



**MADE SIMPLE  
BOOKS**

# PHILOSOPHY

RICHARD H. POPKIN <sup>PhD</sup>  
AVRUM STROLL <sup>PhD</sup>



**NEW  
REVISED  
EDITION**

---

# Philosophy

---

## *Made Simple*

The Made Simple series  
has been created  
especially for self-education  
but can equally well  
be used as  
an aid to group study.  
However complex the subject,  
the reader is taken  
step by step,  
clearly and methodically  
through the course. Each volume  
has been prepared by  
experts,  
taking account of  
modern educational requirements,  
to ensure the most  
effective way of  
acquiring knowledge.

---

## In the same series

---

Accounting	Geology
Acting and Stagecraft	German
Additional Mathematics	Graphic Communication
Administration in Business	Housing, Tenancy and Planning Law
Advertising	Human Anatomy
Anthropology	Human Biology
Applied Economics	Income Tax
Applied Mathematics	Italian
Applied Mechanics	Journalism
Art Appreciation	Latin
Art of Speaking	Law
Art of Writing	Management
Basic	Marketing
Biology	Mathematics
Book-keeping	Modelling and Beauty Care
Britain and the European Community	Modern Biology
British Constitution	Modern Electronics
Business and Administrative Organisation	Modern European History
Business Calculations	Modern Mathematics
Business Economics	Money and Banking
Business Law	Music
Business Statistics and Accounting	New Mathematics
Calculus	Office Practice
Chemistry	Organic Chemistry
Childcare	Personnel Management
Child Development	Philosophy
Commerce	Photography
Company Law	Physical Geography
Computer Programming	Physics
Computer Programming Languages in Practice	Practical Typewriting
Computers and Microprocessors	Psychiatry
Cookery	Psychology
Cost and Management Accounting	Public Relations
Data Processing	Public Sector Economics
Dressmaking	Rapid Reading
Economic and Social Geography	Religious Studies
Economics	Russian
Effective Communication	Salesmanship
Electricity	Secretarial Practice
Electronic Computers	Social Services
Electronics	Sociology
English	Spanish
English Literature	Statistics
Export	Technology
Financial Management	Teeline Shorthand
French	Twentieth-Century British History
	Typing
	Woodwork

---

# Philosophy

---

*Made Simple*

Second edition

Richard H. Popkin, Ph.D and  
Avrum Stroll, Ph.D



*Made Simple Books*  
HEINEMANN : London

**R.I.B. LIBRARY**

© 1981 William Heinemann Ltd

---

Made and printed in Great Britain  
by Richard Clay (The Chaucer Press) Ltd,  
Bungay, Suffolk  
for the publishers William Heinemann Ltd,  
10 Upper Grosvenor Street,  
London W1X 9PA

First edition 1969  
Reprinted 1972  
Reprinted 1973  
Reprinted 1975  
Reprinted 1977  
Reprinted 1979  
Reprinted 1981  
Reprinted 1982  
Reprinted 1983  
Second edition 1986

This book is sold subject to the  
condition that it shall not, by  
way of trade or otherwise, be lent,  
re-sold, hired out, or otherwise  
circulated without the publisher's  
prior consent in any form of binding  
or cover other than that in which it is  
published and without a similar condition  
including this condition being imposed  
on the subsequent purchaser

#### **British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

Popkin, Richard H.

Philosophy made simple – 2nd ed. – (Made simple books, ISSN 0265-0541)

I. Philosophy, modern – 20th century

I. Title	II. Stroll, Avrum	III. Series
190'.9'04	B804	

ISBN 0 434 98608 9

---

# Contents

---

<b>Preface</b>	viii
<b>Introduction</b>	x
<b>1 Ethics</b>	1
Definition of 'ethics'	1
Ethics originates in everyday life	2
Classification of ethical theories	2
Classical theories	3
Platonism	3
Aristotle: the doctrine of the mean	7
Hedonism: the philosophy of Epicurus	12
Cynicism	17
Stoicism	20
Christian ethics	25
Philosophy of Spinoza	30
Utilitarianism: Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill	37
Kantian ethics	41
Modern ethics	50
Subjectivism and objectivism	52
Naturalism, non-naturalism and emotivism	54
Motivist, deontological and consequence theories	55
Analysis of subjectivism and objectivism	56
Applied ethics	60
Suggested further reading	62
<b>2 Political philosophy</b>	64
Definition of 'political philosophy'	64
Plato's political philosophy	66
Political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes	71
Political philosophy of John Locke	77

Political philosophy of John Stuart Mill	83
Political philosophy of Karl Marx	91
Contemporary political theory	102
Suggested further reading	108
<b>3 Metaphysics</b>	110
What is metaphysics?	110
Pluralism and monism	110
Scope of metaphysics	111
The problem of permanence and change	111
The mind-body problem	117
The problem of free will and determinism	126
Types of metaphysical system	134
Some criticisms of metaphysics	154
Suggested further reading	167
<b>4 Philosophy of religion</b>	169
Philosophy and religion	169
The problem of religious knowledge	170
Natural and revealed religion	173
Hume's argument	174
The cosmological (or causal) argument	184
The ontological argument	187
Conclusions	191
The problem of the nature of God	197
Suggested further reading	202
<b>5 The theory of knowledge</b>	204
René Descartes: the problem posed	205
The problem of knowledge: a closer look	211
Ancient Greek philosophy	212
Plato	214
Socrates's theory of universal forms	216
The philosopher-king	217
Descartes's theory of knowledge	224
The argument for objective reality	230
Rationalist theories of knowledge	231
Empirical philosophy	234
John Locke	235
Bishop George Berkeley	244
David Hume	254
Summary of the empirical theory of knowledge	267
The empiricist critique of rationalism	268
Summary	269

Suggested further reading	270
<b>6 Logic</b>	272
Definition of 'logic'	272
Deductive and inductive logic	274
Deductive logic: the syllogism	276
Terminology of logic	277
Affirmative and negative propositions	278
Universal, particular and singular propositions	281
The four standard propositions of logic	282
Distribution of terms	283
Middle, major and minor terms	285
Rules for determining validity and invalidity	287
Translating ordinary into logical sentences	292
Equivalent sentences	296
Obversion	297
Conversion	298
Contraposition	299
Fallacies	300
Logic, semiotics and semantics	309
Summary	311
Answers to exercises	312
Suggested further reading	317
<b>7 Contemporary philosophy</b>	318
Pragmatism	318
The pluralistic universe	323
Instrumentalism	324
Some criticisms of pragmatism	326
Philosophical analysis	327
Logical atomism: the philosophy of	
Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein	336
Logical positivism: Schlick, Carnap, A. J. Ayer	337
Ordinary language philosophy: Moore and	
the later Wittgenstein	343
Existentialism and phenomenology	348
Søren Kierkegaard	348
Contemporary existentialism	355
Suggested further reading	361
<b>Indexes</b>	363



---

## Preface

---

Some years ago the *New Yorker Magazine* ran a typically witty cartoon. The scene was a bookstore and four books were prominently displayed for sale on a table. Their titles could easily be read: The first was 'Philosophy Made Simple' and the next 'Philosophy Made Simpler'. The third said 'Philosophy Made Still Simpler', and the fourth was 'Philosophy Made Simplest'. Since the first title was that of our own *Philosophy Made Simple*, the book you are reading now, it occurred to us to ask whether the new edition of this work – the first since 1956 – should, following the cartoon, perhaps be entitled 'Philosophy Made Simpler', or even 'Philosophy Made Simplest'. But when we read over the first edition of the work we realized that we had made philosophy about as simple as it could be made without distorting the subject drastically, and so in this new edition, we'll leave the title intact.

Apparently, several hundred thousands of readers have agreed with us that the book is simple enough. *Philosophy Made Simple* has been translated into foreign languages, is sold in nearly every country of the Western world, and in Nigeria, Hong Kong, Singapore, Israel and Australia. We had expected that this book would be used by ordinary readers, most of whom would have no special training or background in philosophy but would like to know something about this supposedly 'abstract' subject. And many of our readers fall into exactly that category. But the book has also been used as a text in dozens of universities throughout the world. We have received many letters from undergraduate and graduate students, and instructors indicating that it is one of the best and *simplest* introductions to philosophy to be found anywhere.

Nevertheless, there have been important developments in philosophy during the past three decades. We therefore felt that a new, reworked, and updated edition would be desirable at this time. This new edition thus has extensive changes throughout – too numerous to be mentioned here. Of course, we should stress that our main focus continues to be on

fundamental philosophical problems. These may take new and sophisticated forms but the great philosophers of the past who addressed these issues are not really dated. Questions about the nature and purpose of human life, about the ideal form that a political association should have, whether one can obtain absolutely certain knowledge about the world – these questions go to the heart of the philosophical enterprise and will endure as long as human beings are able to use their rational faculties to examine their lives and the environment they inhabit. *Philosophy Made Simple* is devoted to these important issues. Our update continues this focus but goes on to describe often innovative forms these matters take as we move toward the end of the twentieth century.

*R. H. Popkin*

University of California, Los Angeles

*Avrum Stroll*

University of California, San Diego

---

# Introduction

---

## What is philosophy?

---

Philosophy is generally regarded as perhaps the most abstruse and abstract of all subjects, far removed from the affairs of ordinary life. But although many people think of it as being remote from normal interests and beyond comprehension, nearly all of us have some philosophical views, whether we are aware of them or not. It is curious that although most people are vague about what philosophy is, the term appears frequently in their conversation.

## Popular usages

The word 'philosophy' is derived from the Greek term meaning 'love of wisdom'; but in current popular usage many different ideas are involved in the ways we employ the term. Sometimes we mean by 'philosophy' an attitude towards certain activities, as when one says 'I disapprove of your philosophy of doing business' or 'I am voting for him because I favour his philosophy of government'. Again, we talk about being 'philosophical' when we mean taking a long-range, detached view of certain immediate problems. When one is disappointed, we suggest to him/her that he/she ought to be more 'philosophical', as when one misses a plane. Here we mean to say that he should not be over-concerned with the events of the moment, but should try instead to place these in perspective. In still another sense we think of philosophy as an evaluation or interpretation of what is important or meaningful in life. This usage may be indicated by the story of two men who were drinking beer together. One of them held his glass to the light, scrutinized it thoughtfully, and then observed, 'Life is like a glass of beer'.

His companion looked up at the glass, turned to his friend, and asked, 'Why is life like a glass of beer?'

'How should I know,' he answered, 'I'm not a philosopher.'

## Popular conceptions

By and large, in spite of the many different ways we may use the words 'philosophy' and 'philosophical' in ordinary speech, we tend to think of philosophy as some extremely complex intellectual activity. We often imagine the philosopher (as in Rodin's statue of the Thinker) as one who sits, pondering questions of the ultimate significance of human life while the rest of us have only the time or the energy to live it. Occasionally, when our newspapers or magazines publish a story about the important philosophers of the past, such as Bertrand Russell or Aristotle, the impression is given that they devoted themselves to contemplation of the problems of the world in a most abstract manner and arrived at views or theories that may sound splendid, but can hardly be of much practical value.

While this picture has been created of the philosopher and what he/she is trying to do, there is also another image. This is that the philosopher is one who is ultimately responsible for the general outlook and the ideals of certain societies and cultures. Thinkers such as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, we are told, are the ones who have created the point of view of the Communist party; while others, such as Thomas Jefferson, John Locke and John Stuart Mill have developed the theories which prevail in democratic societies.

## The philosophical enterprise

Regardless of these various conceptions of the role of the philosopher, and regardless of how remote we may think his/her activities are from our immediate concerns, the philosopher has been engaged in considering problems that are of importance to all of us, either directly or indirectly. Through careful critical examination, he/she has tried to evaluate the information and beliefs we have about the universe at large, and the world of human affairs. From this investigation, the philosopher has attempted to work out some general, systematic, coherent and consistent picture of all that we know and think. As we gain more information about the world through the sciences, new interpretations of accepted pictures need to be considered.

This sort of understanding has provided an outlook or framework in which the ordinary person can place his/her own – possibly more limited – conception of the world and human affairs. It has provided as well a focus through which we can see our own roles and activities, and determine if they have any significance. Through such an examination and evaluation, we may all be better able to assess our ideals and aspirations, as well as understand better why we accept these, and possibly whether we ought to.

From the very beginnings of philosophy in Ancient Greece, over two and a half millennia ago, it has been the conviction of the serious thinkers who have engaged in this pursuit, that it is necessary to scrutinize the views that we accept about our world and ourselves to see if they are rationally defensible. We have all acquired much information and many opinions about the natural and human universe. But few of us have ever considered whether these are reliable or important. We are usually willing to accept without question reported scientific discoveries, certain traditional beliefs, and various views based upon our personal experiences. The philosopher, however, insists upon subjecting all this to intensive critical examination in order to discover if these views and beliefs are based upon adequate evidence, and if a reasonable person may be justified in adhering to them.

### **The Socratic contention**

Socrates, at his trial in 399 BC, maintained that the reason he philosophized was that 'the unexamined life was not worth living'. He found that nearly all of his contemporaries spent their lives pursuing various goals, such as fame, riches, pleasure, without ever asking themselves whether these are important. Unless they raised such a question, and seriously sought the answer, they would never be able to know if they were doing the right thing. Their entire lives might be wasted pursuing useless or even dangerous goals.

All of us have some general outlook about the kind of world we think we live in, the sort of things that are worthwhile in such a world, and so on. Most of us, like Socrates' contemporaries, have never bothered to examine our views to discover their foundations, whether we have adequate or acceptable reasons for believing what we do, or whether the totality of our views has any general consistency or coherence. Hence, most of us, in one sense, have some kind of a 'philosophy', but we have not done any philosophizing to see if it is justified.

The philosopher, following Socrates' contention, insists upon bringing to light what our implicit beliefs are, what assumptions we make about our world, ourselves, our values. He/she insists that these can only be accepted by reasonable and intelligent people if they can meet certain tests set up by the logical mind. Rather than merely possessing an unorganized mass of opinions, the philosopher feels that these must be inspected, scrutinized and organized into a meaningful and coherent system of views.

### **What does a philosopher do?**

One may be tempted to observe at this point that these initial comments give some slight idea, perhaps, of what philosophy deals with, but that

they are too vague to make clear what it is all about. Why can't one just give a straightforward definition of the subject, and then proceed, so that one can see clearly at the outset what a philosopher is trying to do?

The difficulty is that philosophy can be better explained by doing it than by trying to describe it. It is in part a way of dealing with questions, as well as an attempt to resolve certain problems which have been the traditional interest of the persons who have called themselves, or have been called, 'philosophers'. As we shall see throughout this book, one of the subjects that philosophers have never been able to agree upon is what philosophy consists in.

### **Varieties of philosophy**

The people who have engaged seriously in philosophizing have had varying aims. Some have been religious leaders, like Saint Augustine, and have tried to explain and justify certain religious points of view. Some have been scientists, like René Descartes, who have attempted to interpret the meaning and importance of various scientific discoveries and theories. Others, like John Locke and Karl Marx, have philosophized in order to effect certain changes in the political organization of society. Many have been interested in justifying or promulgating some set of ideas which they thought might aid mankind. Others have had no such grandiose purpose, but merely wished to understand certain features of the world in which they lived, and certain beliefs that people held.

### **Who are philosophers?**

The occupations of philosophers have been as varied as their aims. Some have been teachers, often university professors giving courses in philosophy, as in the instance of St Thomas Aquinas in the Middle Ages, teaching at the University of Paris, or John Dewey in the twentieth century, lecturing at Columbia University, or Martin Heidegger at the University of Freiburg, or Ludwig Wittgenstein at Cambridge University. Others have been leaders of religious movements, often taking an active part in the affairs of their organizations, like St Augustine, who was Bishop of Hippo at the decline of the Roman Empire, or George Berkeley, who was the Bishop of Cloyne in Ireland in the eighteenth century. Many philosophers have had ordinary occupations, like Baruch Spinoza, who was a lens-grinder by profession. John Locke was a medical doctor; John Stuart Mill was a writer for magazines, and briefly a Member of Parliament. A good many of the most prominent philosophers have been scientists or mathematicians. Some have had careers which kept them far removed

from the excitement and crises of everyday life; others were continually occupied in the most active pursuits.

Regardless of their aims, or their occupations, philosophers have, by and large, shared a common conviction that thoughtful examination and analysis of our views, and our evidence for them, is important and worthwhile. A philosopher thinks about certain matters in certain ways. He/she wants to find out what various basic ideas or concepts that we have mean, what we base our knowledge on, what standards should be employed in arriving at sound judgments, what beliefs we ought to adhere to, and the like. By reflecting upon such questions, the philosopher feels that one can achieve more significant comprehension of the universe, natural and human.

Recently one of the authors of this book began his lectures in a course entitled 'Introduction to Philosophy'. He tried to give the class some idea of what sort of material they would be considering throughout the course by raising a question that Plato had asked over twenty-three hundred years ago: 'What is justice?' To suggest what this question might mean, he raised related problems, among them: 'How do we distinguish just acts from unjust ones?' 'How do we tell what we ought to do, or what is right?' 'Is justice based only on legal conventions, or are there other, more basic standards?' After the lecture, a student remarked to the professor that many questions had now been asked and he wondered if the answers would be forthcoming in the near future. The teacher told him that they would consider some *possible* answers in the course, but he could not guarantee that they would be the *right* answers. The student answered, 'That's all right, so long as we get answers—just so that we don't have to think'.

The philosopher does not want *any* answers, and is unwilling to accept them merely because they purport to be answers. The student might be willing enough to live 'the unexamined life', but the philosopher wants to find the right answers, those that a rational man can feel are warranted after most thoughtful consideration. The fact that some answers have been offered, or even that some have been accepted by almost everybody in a given society, does not suffice for the philosopher. Even that one might feel that certain answers are the right ones is not an adequate basis for relying upon them. Rather, the philosopher insists, it must be completely certain, that these answers are the true ones, before a rational person can adopt them as his/her own. Otherwise, the best that we may be able to accomplish by philosophical examination is only to realize the inadequacy of all answers that have been thus far presented.

That particular student, like so many people in all ages, was willing to sell his 'birthright' rather than undertake the effort required to philosophize. He was abdicating his proper function as a rational human being in order not to have to be bothered with the problem of

finding some justification for what he believed, with discovering some consistent and coherent system for his views. But the philosopher claims that fundamentally the questions to be considered are too important to be answered in any quick and lazy fashion. It would be far better to have no answers than unexamined answers or, worse, answers that might be wrong.

## Two examples

In order to make clearer what the philosopher is seeking and what he/she does, let us consider briefly two examples from the earliest history of philosophy, which indicate the sort of situations that have given rise to intellectual consideration of various fundamental beliefs. The first instance is that of the first Greek philosophers, who lived in the sixth century BC, in one of the Greek colonies in Asia Minor, the part which is now Turkey.

## The Greek philosophers

From the little we know of this era, apparently the vast majority of the populace was willing to accept a mythological explanation of events, an explanation like those we find in the works of Homer. Natural occurrences were accounted for in terms of the activities of gods or spirits who inhabited the natural world. The wars, jealousies and rivalries among the gods, and their relations with men and women, were taken to account for the events of the visible world.

The thinkers who began the philosophical quest were those who found that when they scrutinized these accepted beliefs they were seen to be inadequate. Different societies had different legends and mythologies. Most of these either conflicted with the others or with themselves. The explanations were always based upon insufficient evidence, and could never adequately account for all the information people had acquired about the world. The philosophers, to the dismay of their contemporaries, challenged the believers in mythology to prove their views, or to find a better theory, one that would satisfy reasonable people. Out of this rejection of traditionally accepted beliefs, and the search for more plausible or more defensible theories, came the attempts of thoughtful people to explain the natural world in some consistent and rational fashion.

## Book of Job

Similarly, in the Bible, in the *Book of Job*, we are given a picture of the beginning of the philosophical quest. Job is portrayed as living in a world in which people accept the view that the universe is governed by



a just and good God who rewards the just and punishes the wicked, and that this system of divine retribution works out immediately in everyone's lifetime. Job, we are told, 'was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil', and yet he was punished.

Job and his 'comforters' discussed this apparent conflict between the accepted belief in God's goodness and justice and what was happening before their very eyes – i.e., the torments of Job. The 'comforters' refused to examine their view with critical eyes, and instead denied the facts. They attempted to convince Job that he must have been a wicked man, otherwise he could not be in his predicament. Job, on the other hand, saw that the accepted system of belief could not be adequate to account for what we do in fact know about the world, namely, that the wicked flourish and the just suffer in this supposedly divinely-governed cosmos.

The *Book of Job* reveals the defects of the traditionally-held view about the nature of the world. Because of these, a different, and more rationally defensible, theory has to be sought. Several possible ones are examined in the course of the book, and finally the only remaining solution is that man is unable by means of reason, to discover any satisfactory answer. Rather than rest content with inconsistent theories, or unjustifiable ones, the philosophical writer of the *Book of Job* could only pose a question. The people who lived 'the unexamined life' tried their best to avoid facing the problem. But the philosopher, because of his need for intellectually satisfactory beliefs, had to examine it. Even if he could not find a better theory than the traditional one, at least he would not accept a view that he knew was inadequate.

In these examples – both instances from the beginnings of philosophical activities in ancient times – we can discern some of the drive that sets the philosophical quest in motion. There are always people who are ready to accept almost any view. But there are others who are troubled by what appear to be inconsistencies in these views, or are troubled because they do not see why these views ought to be accepted, or why they are true. These philosophers begin to raise questions and seek solutions. How they do this, and what they have accomplished, is the subject-matter of philosophy.

## Conclusion

If one asks, what is the point of all this searching for some consistent and coherent system of beliefs, of demanding rationally satisfactory explanations, possibly a kind of answer is contained in a story about a relatively recent catastrophe. According to the newspaper accounts, a Georgia bootlegger ran out of liquor with which to supply his clients. There was a great demand, and to satisfy this, he concocted a brew out of some anti-freeze and other ingredients. The results were disastrous –

some thirty people died from drinking the beverage. When the bootlegger was arrested, he was asked if he had anything to say about what had happened as a result of his nefarious activities. 'Well,' he commented, 'it makes a man think.'

Philosophy, in a less dangerous way, also makes a person think – think about the basic foundations of his/her outlook, his/her knowledge, his/her beliefs. It makes one inquire into the reasons for what one accepts and does, and into the importance of one's ideas and ideals, in the hope that one's final convictions, whether they remain the same, or whether they change as a result of this examination, will at least be rationally held ones.

Whether this desired consequence is actually superior to declining to examine one's life, is a philosophical question, and one that can better be decided after reading this book. One may well decide, after seeing what philosophy is, and what philosophers have done, that it is all a waste of time. On the other hand, one may find that the consideration of problems in the various branches of philosophy – logic, ethics, theory of knowledge, metaphysics, and so on – provides solutions to the most urgent questions. Any conclusion that the reader comes to, we hope, will be based upon a thoughtful consideration of the material that is to follow, and hence will be the result of the reader's philosophizing.

We repeat: the best way to discover what philosophy is, is by studying it, and by philosophizing.

This page intentionally left blank

---

# 1

## Ethics

---

### The definition of 'ethics'

---

As with so many words in common use, the term 'ethics' has a number of different meanings. In one of its most frequent uses, it refers to **a code or set of principles by which people live**. Thus, we speak of 'medical ethics' and mean by this phrase the code which regulates and guides the behaviour of doctors in their dealings with each other and with their patients. Or again, when we speak of 'Christian ethics' we are referring to the principles which prescribe the behaviour of those who are Christians, such as the rules for conduct which are found in the Ten Commandments.

Philosophers, however, do not only employ the word in this sense when we speak of 'ethics'. They also mean by it **a theoretical study**, very much as the physicist means by 'physics' a theoretical study. But whereas the physicist studies certain natural phenomena, such as moving bodies and their laws, the objects which are studied in ethics are theories. These theories, sometimes called 'ethical theories', deal with such questions as 'How ought men to behave?' 'What is the good life for man?' and so on. An example of an ethical theory studied in the branch of philosophy called 'ethics' is **Hedonism**. This is an ancient theory which contends that the good life is ultimately one of pleasure.

Philosophers study such theories as Hedonism not merely because these doctrines have important consequences for living and for understanding human nature, but also because many ethical doctrines which appear plausible at a first glance, such as Hedonism, are found upon careful examination to suffer from certain defects. For example, does it not make sense to speak of 'bad pleasures', i.e., of the things which may give us momentary pleasure, such as drinking alcohol, but which may result in a life of subsequent pain and travail? If this is so, then how can the good life be identical with a life of pleasure, since there are pleasures which are bad? But if it is not pleasure which constitutes