



Sample Pages

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Part 1

Welcome to Philosophy

In this section, students are progressively introduced to the world of philosophy. It begins with a brief history of philosophy and short definitions of the different areas of philosophic thought. A goal of philosophy is expanding one's worldview through thoughtful contemplation of life experiences; students reflect on questions that are the basis for several schools of philosophy. The challenge of reading and writing philosophic dialogue is addressed as students practice the principles of philosophic analysis by writing a dialogue describing an abstract concept. To conclude, students read the "Allegory of the Cave" from Plato's *Republic* and critically examine the manner in which they live through the creation of a skit.

either in so far as it is in the brain, or as it is in the foot, or as it is in some other place between the foot and the brain, or it might finally have produced consciousness of anything else whatsoever; but none of all this would have contributed so well to the conservation of the body. Similarly, when we desire to drink, a certain dryness of the throat is produced which moves its nerves, and by their means the internal portions of the brain; and this movement causes in the mind the sensation of thirst, because in this case there is nothing more useful to us than to become aware that we have need to drink for the conservation of our health; and the same holds good in other instances.¹

Other Aspects of Descartes' Philosophy

The Pineal Gland. As seen in Meditation Six, Descartes believes that humans are composed of two distinct parts: a physical body which moves about in the physical world, and a nonphysical or spiritual mind which does the thinking. This dualism presents a problem for Descartes insofar as an explanation is needed as to how our minds and bodies interact in their separate realms. For example, when my hand touches something hot, this sensation is registered in my mind. Also, if my mind decides to remove my hand, this decision must be transferred to my body, which results in motor activity. Thus, Descartes needs an explanation of both sensory and motor communication between our spirit minds and physical bodies. He offers such an explanation in Part One of *The Passions of the Soul* (1649): the pineal gland in the brain is the gateway between the two realms. He notes that there are two standard accounts of how the body and soul are connected: through the heart, and through the whole brain. He rejects these and suggests that the point of interaction is the pineal gland. This is because it is a single gland in the center of the brain which unites our doubled sensory perceptions (e.g. two eyes). With sensory perception, information transferred to the pineal gland through animal spirits, blood, and nerves. With motor commands, the gland is moved by the soul, and thrusts the animal spirits towards the pores of the brain, and onto the nerves.

The Automatism of Animals. Descartes believed that, on earth, only humans have a dual spirit/body nature. Nonhuman animals have only bodies and are essentially automaton or biological robots which behave according to their internal biological programs. Thus, they do not think, even though they behave in ways which we might mistakenly take to reflect conscious thought. Descartes' view was patently rejected by many of his contemporaries. In his article on Rorarius in the *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1692), [Pierre] Bayle presents a long list of criticisms against Descartes' theory. Even today Descartes' view is the object of ridicule by animal rights advocates. Descartes' reasoning is presented in a letter to Henry More. He argues that there are two sources of motion in organisms. The first is mechanical and bodily and involves the physiological mechanism of animal spirits. The second is mind or soul which is incorporeal. Descartes believes that the mental cause of motion does not apply to animals, and that all of their behavior can be explained by mechanical and bodily events. The common reason for holding that animals think is that they have sensory organs like humans. However, Descartes offers several reasons for not ascribing thinking to animals. First, we acknowledge that lower animals (such as bugs) move only by mechanics. Recognizing this makes

¹Elizabeth S. Haldane, trans., *The Philosophical Works of Descartes* (New York, 1911). The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 20 January 1996, <<http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/text/descart/des-med.htm>> (3 May 2001).

Part 3

Epistemology

Epistemology is the study of knowledge; it tries to discover the process in which knowledge is acquired, the extent of knowledge, and the obstacles for gaining knowledge. In this section, the evolution of epistemology is examined through the following: Plato's theory of the Divided Line and his concept of philosopher-king; the continental view of rationalism represented by René Descartes' *Meditations*; and the English Empirical movement from the works of David Hume, John Locke, and Francis Bacon. Finally, Bacon's false idols and George Orwell's *1984* examine the objects that block the gaining of knowledge.

Free Will vs. Determinism Debate

Answer the following questions. Be complete in your answers, and provide examples. Be prepared to share answers.

1. Do you believe in Free Will or Determinism? Explain your answer.

2. Within small groups of similar beliefs, add supporting arguments.

3. List the main arguments of the two large groups—Free Will advocates and Determinists.

4. What will it take to resolve this issue?

The Prince by Machiavelli

Read the following excerpt from Edwin Fenton's translation of Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Answer the questions at the end, and be prepared to share your answers with the class.

It is a good thing for a prince to be considered generous. But if generosity is concealed, no one will ever hear about it. Unless he advertises his generosity, the prince will become known as a miser. To earn a reputation as a generous prince, therefore, many men finance lavish displays and put on costly shows. But if a prince does this, he will spend most of his money on displays. If he is to continue to appear generous, he will have to impose heavy taxes and do everything possible to obtain more funds. This course of action will make his subjects begin to hate him; they will not even respect him because he will be poor. His generosity will have injured many and benefited only a few. . . . For these reasons a prince must not worry if he becomes known as a miser. . . .

Is it better for a prince to be loved more than feared? Or is it better to be feared more than loved? Ideally, a prince ought to be both feared and loved, but it is difficult for subjects to hold both sentiments toward their ruler. If one of the two must be sacrificed, it is much safer for a prince to be feared rather than loved. In general, men are ungrateful, dishonest, cowardly, and covetous. As long as you help them, they will do what you want them to do. They will offer you their blood, their goods, their lives, and their children when it appears that you will not need to take them up on their word. If a prince has relied solely on the good faith of others, he will be ruined. Men are less afraid to offend a prince they love than one they fear. . . .

I conclude, therefore, that men have control of their love for a prince, but the prince, himself, controls their fear of him. The wise prince will rely on what he can control and not what others control. He must be careful, however, not to make men hate him.

Everyone knows that it is a good thing for a prince to keep his word and live a faithful life. The history of our own times shows, however, that those princes who have done great things have not worried about keeping their word. A successful prince must imitate both the lion and the fox. In imitating the lion, the prince protects himself from wolves. In imitating the fox, he protects himself from traps. . . . A prince ought not to keep his word if doing so would go against his best interests. . . . If all men were good, this rule would not be a sound one. But because they are bad, and do not honor their word to the prince, he is not bound to keep his word. . . .

It is not necessary for a prince to have all the good qualities that I have named, but it is necessary that he seem to have them. I will even go so far as to say that to actually have these qualities and to be guided by them always is dangerous. But to appear to have them is useful. It is well, therefore, to seem merciful, faithful, sincere, religious, and also to be so. But a prince must be always ready to have the opposite qualities if need be. New princes, particularly, fail when they have these good qualities. In order to maintain their power they often must act against faith, against charity, against humanity, and against religion. A prince must be ready to shift with the wind as the ups and downs of fortune require. He should not go against what is good if he can avoid it, but he should be ready and able to do evil when necessary.

Epicurean Society vs. Present Society

Topic	Epicureans	Present
1. Role of Atoms		
2. Fear and Anxiety		
3. Sex		
4. Desires		
5. Partying		
6. Community		

Case Studies in Ethics

Read each of the following scenarios from James L. Christian's *Philosophy: An Introduction to the Art of Wondering*. To determine the ethical implications, apply the points of view for formalism, relativism, and contextualism by answering the following questions on a separate sheet of paper:

1. What is the ethical problem?
2. How would the formalist analyze and resolve the problem?
3. How would the relativist analyze and resolve the problem?
4. How would the contextualist analyze and resolve the problem?
5. How would you analyze and resolve the problem? Explain.

Be prepared to share your answers.

Case Study 1

The story is told of a tragic incident that occurred when a frontier village was raided by Indians. Several members of the village hid where they could not be found. One woman had a very small baby in her arms. As some Indians drew close, she smothered the baby rather than risk giving away their hiding place and thereby insuring death for them all. Some time after the raid, she was punished by both the church and community for committing murder.⁴

Case Study 2

[In the early 1900s,] a young couple in a small Arkansas town were still childless after several years of marriage. When they went to their doctor to find out why, tests showed the man to be sterile. After talking over their problem, they went together to their local pastor and asked him if he would make the wife pregnant. In due time, he obliged, and she conceived. The child was fully accepted by the man and his wife and was loved and raised as their own. The minister, however, was forced to surrender his orders and leave the ministry.⁵

Case Study 3

Much controversy surrounded the case of the Green Beret captain in Vietnam who, under orders, executed a Vietnamese agent who had been working under his command. Strong evidence had come to light that the man was a double agent. Security-wise, he could no longer be used, nor could he be allowed to go free if he were a double agent; he carried information that could jeopardize military plans and the lives of countless men. The captain therefore carried out his orders and eliminated the agent, although they had worked together and had become "friends."⁶

⁴Christian, *Philosophy: An Introduction to the Art of Wondering*, 395.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.