

Preface



Fig. 0.1 *Tabulae Rudolphinae: quibus astronomicae...*/ by Johannes Kepler, 1571–1630 (NOAA)

0.1 About the Readings

The readings in this volume cover most topics studied in a first philosophy course at the university level. The scope of the text includes these major issues of philosophy: (1) philosophy of life, (2) philosophy of religion, (3) philosophical ethics, and (4) metaphysics and theory of knowledge. Although the approach is not comprehensive, it is reasonably representative of significant areas of philosophical inquiry. The readings are intended to illustrate the interrelations among these subject areas and to provide the foundation for future investigations of these and related philosophical fields of study. The ideas presented in these classic writings represent some of the brightest and most profound ideas in the history of Western civilization. They should prove invaluable for framing and testing a personal philosophy of life as well as for presenting the scaffolding for a synoptic view of the sciences and humanities.

Since the study of philosophy involves working with concepts rather than facts, the activity of philosophy seeks understanding and interpretation of the world more than knowledge of worldly states of affairs. For that reason,

emphasis in these studies is placed on the reasoning process: both analytical and synthetical. Memorizing the subject matter of philosophy is less likely to give insight into the discipline than is engaging actively in the process of doing philosophy with evaluative and critical thinking skill. Both composing written responses to questions at the beginning of the chapter as the reading progresses and engaging one or two of the questions at the end of the chapter as the reading is completed are essential for acquiring a thorough understanding of the ideas presented.

Although several of the readings are difficult even for university students, most other readings should prove insightful, entertaining, and at times fascinating. Occasionally the ideas presented may seem strange, even perhaps ludicrous, and on these occasions the reader is encouraged to approach the subject with the principle of charity. Whenever the initial reaction to a contention is to disagree with the author, the reader is encouraged to suspend disbelief and provisionally assume the stated idea is plausible so that the reader remains open to new insights which might follow. When preconceptions are temporarily suspended and any ambiguity or inconsistency is temporarily tolerated, an accurate, sympathetic understanding of the presentation is made possible. Very often seemingly radically opposing views turn out to be different perspectives amounting to much the same conclusion. Other times, this approach “pokes holes in cultural fences” and suggests novel outlooks. This method of approaching philosophy enables creativity and experimentation with thought. Only after a carefully considered understanding of a philosophical idea is achieved can a thoughtful and meaningful critique be constructed. Even for accomplished philosophers invoking the principle of charity takes special effort and acculturation.

In the first part of this book, Bertrand Russell illustrates how our experience is broadened and our thinking is enriched by seeking to understand new ideas in this fashion. Once ideas are well understood, only then, should they be evaluated. Philosophical inquiry might not be the be-all and end-all of a good life, yet, to paraphrase Socrates’ view, also presented in the first part, a life worth living for many persons is an “examined life.”

0.2 A Note about the Presentation

Each of the readings in this collection begins with a summary overview of the author and the work followed by a set of questions which, if answered, outlines the key ideas of the philosophers excerpted. Answering these questions is the reader’s opportunity to validate understanding through the expression of these ideas by rephrasing and refining the important themes. Questions

at the end of each reading selection are designed to encourage considerably more thought. Also, these end-questions should also prove useful for position papers or for extended class discussion.

Two shortcomings of this collection need mention. First, the reading selections not only have deletions of text in *passim* but also often examine the philosopher's views independently of their precise literary and historical context. Some university professors will justifiably find these practices unacceptable and will choose instead to seek unabridged texts for their students.¹ Obviously, there is much to be gained by reading complete and unadulterated works—especially for university students majoring in philosophy or related fields of study. But this approach necessarily limits the student's exposure to new ideas. A second shortcoming of this collection of texts is the exclusion of Eastern philosophy. Nevertheless, the main focus in the present offering is not intended to be so much a comprehensive world-historical understanding of philosophy as it is intended to present different germinal ideas from a wide range of thinkers in order to spark thinking about significant issues.

More often than not, the difficulty of a reading selection is mitigated by its arbitrary division into short sections. Descriptive section headings, framed by braces (*i.e.*, [... *section title*...]), are inserted into the abridged texts in order to help the reader follow the flow of the argument. These headings are not part of the original source. Once again, the preeminent consideration for the selection of readings in this book is to provide primary sources accessible for a wide variety of readers, including anyone curious about the subjects presented as well as for traditional university, junior college, high school, and homeschooling students.

0.3 Why Open Source?

Anyone with connection to the Internet has access to a vast number of philosophical documents *via* online e-texts. Fortunately, many of the best works in philosophy are in the public domain, and these resources provide convenient access to abiding works in philosophy—readings which provide for quality learning experiences for anyone seeking influential works in the philosophical tradition. The collection of readings selected for this open-source text is offered free, subject to the legal notice at the bottom of the title page. By designating these reading selections as open source, production costs are minimized, and users themselves are invited improve the product, if they wish

¹ Several excellent sources for complete and unabridged philosophical works are listed below in the section entitled Subsection 0.4.3“Online Philosophy Readings.”

to do so.

pt The current text is, in a sense, a small test of the Delphi effect in open source publishing. This edition of *Reading for Philosophical Inquiry* is not a completed work. The development process is loosely patterned on the release early, release often model championed by Eric S. Raymond.² If the core readings and commentary prove useful, successive revisions are to be released in incrementally numbered stable versions.



Fig. 0.2 *Eric S. Raymond*
(catb.org)

In addition to the core set of readings presented here, supplementary readings in philosophy on similar topics are available at <http://philosophy.lander.edu/intro/reading.shtml>. Please feel free to send questions, suggestions, and inquiries to the editors at philbook@philosophy.lander.edu

0.4 Recommended Web Resources in Philosophy

The following resources are among the best of the Web currently available for philosophy.

0.4.1 Online Philosophy Encyclopedias

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: This continuously updated open-access reference work is the project of the Metaphysics Research Lab at Stanford University. Each peer-reviewed entry is written and maintained by scholars in the field.

The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Subtitled “A Field Guide to the Nomenclature of Philosophy,” this open-access resource consists of regularly

² Eric Raymond, *The Cathedral and the Bazaar* (Sebastopol, CA: O’Reilly & Associates, 1999). Online at *The Cathedral and the Bazaar*

updated original peer-reviewed articles edited by James Fieser and Bradley Dowden.

The 1911 Classic Encyclopedia: Most philosophy entries from this 11th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, written by philosophy scholars, are extremely useful for in-depth commentary on major works and authors before 1910.

0.4.2 Philosophy Dictionaries

Dagobert D. Runes' *Dictionary of Philosophy*: Edited by Dagobert D. Runes, the purpose of this dictionary is to offer definitions and clarifications of philosophical terms from both Eastern and Western philosophy. Although somewhat dated in some respects, the work is perhaps the best single source on the Web for short accurate entries.

The Ism Book: This self-described "intellectual field guide" provides brief definitions of theories, doctrines, movements, and approaches in philosophy, religion, politics, science, the arts, and related disciplines. Originally written in 1996 by Peter Saint-Andre, the definitions are public domain.

Dictionary of the History of Ideas Vol. I, Vol. II, Vol. III, Vol. IV: The essay entries, edited by Philip P. Wiener, include articles describing the historical development of a broad spectrum of ideas in philosophy, religion, politics, literature, and the sciences.

Baldwin's *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*: This incomplete resource, first published in 1901, is still useful for essential definitions including terms from ethics, aesthetics, logic, philosophy of religion, and political philosophy. The project is being developed by Christopher D. Green.

A Dictionary of Philosophical Terms and Names: Garth Kemerling's guide to philosophical terms and persons links concisely-defined entries to additional sources on the Internet.

0.4.3 Online Philosophy Readings

Digital Book Index—Philosophy: This alphabetized list of philosophy works constitutes one of the largest meta-indices listing books, texts, and documents from major e-book sites on the Internet.

eBooks@Adelaide—Philosophy: This extensive collection of classic works in philosophy with an emphasis on the "great books" has been formatted for ease of reading. Edited by Steve Thomas of the University of Adelaide, many of the e-books have been converted from Project Gutenberg.

The Online Library of Liberty—Philosophy: This collection of classic philosophical books, available in a variety of formats, is one of the most extensive on the Internet. The site is a project of the Liberty Fund, a private educational foundation.

Online Books—Philosophy: Hosted by University of Pennsylvania, listing over 1 million free books on the Web, this site, founded and edited by John Mark Ockerbloom, facilitates access to an extensive number and variety of philosophy e-texts.

EServer.org—Philosophy: Originally founded at Carnegie Mellon as the English server and now maintained by Iowa State University, the EServer community sponsors writings in the arts and humanities. The philosophy content includes a small selection of classic texts.

Project Gutenberg—Philosophy: Philosophy books in most fields are listed in chronological order by subject. Several general introductory texts are included among the listings.

0.4.4 Online Philosophy Courses of Instruction

Open Culture—Philosophy Courses Online: The listing of free downloadable audio and video philosophy courses in the history of philosophy, ethics, political philosophy, aesthetics, philosophy of language, and more, taught by university professors is selected and maintained by Dan Colman of Stanford University and journalist Mike Springer.

The Open University—Philosophy Courses: “The Learning Space” lists the current free philosophy courses being offered by The Open University, the world’s first distance learning university.

0.4.5 Other Philosophy Sites of Distinction

The Internet Philosopher: This tutorial on the use of the Internet for studying philosophy is most helpful for showing how to access reliable and informative sites. The tutorial explains how to search, what to trust, and how to maximize information skills.

Philosophy Bites: About two-hundred interview-podcasts with well-known philosophers are provided here by David Edmonds and Nigel Warburton in association with the Institute of Philosophy. Their **Ethics Bites**, is a related podcast series commissioned by the Open University/BBC.

Philosophy Forums: Philosophy Forums hosts excellently moderated online discussions in many different areas of philosophy and is the leading discussion group on the Web.

Squashed Philosophers: Glyn Hughes offers excellent informative short summaries of significant works from the history of philosophy.

Ask a Philosopher: This service answers user-submitted questions related to philosophy or philosophers. **Recent archives** as well as **older ones** are sponsored by Pathways to Philosophy, an Internet school of philosophy founded by Geoffrey Klempner.

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