MORE PHILOSOPHY FOR TEENS

EXAMINING REALITY AND KNOWLEDGE

- Discuss Critical Issues Teens Face
- Gain a Sense of the Meaning and Relevance Behind Philosophy
- Explore Values, Reality, and Ethics

A **Prufrock Press** Book

SHARON M. KAYE, PH.D., & PAUL THOMSON, PH.D.

ILLUSTRATED BY JON COMPTON

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For Tris and Robin with love

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PREFACE

Welcome to *More Philosophy for Teens*, the second volume of our series teaching philosophical issues to teenagers. Although the first book focused on aesthetics and ethics, this volume focuses on epistemology and metaphysics. Like the first volume, it is arranged topically rather than historically in order to emphasize the connection between ideas. We have, however, included relevant historical details offset from the main text.

Each chapter opens with a casual and realistic dialogue between two fictional teenagers who disagree about something (e.g., over whether moral rules apply to everyone or about whether God exists). Their disagreement illustrates two philosophical positions on an issue, setting up the topic for the chapter. In each chapter we explore two or more sides of a classical philosophical debate. The debate always includes a "thought experiment" to test the more controversial claims. At the end of each chapter are reading comprehension questions, discussion questions, exercises, activities, and references for further reading. Our goal is to bring philosophy alive through active learning.

We hope you enjoy reading this book as much as we enjoyed writing it! Please feel free to contact us with comments and suggestions.

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This project began life as the textbook we use for teaching in the Carroll-Cleveland Philosophers' Program at John Carroll University in Cleveland, OH. This program brings students from the Cleveland Municipal School District to our campus once a week for a philosophy, service learning, and enrichment class. We are the co-directors of the program. Drafts of this book have been used in the program many times, and we think that this has resulted in a well-tested final product. We would like to thank all of the people who helped launch this project. There are too many to mention by name.

We give special thanks to: Dr. Jenifer Merritt, founder of the Carroll-Cleveland Philosophers' Program; municipal students and teachers who participated in the Carroll-Cleveland Philosophers' Program; Brittany McClane, Program Operations Director for 2006–2007; our John Carroll University undergraduate teaching assistants in the program—Dan Matusicky, Linda Kawentel, Rhiannon Lathy, Alex Decker, Marie Semple, and Betsy Rafferty; Domina Maria St. Catherine, secretary of our department; Marc Engel, Shaker Heights High School student, who proofed the penultimate draft and helped write the final chapter; Robert and Laurie Kaye for proofing early drafts; and our fellow faculty members.

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TEACHER'S GUIDE

Although this book can be read on its own, it is especially useful in the classroom. We have implemented it with success in a wide variety of settings, from special classes with 50 teens and 10 teaching assistants, to standard classes with 25 teens and one teacher, to occasional workshops with 10 learners of different ages.

We have designed each chapter to teach itself in one session. Of course, ideally, the students would read the chapter on their own prior to class. Because the chapters are fun and accessible, this is a reasonable assignment. Nevertheless, we often proceed, and proceed fruitfully, without assigning any homework at all. When we have a 2-hour time block, a typical class period goes as follows: (1) we introduce the central question featured in the chapter; (2) we do a dramatic reading of the opening dialogue; (3) we write answers to the questions at the end of the dialogue; (4) we discuss highlights from the chapter (this may involve reading sections of text out loud together); (5) we write dialogues in small groups; (6) we perform the dialogues for the class and share our reactions. When we have just a one-hour time block we simply eliminate steps five and six or continue with those steps at the next class meeting. In courses that include steps five and six, we often make a video of the best dialogues for the students to watch together on the last day of class and, if copies can be made, to take home as a special memento.

Our students deeply enjoy the performance aspect of our "drama pedagogy"—to such an extent that dialogue production can begin to take over the class. The perennial issues discussed in each chapter have a way of fanning the flames of their creative energy! We recommend adhering to a schedule and keeping dialogues short to allow plenty of time to share reactions. We

have developed a "dialogue worksheet" to facilitate this process. (Please see Appendix A at the back of this book.) The worksheet assigns clear roles to each of the students and brings the purpose of their performance into focus. Drama provides rare opportunities for self-transformation. Having witnessed these in our classroom time and again, we deem the effort well worth it.

The educational standards addressed by the book include history, English, and science. The exercises are designed to improve general literacy along with written and oral communication skills. The chapters need not be read in order, as the content of each is independent of the others. Teachers can make this book the basis for a full course in philosophy or introduce relevant chapters into other preexisting courses. For example, a history class studying the ancient world would benefit from Chapters 5 and 10, which feature Plato and Aristotle, respectively. Chapters 1 and 7 correspond to works of literature commonly studied in English classes. A science class would find value in Chapter 11, which discusses Albert Einstein; Chapter 12, which discusses Karl Popper; and Chapter 13, which discusses Richard Dawkins. Furthermore, any of the chapters would enhance dialogue work in a drama class. We have found the book to be highly adaptable to different learning environments, helping students think about old subjects in new ways.

This book enables teachers to assess students in multiple dimensions through written work, oral performance, and group projects. Because there are no right or wrong answers in philosophy, it can be a difficult subject to grade. In fact, the teacher's main responsibility is to encourage students to explore and be respectful of a wide variety of opinions. However, written work (whether this be answers to questions in the book or a running free-form philosophy journal) can be graded for excellence of expression. We recommend requiring the students to turn in some written work at the end of each class to receive written feedback whether with or without a grade. A point system for class participation may also be useful to reward quality contributions and cooperation. Students should come away from the course (or course unit) understanding the importance of clear thinking and communication. They will be excited to discover that human beings have been wondering about the same things they have for a very long time. In our experience, this excitement translates into leaps and bounds of learning.

INTRODUCTION

Do you ever think about weird things?

For example, have you ever been angry with your computer? Do you think that it could care about you being mad? Do you think we could build a machine that could care? Do you think we could build a machine that could think? What do you think "thinking" is?

Do you think that the universe had a beginning? If you do, what do you think went on before that? Do you think that you have been put on this Earth with a purpose or destiny? If so, how will you find out what that purpose is? Does having a destiny mean that you have no free will?

These are tough questions, and you won't find definitive answers to them on the Internet or in an encyclopedia. Maybe you have never really thought about things like this before. But, if you have, you are not the only one. These thoughts are not really weird, they are philosophical, and that is what this book is about.

This is the second volume of *Philosophy for Teens*. The first volume explores issues in values, aesthetics, and political philosophy, but it is not a prerequisite for this book, which stands alone (although we do hope you will also read the first volume). In this book, we explore philosophical issues in metaphysics and epistemology.

Metaphysics and *epistemology* are obnoxious words, but the ideas are really quite simple. The "physics" part just stands for science, and the "meta" means beyond. So, metaphysics just means the study of what lies beyond science. For example, no scientist can ever really prove whether or not a soul, or God, exists, but these are still meaningful questions, and when we discuss such things we are doing metaphysics.

Epistemology literally means the "science of knowledge," and when we are studying epistemology we are investigating what we know and how we know it. Some philosophers have argued that we don't know anything for sure. Others argue that we are limited to scientific knowledge. And, still others think that we can even have metaphysical knowledge. We will be looking at representatives of all of these positions.

We will also look at the issues of whether computers can think, whether we have free will, whether we are born with any innate knowledge, whether we can believe things that we cannot prove, and, of course, whether there is a "meaning of life."

These sorts of questions are difficult, but also fun and profitable. They are fun because most of us have opinions on these sorts of issues, which are revised and refined by philosophical argument. Having a philosophical argument is not a bad thing. Rather, it is a tool for helping us improve our own opinions. And, that is why considering these questions also is profitable. Think about how many opinions are "out there." Now, think about the odds that you have the very best opinion. Pretty slim, right? So by subjecting your opinion, and those of your fellow philosophers, to real critical scrutiny, you improve the chances of getting it right. There are always more discussions and opinions out there to help you revise and refine your own.

It is fun to experiment with new ideas, even though it may feel strange at first. We begin each chapter of this book with an exercise to help you get the hang of it. The exercise involves reading a dialogue between two fictional high school students and answering some questions about the dialogue. We encourage you to read the dialogues aloud with someone else, each of you adopting the role of one of the characters. Try to put yourself in your character's mind frame and see what it might be like to actually hold the view he or she advocates. You may decide to agree, or you may decide to disagree. Either way, if you have entertained the view as your own it will be easier for you to give reasons for your decision. At the end of each chapter, we challenge you to write a dialogue of your own on one of the themes we have discussed.

In the middle of each chapter you will find another type of exercise known as a "thought experiment." A thought experiment is an imaginary scenario designed to test the truth of a controversial claim. For example, suppose someone claims that religious belief is necessary to give life meaning. We could test this claim by trying to imagine lives or societies that function without reli-

gion. If we can imagine this, then the original claim is false. If we cannot imagine it, then the claim stands as a reasonable possibility. At the end of each chapter, we challenge you to construct a thought experiment to test one of the central claims made in the chapter.

Keep in mind that any book referred to in the text will be listed at the end of the chapter in the References section. You will also find a list of books and articles related to each chapter in the section marked "Further Reading." These lists will enable you to pursue issues that interest you on your own. The reading comprehension and discussion questions at the end of each chapter are designed to enhance your understanding of the concepts presented in the chapter, while the activities and exercises are designed to help you apply these concepts to your daily life. Finally, there is a glossary at the end of the book to help you keep track of new philosophical terms.

Philosophy wakes your up and makes you think. Once you get used to it, you won't know how you ever lived without it.

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