteria for "knowledge" are. How much evidence is enough to constitute knowledge? Skeptics, unlike relativists, do not deny that there is objective truth. Rather, they deny that it is ever known. The reply taken in the following chapters to skepticism will be that knowledge that one's belief is false can be supported by sufficient evidence more easily than knowledge that one's belief is true. Knowledge that one's belief contradicts itself, or contradicts a second belief of the same individual, is more easily established than knowledge that it asserts what is factually the case. Therefore, knowledge that one has been in error is supportable even if knowledge that

one is currently right is not.

That there are objective truths has rarely been doubted in mathematics or physics. Relativism with regard to " $2 + 2 = 4$ " seems perverse. Why should relativism in philosophy not strike us as equally perverse? It may be difficult to know whether a philosophical belief about the existence of God is true. But from this we cannot conclude that there is no objective truth of the matter.

Some distinguished philosophers, like some beginning students, do hold that there is no objective truth about the world's basic elements. They are relativists about whether the world ultimately consists in momentary sensory impressions or enduring physical things, contains rabbits, rabbit parts, or rabbit stages. On this view there remain, in the ultimate analysis, alternative ways of chopping the world up into its constituents. None of these ways chops the world, so to speak, at its own joints. Each is merely arbitrary. But the result of relativism, here, too, is that it is impossible to be wrong. It is impossible to investigate the final make-up of the world. It is only possible to make useful decisions, for one purpose or another, as to how to view the world.

For the beginning student of philosophy one appeal of relativism is that it protects one against any risk of being refuted. For the teacher there is a temptation to allow personal styles of belief as they vary from student to student (and student to teacher) to be the message in philosophy as much as in popular music. The alternative is to risk the arousal of hostilities which may prove difficult to control. The study of philosophy as a quest for objective truth is initially threatening to students. This quest not only confronts the student with an alien world, but also does so much more than other academic subjects.

Calculus is also the discovery of an initially alien world. Yet your natural resistance to learning the strange and at first indigestible truths of calculus is less than your resistance to philosophy. You enter the study of calculus with few or no false ideas about differential equations. Indeed, you likely enter with no ideas at all. Here is a corner of the mind, then, which up until the time of formal study remains virgin territory.

As a student of philosophy you are not so fortunate. This is because philosophy shares its subject matter with morality, politics, and religion. We all consciously or subconsciously have beliefs on such topics well before we ever embark on any formal study. Because these pre-philosophical beliefs on philosophical topics were often acquired without serious examination of them, the study of philosophy, much more than the study of calculus, is the correction of error, more precisely the changing of beliefs found to be erroneous. And the correction of error, until you have acquired a taste for it, is more painful than the assimilation of knowledge in a virgin territory in which you have not yet staked out any belief claims. But the pain is doubly great when the beliefs in question are so sensitively personal as to enter into the very definition of your personal identity. No wonder many beginning students retreat from philosophy as a search for knowledge to a view of philosophy as a self-expressive art form.

II. *Philosophy and Religion*

One reason philosophy is controversial is that in its theological function it has the same subject matter as religion: both theological philosophy and religion are concerned with everything that exists. But they are also concerned with that outside of which nothing exists. In religion the whole outside of which nothing is has frequently been called "God," while in philosophy it has been called "the Absolute."

It is with respect to method rather than subject matter that religion and philosophy differ. The philosophical method of forming beliefs is that of rational scientific observation and research. By contrast, in the three great Western religions--Judaism, Christianity, and Islam--belief is established by faith in a religious authority. Such an authority, unlike a rational or scientific authority, is indispensable because we are not provided with any method of knowing on our own without that authority.

Theological philosophy thus appears as a cross between religion and philosophy. It has the limitless subject matter of religion, not the limited subject matter of a special science. And it has the rational error correction method of the sciences rather than the ultimate appeals to authority and tradition common to religion. Because philosophy generally is rational criticism, and because religion is determined by authority and tradition, theological philosophy is a critical assessment of religious belief. It is the analysis and criticism of religious conceptions. Yet philosophical criticism, like film or theatre criticism, can have a positive as well as a negative result. It can undermine religion, but can also lend support to it.

It would be a mistake to assume that all philosophy is theological. It is possible to philosophize through the analysis and criticism of non-theological concepts, such as the concepts of morality, politics, science, or common sense. Indeed, there can be a philosophy of anything. Yet theological philosophy is philosophy at its most ambitious.

Because the subject matter of philosophy is all-encompassing, it is possible, in doing philosophy, to have a feeling of freedom and even exhilaration which is not possible in the pursuit of any special science. There is literally no subject which one cannot study philosophically. The spirit to which we refer is one of uninhibited inquiry unrestricted with respect to all other subject matter. However, many beginning students of philosophy are inhibited from enjoying that freedom for fear that the religious faith brought into the philosophy classroom will suffer. In addressing this problem, it will be useful to enumerate three standpoints on the relation of philosophy and religion. In its own way each of these standpoints permits one to get something out of philosophy without repudiating one's non-philosophical religion or ideology.

The Total Philosopher: Philosophy as the All-Consuming Vocation of One's Life. Some of the greatest philosophers of history, such as Pythagoras, Spinoza, and Hegel appear to have been total philosophers. They consistently retain the philosophical point of view. They of course do other things than philosophy in the strict sense. They eat, drink, and sleep. But they do so philosophically. And they evaluate non-philosophical

beliefs, interests, and institutions from that point of view. Thus no one who is totally a philosopher can rest content with an ultimate appeal to faith or authority, or tradition in any sphere.



Encarta Encyclopedia, Culver Pictures

Pythagoras, Spinoza, Hegel



Encarta Encyclopedia, The New York Public Library



Encarta Encyclopedia, PAR/NYC, Inc.

A total philosopher may of course chose to repudiate religion whenever its assertions are found to be false on the basis of philosophy. But a total philosopher is not obliged to repudiate religion. For there are different ways of judging non-philosophical beliefs from a philosophical point of view.

A total philosopher with a philosophy resulting from personal inquiry may continue to accept the beliefs of a particular religion on the ground that the philosophical truth one has discovered lies encoded in that religion. Considering the moral, aesthetic, or social values of religion, the total philosopher may chose to his or her philosophical beliefs in religion. Religion may be viewed as a map of our relationship to God or the cosmos. A map can only be proved false if taken as an accurate picture of what it maps. As long as cities are not thought to be dots and roads to be lines, a map does not mislead. It simply needs to be read and deciphered in terms of the fuller picture of our relationship to the world given by philosophy. As a solution to the conflict of religion and philosophy this solution may be called "philosophy realizing the illumination of faith."

Periodic Total Philosophers or Recurrent Episodes of All-Consuming Curiosity. Very few if any beginning students of philosophy such as yourselves are "total philosophers." Some of you in studying philosophy will end up alternating between

philosophy and religion. You will end up leading two lives. For the purposes of a class you will become a part-time total philosopher. In your ordinary life you may be a practicing Christian, Jew, pleasure-seeker, or lover of creature comforts. But you will also lead a special life as a student in a philosophy course. The purpose of this special life will be to perform an interesting experiment, the experiment of seeing how far reason and observation can go in the pursuit of truth unaided by divine revelation or authority.

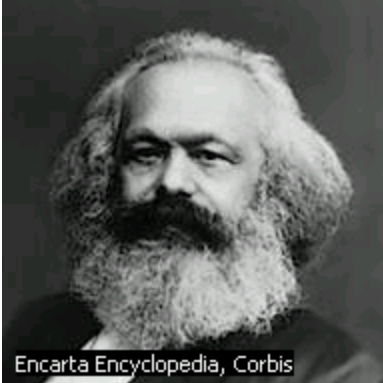
But your special life as a philosophy student is only a small island in the ocean of your ordinary life. From your ordinary perspective outside class, you may be skeptical that philosophy can reach the truth you already are sure you have. In that case you may view philosophy as the enemy, since it leads into error. But you may also believe optimistically that it eventually will reach this truth, even if it is now far removed from it. In any case, you will not judge non-philosophical beliefs from a philosophical perspective. You will not bring the results of your philosophical study to bear on the whole range of your life. Certainly this is a possible solution for which the beginning student may opt. As a solution to the conflict of religion and philosophy it is known as the "separation of religion and philosophy."

Circumstantial Philosophers or Philosophy in the Service of Something Else. If the mental gymnastics of trying to "lead two lives" are too strenuous, it is possible for you to study philosophy without even temporarily suspending the commitments of your ordinary life outside the class. You may be a full-time Christian, hedonist, political animal, or whatever. Yet, without being a total philosopher, even part-time, you may use philosophy to help clarify issues in your non-philosophical life. If your basic commitment is to a religion, you thus have the option of using philosophy to clarify that religion. Of course you could do this in an intellectually dishonest way. Thus the Sophists were willing to back up a non-philosophical practice with arguments which merely appear to be good. Yet it is also possible to illuminate and advance a cause with a level of insight from which even those who do not share that cause can benefit. As a solution to the conflict of religion and philosophy it is known as "philosophy seeking an understanding of faith."



Encarta Encyclopedia, Hulton Deutsch

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) was a circumstantial philosopher. Philosophical reflection illuminated his Christianity, a faith that had reasons that reason knows not.



Encarta Encyclopedia, Corbis

Karl Marx (1818-1883) subjected philosophy to the task of illuminating inevitable social revolution

III. *Philosophy and Self-Realization*

First time study of philosophy is often experienced as a form of alienation. One must struggle to detach oneself from some of one's established beliefs. One must discover, after some discomfort, that when one's beliefs are criticized, one's personal freedom is being promoted, not limited. One measure of the popular distrust of philosophy is the frequency with which we hear the advice that the discussion of religion and politics ought to be avoided, at least in polite society. Philosophical inquiry consists precisely in the discussion of religion and politics. But if philosophy is discourteous or unseemly in good society, it is likely because it is felt to be threatening by those who are uninitiated to it.

We may admit that philosophy is not for everyone. Many are content with traditional religious, ideological, and moral formulas approved by accepted authorities. We do not have to belittle human intelligence to recognize that many lack the time or interest to apply their intelligence to what some philosophers have thought to be its highest end.

Philosophy is for those who are no longer content to receive traditional formulas merely on authority. But such persons constitute a pivotal segment of the population. If a civilization faces a moral crisis, it is not necessarily because people generally have withdrawn their confidence. This occurs more typically because a more intellectually skeptical and potentially influential segment of the population no longer accepts on trust certain assumptions on which that civilization is based. Philosophy is for those who are tempted to discard the religious, political, and moral principles of their civilization because the only form in which they have known these principles now somehow appears childish. But whether or not a civilization declines depends on whether the educated, in positions of potential responsibility, remain committed to the assumptions of that civilization. University students by their education naturally fall into this group.

This is perhaps particularly true of university students who go away from home for their education, and thus who are separated from family, church, and friends. But even university students who at least in spirit "stay home" for their education have reason to be concerned with doubts troubling those who in spirit go away. For students in the latter group may challenge certain assumptions of all groups. Conceivably a civilization does

not deserve to survive if the principles on which it is based are false or meaningless. Only philosophy can assess such principles. So even if the study of philosophy is at first alienating, you would not do yourself justice in assuming that it must remain so for you. A central function of a university is to draw you into a quest for objective truth. Such education is ultimately more self-realizing than alienating. If it separates you from what you have been, it does so to unite you with what is really the case. Aristotle held that as a human being you have a natural desire to know, and this must be weighed against the natural desire you perhaps also have to maintain your present beliefs. Error, no matter how vital to your established religious, ideological, or moral identity, implies the alienation of your belief from

Knowledge implies that what you believe is the case. If you believe that whales are fish, you will experience alienation from yourself, from your pretended knowledge, in discovering that whales are mammals. To form a true belief is to experience a kind of self-realization in encountering the fact which makes that belief true. The fact that the grass is green is an observable realization of your belief that it is green. To come to know that the grass is green is thus to make the world a little less alien in relation to your beliefs. It is to find the structure of your belief repeated in the structure of one of the world's facts. Thus, the fact that the earth is round repeats the pattern of the proposition that it is round.

IV. The Method of Philosophy

If you are persuaded that philosophy is the search for objective truth, you now have a right to expect some explanation as to how to do philosophy. In their method of proceeding, philosophers have correctly been compared to lawyers. Sometimes this is understood to mean that philosophers are for hire in building cases for any thesis regardless of where the objective truth lies. But we have no wish to erase the distinction between philosophy sophistry, between the search for wisdom and the search for arguments that can make even false theories look true. Though some lawyers merely seek the appearance of truth, the legal system as a whole assigns, even to such lawyers, a role in the court-room quest for objective truth. When a party is accused, the accusation is either true or false. The prosecution and the defense cannot both be right. Giving the appearance of truth to falsehood thus necessarily falls to one side or another in the court of law.

Relativism disrupts the legal process as much as it disrupts philosophy. Yet each side may put forth rational arguments in support of its own view, even if false. The determination of guilt or innocence is sometimes difficult. But that is because there is one true determination to be found.

Philosophical questions are often as difficult as legal questions. Just as opposing lawyers can both give rational arguments in support of opposing positions, philosophers may be equally rational in the defense of theses which contradict each other. This is true because in philosophy, as in law, knowledge of the truth is not given at the start, but is at

best the result of an adversary method of argumentation. Rationality is not knowing the truth; rather, it is the ability to correct error. Being in error is compatible with being rational, so long as you also have the ability to discover and correct that error.

However, error can be neither discovered nor corrected as long as one tries to prove something to an audience which is already convinced. In order to prove guilt, one must prove it to a court which is not convinced, which presumes the innocence of the accused. In philosophy you must prove your thesis to an audience which initially presumes its falsehood. Such an audience is one which, as far as you are concerned, starts out siding with the "devil's advocate."

No matter what you wish to prove, you must know your enemy, know the case against you, and know how to put that case in play against yourself. Once you know this, there are two ways you can argue for your own view: either directly or indirectly. In direct argument you argue from the standpoint of your own present belief. But you still have to take into account the view or views which are opposed to yours, so as to meet possible objections. In indirect argument, you primarily take up and develop the standpoint of your opponent rather than yourself. But you do so convinced that your opponent's viewpoint, if faithfully followed to its logical conclusion, will end in self-contradiction. You are even convinced that your opponent's viewpoint will convert itself, to escape contradiction, into your own viewpoint.

To illustrate, the eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant once argued against lying by taking the standpoint of the would-be liar, and helping the liar accurately formulate the rule of his/her own action: "If one can advance oneself by lying and can get away with it, one should tell a lie." But this rule, like all general rules, justifies lying by others as well as by me. In justifying my own lies I have provided others with justification for lying to me. Yet in wanting to justify my own lying I do not really want to justify others lying to me. Therefore, as a liar I end up willing and not willing one and the same thing. Moreover, if in lying I justify everyone lying, I justify a world in which no one could lie, since in such a world mutual trust would be insufficient for anyone to be believed.

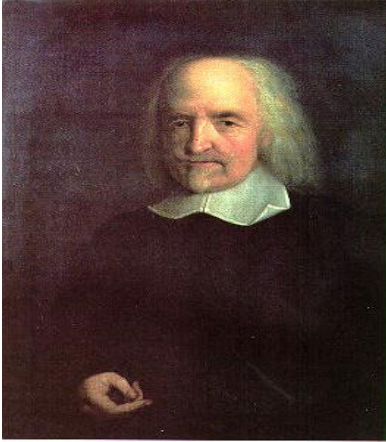


Encarta Encyclopedia, Hulton Deutsch

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

To cite another example of indirect proof, the seventeenth-century British

philosopher Thomas Hobbes took up the standpoint of individuals acting freely without the restraint of any law and order to show that the wish to roam free of legal restraint is really a wish for constant personal insecurity, in the end a wish for early death. The wish for what one wants is at once the wish for what one decidedly does not want. To wish freedom from legal restraint is, when the nature of such freedom is clarified, contradictorily not to wish for it.



Thomas Hobbes (1517-1648)

To give a third example, consider a famous refutation of motion by the ancient Greek philosopher, using indirect proof. To believe that an arrow is in flight is to believe that it is now at one position, at a later or earlier time somewhere else, but at no time in two places. At any given time the arrow is "at rest" at one place alone. Thus to believe that the arrow moves is to believe contradictorily that it does not move.

Indirect argument means a kind of role playing. It means to play the devil's advocate yourself, to state and anticipate the objections to your own view, as well as the devil himself. Ideally your strategy is to be your own devil's own advocate, to impersonate the view you take to be false so well that others can confuse it with the view you yourself take.

Two results may come of this attempt to develop the point of view of your opponent. Either you will discover from personal experience what is wrong with the opponent's view, or you will be won over to that view yourself. Thus there is always a risk in attempting an indirect proof of your view for this first time. Unless you know where your indirect argument is going beforehand, you may end up being taken in by your opponent. An inexperienced Kantian could not be free of all anxiety in arguing indirectly against lying. If you are quite rigid about not wanting to change your views, and if you are inexperienced in the indirect argument, using it can be like playing with fire.

Still, if you are willing to bet on the personal growth that can come from putting your beliefs at risk, indirect argument is best suited to help you, the beginning student, expand your consciousness to include perspectives you have never heard of before, or at

least have never considered plausible. Of those who pursue philosophy you have the greatest potential for growth and progress towards the truth. The indirect method, in part because of its risk to your present views, is the best adapted to assisting you in this growth. As a rational person, you are presumably not permanently wedded to your present beliefs. If one of these beliefs fails because an attempted indirect proof goes astray in your hands, you have not been destroyed. It is your own identity and growth as a person capable of inquiry and error correction which has been promoted.

I do not mean to suggest that in doing philosophy you must not be identified with your beliefs. As a philosopher you must be inwardly persuaded as to the objective truth of the thesis you support: you must identify with your belief whole-heartedly and passionately. Yet such identification will not be unconditional. The whole-hearted defense of a thesis may still be open-minded, open to possible refutation. The heart may abandon its reservations without the mind abandoning its. Close-minded dogmatism, the conviction that one is infallibly right, is anti-philosophical. The fervor of such dogmatism is more appropriate to religion than philosophy. The opposite of philosophy, anti-philosophy, is called philosophical skepticism. The philosophical skeptic doubts that progress towards real knowledge in philosophy is possible. Whether or not you are doubtful about philosophy depends on how ambitious your concept of philosophy is. If you understand philosophy in a modest sense as the analysis of this or that concept to avoid puzzles that have caused many to wonder, you will have little reason to doubt. For example, some people have wondered at the apparent fact that we really do not know that other people exist. Perhaps what you take to be other people are merely figures in a dream of yours, or are merely robots. However, this puzzle and whatever wonder it causes can probably be eliminated by a correct analysis of the concepts of knowledge which we actually use. Such an analysis would show that the absolutely certain knowledge suggested by mathematical knowledge is not the one true form of knowledge, and that our less certain knowledge of the existence of other minds is still real knowledge. There are simply different kinds of real knowledge.

Suppose, however, you have a more ambitious concept of philosophy. Suppose rather that philosophy is not just the solution of some conceptual puzzle, but is the solution of what may be called "the riddle of the universe." Some skepticism on your part may then be harder to avoid. The riddle of how we know other minds is really quite simple compared to the riddle of the universe. The German, philosopher Leibniz, put this riddle clearly when he asked: since it is conceivable that the universe might not have existed, why does it exist? Why is there something in this universe rather than nothing at all? The question is not simply "What is the cause of the world's existence?" but more specifically: "What is the purpose or meaning of its existence?" Since we are asking about the purpose of the universe in which we ourselves exist, we are talking of a cosmic purpose which touches our lives, though it may not be the purpose of our lives. One example of cosmic purpose is the idea that the world exists to realize harmony and beauty. Still another answer is that it exists to discover its own meaningless suffering and to dissolve itself. We shall see that these different ideas of cosmic purpose are associated with different great civilizations in world history. Even if they are not true, they help us understand people educated in those different civilizations.



Encarta Encyclopedia, Culver Pictures

Leibniz (1623-1716)

The question Leibniz started out with is: "What is the cause of the world's existence?" But since the cause turned out to be the perfect Creator suggested by Genesis, knowledge of the world's cause was at once knowledge of its value and purpose as an effect of that cause. This world, created by a perfect God, is the best of all possible worlds. Leibniz's question "Why does this defective world exist which conceivably might not have existed?" thus becomes: "What value does the world's existence have?" The task, which was to explain how there is a world, is now to justify it. To most of us justification of the value of the world is more vital than finding its cause. Failure to find its cause frustrates curiosity. Failure to justify the world may affect life in a more practical way, undermining religion in its most general sense, resulting in detachment and withdrawal into private interests. A plausible definition of religion is that to be religious is to believe that one's own deepest value whether it be beauty, justice, pleasure, or whatever is backed up by all the force and might of the cosmos. It is, in short, to believe that you are not alone. The fate of whatever you treasure most does not depend merely on your meager efforts.

One of the benefits of living in your own home town has always been the feeling that in a pinch you are backed up by your family. The religious individual feels supported and at home anywhere and everywhere in the world. According to the eighteenth-century British philosopher David Hume the two indispensable attributes of any God you would worship are being all-good and all-powerful. For you to say that God is all-good is to say that He (or It) is a being after your heart. To say that He is all-powerful is to say that He can also be of invincible assistance.

Now note that we are asking about the hypothetical value (meaning, purpose, goodness) of a universe in which we ourselves exist. We are thus talking of a cosmos whose value touches our lives, whose universal laws penetrate our very existence. It touches us in two specific ways. First, as we have seen, its value is ultimately ours. Secondly, it is through us that the cosmos raises the question of its own value.

For Leibniz, that God exists both explains and justifies the goodness of the world's existence. The Creator God is the cause of the world; and, as created by an all-good God, the world is justified. God, who is beyond the world, assigns to the world a purpose which it could not have by itself. But other possible theories of cosmic value hold that the cosmos assigns to itself a purpose. Or that it brings about a valuable result

even if it does not intend to do so. Another theory, associated with certain ancient Greek philosophers, might be that the value of the world lies in the harmony and beauty of the heavens as seen by its upright human members. Still another theory is that life is nothing but suffering, and that this suffering is without purpose or value. In discovering this fact we do not give value to the world, but merely escape from its pain. There is no cosmic purpose.

Another possibility is that the question may be misformulated. It may be what is called a pseudo-question, a question without an answer. Your wonder at the world's existence may be overcome by finding cosmic purpose, or by finding that there is no cosmic purpose. But a third possibility is that you are unable to know whether there is such a purpose, and in this case your wonder at the world's existence will simply not be overcome. The possibility will lurk in the back of your mind that the universe may have a purpose which you cannot know.

If you decide in favor of this third possibility, you will be a philosophical skeptic, a skeptic about philosophy in the ambitious sense of the term. You may still believe in the value of philosophy in the more modest sense of the analysis of concepts in response to various puzzles, though not in response to the puzzle of the universe. As such a philosophical skeptic, you may allow religious faith to determine your view of cosmic purpose. This is the path suggested by Immanuel Kant, the philosophical skeptic who said that the purpose of his own philosophical skepticism was to "place limits on reason in order to make room for faith." But as a philosophical skeptic, it is also possible for you to refrain from a leap of religious faith. Some people have in fact managed to live their lives, and even to give a personally satisfying meaning to their lives, without believing in any cosmic purpose. The contemporary French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre is an example of such a philosopher.



Encarta Encyclopedia, Archive Photos

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980)

We have just distinguished philosophy in the ambitious sense and philosophy in a more modest sense. We shall refer to it simply as the distinction between Philosophy and philosophy. Historically, Philosophy arose in the hands of Socrates and others as a successor to the mythological religion of the ancient Greeks which you have probably already studied in high school. More specifically, it arose in response to religious skepticism, to skepticism about the religious myths of the Greeks. At the risk of some simplification, consider the following historical cycle: (1) First came religion. The

Greeks called it "piety towards the gods." (2) Then comes religious skepticism, impiety. (3) Then comes Philosophy, an attempt to find some essential core of religion which survives religious skepticism and put it on a rational basis. (4) Then, in response to the sometimes disappointing achievements of Philosophy, comes philosophical skepticism, skepticism about Philosophy. (5) Finally, into the void left by philosophical skepticism, the decline of faith in Philosophy, comes a new religion. In ancient history there is some truth in saying that Christianity was such a new religion in relation to the Greek mythical religion.

And so the cycle is complete. The limits placed on reason made room for faith. But in fact the cycle simply started anew once more. Religious skepticism directed against the Christian religion gives rise to Christian Philosophy, much as skepticism directed against the Greek mythological religion generated pagan Philosophy. For example, the fourth-century Christian Philosopher, St. Augustine, responded to religious skepticism about the literal truth of the Genesis creation story by substituting a quite different belief. God did not create the world at any point in time. There never was a time before creation when the world was not. In creating the world God created the entire temporal order.



Figure 1 Saint Augustine (354-430)

Now see how all this relates to you personally. If you have gone through skepticism with respect to your original religious faith, you are at least a candidate for Philosophy with a capital 'P'. Philosophy is an attempt to do better and more intelligibly what religion itself tries to do in orienting you with respect to cosmic purpose. But this will also make you a possible candidate, at a later stage, for Philosophical skepticism, and for a new religious faith. On the other hand, if you have never passed into religious skepticism—whether because you retained your original faith or because you simply are free of religion—you are not a likely candidate for Philosophy. But you still will probably find Philosophy worthy of some study. And you will still find much in philosophy (if not in Philosophy) to learn and put to personal use.

V. Heuristic Dogmatism

Philosophy with a capital 'P' attempts to defend itself against Philosophical skepticism. And it must block associated irrational leaps of dogmatic faith, at least within philosophy, though not necessarily within religion. But philosophy can do this only by cultivating a non-religious "dogmatism" of its own. This new dogmatism will be a non-authoritarian dogmatism. It is not the dogmatism of a teacher or author who, much as in Euclid's geometry, selects premises and then externally directs the course of the pupil's deduction. It is the dogmatism of a searcher after truth who refuses to budge from his or her hypothesis until it has been soundly tested and refuted. We may call it heuristic" dogmatism.

"Heuristic" means what promotes discovery. "Dogmatism" means believing with unquestioned self-assurance. The heuristic dogmatist uses dogmatism as a means of discovery. He or she holds that there is no interesting philosophical belief that is infallible. Secondly, the heuristic dogmatist also believes that progress towards knowledge can be made through methodological identification with whatever belief appears most likely true on the available evidence. The dogmatic assertion of one's claim has a skeptical purpose. Heuristic dogmatism is the essential means of establishing and correcting error. The very first error is the fear of error. A fear of error so great that one declines to commit oneself incapacitates learning. Knowledge is possible only for those who can detach themselves from their dogmas and view the prospect of falling into error as an opportunity to learn.

What we have called "heuristic dogmatism" is not an original theory. It is fundamentally the theory of the American philosopher Charles Saunders Peirce. He called it fallibilism. We have preferred "heuristic dogmatism" because "fallibilism" highlights a possibly discouraging risk of error. "Heuristic dogmatism" highlights the emboldening power of belief despite error, indeed, precisely because error is self-correcting. In itself, "heuristic dogmatism" is a somewhat puzzling, paradoxical phrase. It is usually supposed that a dogmatist thinks he or she has nothing more to discover. A heuristic dogmatist does not think this; yet he or she feels it, so to speak, theatrically.

As a heuristic dogmatist you must play against yourself, but to do so you must first have the courage to play. Error in philosophy is fortunately not so threatening as, say, going the wrong way on a freeway. It is true that acting out a false philosophical belief may have disastrous consequences. Hitler showed this all too well. Yet when a belief begins to be tested experimentally--whether in the choice of a personal life-style, in violent revolution, or the scientific laboratory--it ceases to be specifically philosophical. The proper philosophical method of testing belief is not overt experimentation. Rather, it consists in the so-called arm-chair method of experiments of the imagination and of thought, and dialogue.

As long as inquiry is specifically philosophical, it is not dangerous. This is not to say that the search for truth can or should remain purely philosophical. It is simply to insist on a line of separation between philosophy and non-philosophical search. It is no doubt true that beliefs cannot always be tested in the imagination or thought. A philosophical ability to refute beliefs merely on the basis of experiments in thought or

imagination often becomes possible only through reflection on past experimentation of an openly scientific, social, or personal nature. The life of an historical figure is often the disastrous trial of an error. We, today, may put that error aside without having to act it out experimentally.

As a beginning philosophy student remember that were it not for error and the opportunity for its discovery and correction, the prospects for knowledge in philosophy would be far bleaker than they are. Discovering that we are wrong is easier than discovering that we are right. Thus it is easier to know that a belief is wrong by discovering a hidden contradiction in it than to be sure that no contradiction still lies hidden in one's present belief. This is a consideration which points the way to real progress towards knowledge in philosophy as in other subjects. If we can make progress, it is only by trial and error. It is only by zeroing in on the truth through the gradual elimination of one error after another.

This book seeks to teach heuristic dogmatism by example. Each chapter except the present one features the heuristic defense of a selected central argument. I will only briefly list the heuristic dogmas here—the issues will become clear in the course of the chapters. In Chapter Two, the argument is for "panpsychism," the view that even inanimate matter contains indwelling feeling--i.e., soul life though not biological life. In Chapter Three, the selected argument supports the view that commonsense and ordinary language offer no basis for inhibiting metaphysical inquiry into the most surprising views of reality. In Chapter Four, it is against the possibility of motion or moving objects! In Chapter Five, the argument heuristically defended is a refutation of the so-called cosmological argument for the existence of God. In Chapter Six, it is against Plato's doctrine of universal ideal forms, and in favor of the view that only individuals exist. In Chapter Seven, the argument is against determinism. This is the view that every event is completely caused, i.e., that given events prior to it, it could not have been different in any way. The heuristic argument in Chapter Eight is in favor of a philosophical interpretation of Christianity as the only true interpretation. The argument in Chapter Nine is for individual human rights.

As a rational method of doing philosophy, heuristic dogmatism may be reduced to six rules. It is fair to say, I think, that if you gradually made these rules into habits of your life you would be a rationally inquiring person, although the purpose or meaning of the cosmos may remain unknown.

(1) First, begin your quest for the truth wherever you are in your own belief pattern. Even if there is only one objective truth on any given issue, only one point of arrival, there are many points of departure. You need not begin where someone else finds him- or herself. However, do not discount the possibility that you might not actually be where you think you are. It is possible not to know where one is on a map. In order to decide where to go from where you are, you must find out where you are. You must know yourself, and this is to know where you are coming from. But you are coming from a long-established tradition of thinking about philosophical matters. Thus to find yourself on the map is to locate your own thinking in relation to thinkers of the past.

Historically-minded teachers have always said this, but most beginning students still prefer the "relevance" of today to the "dust of antiquity." Yet your conscious thoughts are in fact the visible tip of more or less buried history. Intellectually you know this already. The only question is how determined you are to free yourself of the surface to explore your own identity in greater depth.

Remembering where we have been will eliminate the need for you to repeat some long-corrected historical error: you find yourself at a point well advanced into world history, not at its dawn. Therefore, for you to understand even your own personal history is somehow for you to retrace the history of the culture of the world. It is well-known that ideas which for us today are child's play--such as the abstractions of geometry or the idea of the Creator God--have been made available to us only through the strenuous labor of past ages of world history.

Remember, finally, that since you share this world history in common with your contemporaries, it is easy for you to exaggerate differences between you and other individuals with whom you interact. If we proceed in different directions, it is from a common point of departure. Original inquiry, of course, implies that one has taken stock of what has been done historically on the question at issue. There is no need to be bashful about the fact that you are probably not undertaking original inquiry in introductory philosophy. But you should not let yourself be put down with the reflection that your inquiry is "merely" academic. Though not necessarily original in world history, it will result in quite exciting and original insights for you.

(2) Do not wait for the completion of your study of history to start thinking for yourself. You will never complete it. On the basis of whatever study you have managed to accomplish, survey the possible beliefs on a given question and form a conjecture as to what belief is true. At that point identify with your present belief as passionately as you can in order to draw out its ultimate consequences and test it. Conduct your thinking as if were objectively true, so as to sensitize your mind to any possible objections. In this way you will personally feel that you are the target of such objections.

By "identification with your present belief" two things may be meant. First, it may be meant that you hold this belief to be objectively true. Secondly and more modestly, you may hold only that you have an apparently good case for saying that it is objectively true. Depending on which sense is in question, two versions of heuristic dogmatism may be distinguished, strong and weak. Which version is adopted depends on which is the more heuristically useful.

It may be possible for you to believe that you have a strong case even when intellectually you can still think of abstract reasons to doubt that the belief is true. Maybe there is something you forgot, some objection you did not notice, some step in your argument which does not logically follow. However, once you have a good case—indeed the best case of which you are aware, a case which meets all the objections of which you are aware—it will be heuristically useful for you to suppress those doubts. In such circumstances, go beyond the evidence: maintain that the belief is objectively true,

leaving it to others to bring out any reasons to the contrary. State yourself without the caution which in the interest of absolute certainty might be justified.

Yet remember that the whole context of your present belief that a statement is objectively true is heuristic. You do not claim to believe the statement is true on the basis of adequate evidence. You admit it might be objectively false. In the quite different context of religion you yourself may believe it is false. Still, in philosophical inquiry—without contradicting whatever non-philosophical belief you may have in a different context—you can believe heuristically that it is true.

There is no contradiction between believing proposition "p" heuristically and proposition "Not p" non-heuristically. An example of non-heuristic belief would be a proposition functioning as an article of religious faith as to what, regardless of all the evidence, is so. Heuristic and non-heuristic beliefs are simply two different kinds of belief, arising in different contexts for different purposes. Your heuristic act of belief is justified not merely by the evidence but also by its results in contributing to further dialogue and discovery.

(3) Do not just wait around for objections to fall your way. First, let your own alter ego be your own devil's advocate. Challenge your own belief for internal logical consistency, consistency with the known observational evidence, fruitfulness in leading to new discovery. Never miss a chance to seek out counter-evidence and counter-examples to your present belief.

(4) Do not merely be your own devil's advocate. Engage other human beings as well as your alter ego in dialogue. Never be content with your belief until you have convinced all rational beings. The truth, Peirce said, is what all those who search for the truth will agree on at the end of history. You should seek intelligent critics with whom to discuss the arguments for and against your belief. Help all humans maximize their ability to contribute to the ongoing human dialogue in the quest for truth.

(5) Be prepared to drop your belief at a certain point in the light of growing counter-evidence. Rationality is not being right, but is being able to change your mind when you are wrong: not true belief, but the ability to correct error. Identify with your beliefs passionately, but not unconditionally. Having given up a refuted belief with which you were identified, you will never again be tempted by it like the skeptic who has never tried it out

(6) If you find signs of irrationality in your thinking, look for hidden motives for holding on to your belief despite the accumulated counter-evidence. If your professed reason for holding a belief is obviously inadequate, consider the possibility that the true cause of your belief is not your professed one. What interests may be unconsciously fulfilled through the belief? According to the originator of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, we all show signs of the sort of mental disturbance known as "neurosis." In our thought processes these signs can show up in a disturbance of our ability to draw and appreciate rational conclusions. You can psychoanalyze yourself--so long as neurotic

resistance to reason and to the facts has not reached clinical proportions. Only after that point is reached would an external therapist be needed to help you work through your resistances, and to see reason and the facts!

VI. *Philosophy Today*

It is conceivable that philosophy ought not be taught in a university as an academic subject. But this book is premised on the view that so long as it is taught it is important that students be taken into the heart of the subject even on the introductory level. The philosophy teacher finds him- or herself in a position that is at once enviable and demanding. It is enviable because it is possible to take the beginning student into the heart of philosophy in a first course. It is not possible in mathematics, physics, and other very specialized subjects, but it is possible in philosophy. This is because philosophy does not consist in a body of accepted knowledge which your teacher simply passes down to you. Your teacher must recreate the subject from scratch in dialogue with you, taking nothing for granted, each time he or she teaches it.

But the situation of the philosophy teacher is as demanding as it is enviable. He or she must usually teach the class on the assumption that you will not continue in the formal study of philosophy. Thus, if it is possible to reach (but hardly exhaust) the heart of philosophy in one course, it is also mandatory to do so. This is the one chance most of you will have to get there.

There is little doubt that philosophy has suffered a loss of nerve, a crisis of self-confidence, in today's world. Many teachers of the subject no longer believe in the viability of Philosophy. They prefer to teach instead:

1. the curious history of Philosophy
2. the art of individual self-expression in Philosophical belief systems.
3. skeptical criticism of the ambitions of Philosophy divorced from an intelligent account of Philosophy itself.
4. training in logical thinking through debating Philosophy
5. the art of communication between the different academic subjects (interdisciplinary dialogue. For example, is there a universal system of Philosophical concepts for grasping any topic at all, a system with which your physics teacher and your poetry teacher can talk with each other?)
6. the art of communication between foreign cultures steeped in different Philosophies: intercultural dialogue (For example, can American companies successfully apply management techniques based in Oriental philosophy to American workers?)
7. analysis of basic concepts (e.g., good, beauty, number, matter) employed in the different institutions of life, and identification of what these concepts may refer to. As long as such analysis excludes religion and references to "God," it is "philosophy" with a modestly lower-case "p". If it included religion, it would become Philosophy.

These are surely important activities. They are important goals of this book. They number among the legitimate goals of any introductory philosophy class. Yet, as

we see, they implicitly refer to what they exclude: the bold endeavor of Philosophy to speak of all things and to define any possible purpose they may share. A course in introduction to philosophy which attempts to limit itself to philosophy nonetheless gingerly skirts around the taboo subject of Philosophy. This book is premised on the need to bring Philosophy out into the open, and give it a hearing. Even if you reach a skeptical conclusion about the ambitions of Philosophy, the above endeavors to practice philosophy modestly will become all the more intelligible. This book will assign an important place to intercultural dialogue in particular, but the purpose will be to interest you in Philosophy by showing its role in mutual understanding between peoples.

Religions affirm God or gods under conflicting descriptions, and all-embracing ideologies sometimes address the question of cosmic purpose even without affirming God. Only Philosophy can test the capacity of reason to bridge the often blind faiths which divide the world. If Philosophy drops out, local religion ideology, and myth will continue without possible rational control.

Of course, bridging these divisions is not merely the job of philosophy. Karl Marx believed that to overcome the divisions between human beings in the ways they think, it is necessary to overcome the divisions that exist in the social conditions in which they live. Yet, assuming he is right, the work of philosophy is still necessary. World community may come to exist potentially on the basis of transformed social conditions of the present or future. But a community can be actualized only through the practice of actual communication.

You as a beginning student may wonder how you can take part in the crucial but seemingly all-too-difficult task of Philosophy. Recall that a first step is to resist the widespread fear of error, and hesitation to take sides on Philosophical issues according to your present insight. Over the centuries Philosophy has broken down into a variety of opposed "...isms" you may not have heard of yet: materialism, idealism, theism, pantheism, Platonism, Stoicism, etc. It is not uncommon to find philosophy students who prefer not to identify with any particular school of thought. A philosophical mind, it is thought, must remain open to all viewpoints. It is true that citing the authority of some doctrine of "ism" does not magically solve any philosophical problems. But there may be more than such simple-mindedness behind identification with a particular school of thought. If a term like "materialism" or "creationism" exists in ordinary language, it is because it designates a viewpoint which is publicly important. For you to identify heuristically with an "...ism," far from resolving any problems, gives you a personal and even social responsibility. For it is now you who have the job of making a socially significant abstraction concrete, of testing its limits, and of demonstrating its value to others. Above all, do not stay on the sidelines. Whoever holds the truth can never be fully confirmed without our assent.

MAIN HEURISTIC THESIS FOR CHAPTER ONE: Relativism holds that thinking a statement to be true makes it subjectively true. Further it holds that the only type of truth that can be recognized is subjective: There are no objective truths

determined only by stubborn facts which hold true independent of anyone's opinion. Relativism must first be rejected because it makes error impossible. It therefore makes any academic or scientific search for a truth not yet possessed impossible.