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Introduction

WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

Many years ago there was a popular song which posed life's most fundamental philosophical question:

What's it all about, Alfie?
Is it just for the moment we live?
What's it all about
When you sort it out, Alfie?¹

What *is* it all about? In other words, what is the meaning of life? What makes this question so challenging is the fact that to answer it properly one must answer several other difficult questions: What are human beings? Where did we come from? Are we responsible for how we live? What happens after we die? Is there a God? If so, what is God like? Can we know the answers to such questions? Can we know anything at all?

These are sometimes called the “Big Questions” in the sense that they are the most important questions one can ask. Whatever else you might want to find out during your brief time on this planet, these are questions for which you should seek answers. Ironically, many people work hard to *avoid* dealing with such questions, either because they find them too difficult or because they fear the answers they might discover. But, of course, these are poor excuses for not looking for ultimate meaning in life.

This book is all about the Big Questions. In this sense, you might say, this book is all about what life is all about. We will explore issues about who we are, where we came from, who made us, where we are going, whether we are free, how we should live, why we suffer, the value of beauty, the nature of goodness, and the nature of God. And we will consider the wide variety of answers that have been given to all of these questions. In discussing the issues we aim to be fair, but we will not

¹ Burt Bacharach, “Alfie” (1966).

pretend to be neutral. We are Christian philosophers, and our distinctive worldview will directly impact how we deal with most issues. Of course, all authors of textbooks write from the perspective of a particular worldview. As one philosopher recently put it, there is no view from nowhere.² We just thought it would be wise to let you know our perspective at the outset—even to the point of communicating this in the book's subtitle.

Philosophical Method

Our aim, as the book's title suggests, is to introduce you to philosophy in the original sense of the word—*the love of wisdom* (from the Greek *philo* and *sophia*). Philosophy is properly about more than acquiring an intellectual grasp of answers to life's Big Questions. It is about gaining insights which culminate in a life well-lived. Good philosophers not only think well but live virtuously. In this sense, we share the same mission as the most famous philosopher in Western history.

The Life of Socrates

Socrates (469–399 BC) lived in a time and place in which there was social upheaval and increasing cynicism about the meaning of life. He became famous (or infamous) in ancient Greece for accosting people on the street with inquiries about truth, goodness, knowledge, and many other issues. But he did not do so for the sake of idle entertainment. Rather, these impromptu interviews were inspired by a pronouncement by the Oracle at Delphi, who supposedly spoke for the god Apollo. The oracle declared that Socrates was the wisest man in all of Athens. When news of this got back to Socrates, he scoffed, insisting that there were many Athenians much wiser than he. But when some insisted that it was so, he set out to disprove the oracle. The best way to do so, he figured, would be to find someone who could answer some of the questions about which he was ignorant—questions about the nature of truth, goodness, knowledge, and so on. And so began the random Socratic interviews on the streets of Athens.

What Socrates learned in the process surprised him. He interviewed all kinds of people, without discriminating on the basis of reputation or social standing. He discovered that those who were purported to be most wise had fewer reasons for their beliefs and were less patient than the so-called ignorant. But in every case he found that no one had any better answers to his questions than he did. All were alike ignorant about the basic philosophical issues he raised. But those he interviewed did not

² Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

perceive their own ignorance, whereas Socrates knew he was ignorant. “All I know is that I know nothing,” he declared. His fellow Athenians did not even know this much about themselves. Thus, he realized, the Oracle was correct after all. Socrates was indeed the wisest man in all of Athens. For it is better to know you are ignorant than to be ignorant and think otherwise.

The publicans and other esteemed Athenians began to resent Socrates’ constant questioning. Not only did it reveal their own ignorance, but they feared this would undermine their political authority. Eventually, Socrates was indicted for impiety. More specifically, Socrates was charged with (1) introducing unfamiliar religious practices and failure to worship the state gods and (2) corrupting the youth at Athens. The first charge concerned Socrates’ skepticism about the Greek pantheon of gods and his conviction that there was actually one God who will ultimately judge us all. The second charge pertained to the fact that Socrates developed a large following of young people, many of whom were impressed by their mentor’s life and philosophical methodology. One of these was a young man by the name of Plato.

Socrates defended himself ably in court, as was recounted by Plato in the *Apology*. During his trial he not only defended himself against his formal charges but he also explained his life mission:

It is my belief that no greater good has ever befallen you in this city than my service to my God. For I spend all my time going about trying to persuade you, young and old, to make your first and chief concern not for your bodies nor for your possessions, but for the highest welfare of your souls, proclaiming as I go [that] wealth does not bring goodness, but goodness brings wealth and every other blessing, both to the individual and to the state.³

Despite his defense, Socrates was convicted on both charges and given the death penalty, via the drinking of hemlock. He went to his death willingly and became a martyr for philosophy. However, not long after his death, the Athenians realized their blunder and erected a statue in Socrates’ honor. To this day he remains the model philosopher for his sincere quest for truth and virtue and for his rigorous methodology.

The Socratic Method

If Socrates’ mission was unique, so was his method of teaching. Today the phrase “Socratic method” is typically used to refer to the technique

³ Plato, *Apology*, trans. Hugh Tredennick, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 16.

of question and answer to teach or discover truth, also known as *dialectic*. While this is certainly an important aspect of Socrates' approach, it is only one aspect of his overall approach, which features several helpful guidelines for an effective quest for truth. Another key element is sometimes called *Socratic ignorance*. Socrates declared, "I am quite conscious of my ignorance."⁴ This confession revealed a humble recognition of the limits of his understanding. (In some of Plato's dialogues Socrates also appears to feign ignorance about an issue—sometimes called Socratic irony—in order to illustrate a point or to drive the dialogue in a particular direction.) The primary value of such humility is how it demonstrates a teachable spirit—something that is a prerequisite for a student of philosophy or any other discipline.

Socrates also played the role of philosophical *midwife*, helping others to give birth to their ideas. This he did through rational debate, a process that is sometimes painful but, when properly done, always worthwhile. This aspect of the Socratic method also underscores for us the fact that philosophy is properly a community affair. If you are reading this book for a class, then you are formally part of such a community. But even if you are not, we hope you will process the ideas you encounter here with others who share your interest in philosophy. Such interaction makes for the most fertile intellectual soil in the pursuit of wisdom.

Finally, and returning to the point of his ultimate mission, Socrates repeatedly emphasized the point that moral knowledge is not mere acquisition of information but personal change. To know the good is to do it, Socrates declared. That is, if you really know the right thing to do in a situation, then your behavior will prove it. To act immorally is to prove your ignorance.⁵ Socrates' view here probably overintellectualizes moral goodness, especially given the biblical theme of moral weakness, which recognizes that people sometimes act against their better judgment. But his emphasis on the connection between belief and behavior is crucial, especially given the natural human tendency toward hypocrisy.

Other Elements of the Philosophical Method

The above themes are more or less distinctive to Socrates' philosophical approach. But he was part of a tradition that long preceded him and which continues to this day. The defining characteristics of this broader tradition are more difficult to nail down. But there are certain activities that tend to distinguish philosophical inquiry—not in the sense that only philosophers engage in them so much as philoso-

⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁵ See Plato's *Protagoras*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, 357–58.

phers place a special *emphasis* on them. Here are three key aspects of the philosophical method.

1. *Defining Terms.* A good philosopher always takes care to define terms. Not only does this make key concepts clear and distinct in one's mind but it also prevents merely verbal disputes. The American pragmatist philosopher William James related an experience that illustrates this.⁶ While camping with friends, James went off for a short solitary hike only to return to find the others embroiled in a heated debate. The subject of the dispute was an experience most of us have had. Suppose a man tries to get a close look at a squirrel, but it hides behind a tree. And when he circles around the tree, so does the squirrel, always keeping the tree between itself and the man. As James's friends discussed this, the question arose: "Does the man go round the squirrel or not?" Since opinions were evenly divided, they asked James to break the tie. His response: The answer depends on what is meant by "going round" the squirrel. If this means going from the north, then to the east, then to the south, and then to the west of the squirrel, then yes the man is going around it. But if this means moving from the front, then to the left, then to the back, and then to the right of the animal, then clearly the man is *not* going around the squirrel. In this way, James showed the men that they were hung up over the definition of a term and not really debating a substantive issue. Their dispute was merely verbal.

Not only can defining terms prevent such petty squabbles, it also helps to clarify genuinely important debates, from the morality of abortion and war to questions about human freedom and the nature of God. In the chapters that follow we will see how the definition of key terms is crucial for understanding each of the issues discussed. Unless we define our terms carefully, we can hardly understand philosophical questions much less arrive at trustworthy answers.

2. *Using Arguments.* Philosophers place a special emphasis on supporting truth claims with evidence. Everyone has convictions of various kinds. We all hold beliefs about the existence of God, the human soul, life after death, the rightness or wrongness of capital punishment, and any number of other issues. But what distinguishes us is how rational our beliefs are in terms of how well-grounded they are in *good reasons*. Whatever you might believe about the above issues, can you offer reasonable grounds for your beliefs? To support a truth claim with good reasons is to give an argument for it. Here we are using the term *argument* in the logical sense, as opposed to the sense of the term when we refer to a quarrel or heated exchange. It is healthy to have strong feelings

⁶ William James, *Pragmatism* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), 25.

about one's belief commitments, and philosophers are as deeply passionate about their convictions as anyone. But emotions can cloud our judgment at times and interfere with careful inquiry into critical issues. This is why self-control is crucial for doing philosophy, and good philosophers are well-practiced at restraining their emotions when debating issues.

Unfortunately, many aspects of our culture do not prize careful reasoning or self-control. In fact, from Hollywood to Saks Fifth Avenue the constant message is that feelings should be the ultimate determinant for how we think and act. Even when it comes to the most important decisions in life, from our careers to whom we marry, we are often told to "do what feels right" or "follow your heart." While such platitudes have a positive ring about them, they are really quite dangerous if followed consistently. Life's biggest decisions should be grounded in good reasons. And the same is true for all of our beliefs about important issues, such as those discussed in this book.

3. Identifying Presuppositions. The previous two paragraphs actually contain arguments about, well, the importance of arguments. As will be discussed in depth in the next chapter, an argument reasons from premises to a main point or conclusion. While our conclusion—that one's beliefs should be grounded in good reasons—is stated explicitly, some of our premises are not. In fact, we have taken several facts and values for granted in the above paragraphs. For example, we *assumed* that it is not good to have one's judgment clouded by emotions; we *assumed* that the common platitudes in quotes are dangerous; and, we *assumed*, if only by insinuation, that it is unwise to live according to such platitudes. All truth claims which are assumed without argument are called *presuppositions*. While we could argue for each of our presuppositions above, every argument we used would itself make several presuppositions. In turn, we could provide arguments for those presuppositions, and so on. However, this process cannot go on forever. This shows that one cannot avoid having presuppositions. But what distinguishes a good thinker is her ability to *identify* presuppositions, both in her own arguments and in the arguments of others.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the mathematician Kurt Gödel (1906–1978) proved his "incompleteness theorems," which showed that all rational systems are necessarily incomplete. No matter how thorough and rigorous one is in trying to prove all of one's claims, there will always be assumptions one takes for granted. Thus, the question is not whether or not you will have presuppositions but whether you are *aware* of them and *why* you make those presuppositions rather

than others. Good philosophers have a healthy self-awareness when it comes to their own presuppositions, and they can often tell you why they presuppose the things they do.

The Concept of Worldview

Having clarified some key aspects of philosophical method, let us consider now one of the main goals of philosophy, specifically to develop a reasonable *worldview*.⁷ A worldview is a conceptual scheme or intellectual framework by which a person organizes and interprets experience. More specifically, a worldview is a set of beliefs, values, and presuppositions concerning life's most fundamental issues. You might say it is a *perspective* on reality. Like tinted glasses, a worldview "colors" the way we see things and shapes our interpretation of the world. And, it must be emphasized, *everyone* has a worldview.

What precisely are the fundamental issues, the Big Questions one's answers to which comprise one's worldview? Here Christian philosopher Ronald Nash is helpful.⁸ He analyzes worldviews under five categories, each corresponding to a traditional branch of philosophy:

1. God (Theology)
2. Reality (Metaphysics)
3. Knowledge (Epistemology)
4. Human Beings (Anthropology)
5. Values (Ethics, Aesthetics, Political Philosophy)

1. *God*. Every worldview includes beliefs about God. Some worldviews, such as Christian *theism*, affirm the existence of a Creator who is eternal, immutable, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent.⁹ Moreover, this divine being, though distinct from His creation, is intimately involved in the course of history and the affairs of His creatures. Some people affirm that a God with these exalted attributes exists but has little or nothing to do with the world (*deism*). *Pantheism* is a worldview that affirms the divinity of all things—everything that exists is either identical with God or an aspect of God. Other worldviews claim that there are multiple gods who are more limited in nature (*polytheism*). Finally, naturalistic *atheists* deny the existence of any supernatural

⁷ Much of the content of this section is adapted from G. Kurian, *Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), s.v. "Christian Worldview" by Steven B. Cowan.

⁸ Ronald H. Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 26–32. In his work, Nash simply lists ethics as his fifth category. We have broadened that category in accordance with contemporary usage to include all the major aspects of value theory.

⁹ More will be said about these divine attributes in chapter six.

beings, typically claiming such beliefs to be the product of ignorance and superstition. In any case, what one believes about God fundamentally affects how one interprets experience.

2. *Reality.* Every person has metaphysical beliefs about the nature of reality. The atheist will likely embrace *materialism*, the view that the ultimate reality is matter. All that exists, according to the atheist, is the physical universe. For the pantheist, in contrast, ultimate reality is spirit or mind. Many pantheists believe that the physical universe discerned by our five senses is an illusion (the Hindu word is *maya*). Reality is purely spiritual or mental. Still others (e.g., most Christians and other theists) espouse some form of metaphysical *dualism* that acknowledges the existence of both matter and spirit. Unlike the materialist, both the pantheist and the dualist admit that there are real entities that lie beyond the purview of the natural sciences.

3. *Knowledge.* Every worldview makes claims in the area of epistemology, claims about whether or not human beings can achieve knowledge and what kind of knowledge we can have. Most theists maintain that God created us with the capacity to understand the created order and to have personal knowledge of God as well. Moreover, most theists believe that God has actually spoken in history and revealed Himself through prophets and holy Scripture. The naturalistic atheist, because she believes that the physical universe is the only reality, limits what human beings can know to what is discoverable by science. The pantheist who believes that the physical world is an illusion opts for *mysticism* as her epistemology. Naturally, such a pantheist puts little credence in science or sense experience for discovering knowledge. Moreover, she believes that the individual self and its mind are illusions, too. So pantheism does not advocate the use of human reason as a valid source of knowledge any more than sense experience. For the pantheist, the only way to have anything that might be called knowledge is by subjective, mystical experience achieved through meditation or some other technique that alleges to transcend the mind and the senses. And what we come to “know” through mystical experience cannot be understood by the mind or described in words.

4. *Human Beings.* What is the nature of human beings? What are we composed of? What is our source or origin? What happens to us after we die? Many pantheists deny any ultimate reality to the individual self or soul, seeing it as part of the illusion of *maya*. Insofar as the self is considered real, pantheists tend to see human beings as a part of the divine whole, no more or less divine than everything else. After death, the self or soul simply merges with or is absorbed by God. Naturalistic

atheists are *physicalists*, seeing human beings as purely physical entities that have evolved from a common ancestor. Our conscious minds are entirely explicable in terms of biological processes, and at death the person simply ceases to exist. Christian theists hold that human beings were created by God and endowed by Him with dignity and purpose. Most Christians are *dualists*, holding that we are a duality of body and soul. That is, human beings have a material component (body) and an immaterial component (soul). This dualism provides for the possibility of free agency and life after death

5. *Values.* Every person has values pertaining to many different aspects of life. Our values determine our priorities, guide our actions, and ground our ultimate life commitments. Our values include those which are political, social, economic, and aesthetic, but our most critical values pertain to ethics. These have to do with how we ought to treat other people. Both pantheism and naturalism often lead to *moral relativism*, the view that what count as right and wrong is a matter of personal or cultural preference. One reason for this is that both pantheism and naturalism tend to regard human concerns as ultimate. Theists, however, regard God as the ultimate good and maintain that God created human beings to reflect His character. This implies a kind of *moral objectivism*, the view that moral values transcend human beings and require universal adherence.

Although there are many worldviews, only one worldview can be true. Sadly, many people never reflect critically on their fundamental beliefs in the above areas to carefully check the truth of their worldview. They hold the beliefs or values they do because they inherited them from their parents or because they are popular among their peers. But, to quote Socrates again, “the unexamined life is not worth living.” The discipline of philosophy requires that one take a hard look at one’s worldview and examine it by means of the philosophical method laid out in the previous section with the goal of ascertaining whether that worldview is true. By doing so one may hold one’s beliefs and values more confidently or one may be led to embrace a different worldview that seems more nearly correct. This is both the benefit and danger of philosophy.

As noted earlier, we, the authors of this book, readily affirm the truth of the Christian theistic worldview. So, for us, there is a sense in which philosophy is not a *quest* for the true worldview. Nevertheless, there is still much value in the study of philosophy. We ask you to adopt with us the principle of *fides quaerens intellectum* (“faith seeking understanding”). This principle will lead you to pursue philosophical questions, first, as a way of *confirming your worldview*. We believe that

the Christian worldview as revealed in Scripture will be consistent with what the best, good-faith efforts of human reason can discern. We believe that all truth is God's truth and that God will not contradict what He reveals in the natural realm with what He reveals in Scripture. So philosophy can provide, in some cases, evidence that confirms the truth of what Christians believe.

Second, this principle will lead you to pursue philosophical questions as a way of *better understanding your faith*. Explicitly asking and seeking to answer philosophical questions will clarify for you *what* it is that you believe. We say that we believe in God. But what do we *mean* by the word *God*? And we say He is omnipotent, omniscient, and so forth, but what do these attributes *mean*? We believe that human beings are morally responsible for their actions. But what makes us responsible? Is it because we have free will? What exactly is free will, and how free need one be in order to be responsible? Philosophical study can bring clarity to questions like these.

Aims and Overview

As important as it is to build a Christian worldview, the most important goal in doing philosophy is the acquisition of wisdom. Earlier we noted how the original sense of our discipline's name is the *love* of wisdom. But this actually sets too low a standard. We don't want merely to love wisdom but to *acquire* it—to actually become wiser through our inquiry into life's most pressing questions. We really want to find out, when we sort it out, what life is all about. And, more than this, we want our lives to change in a positive way from a practical standpoint.

In this sense, our approach in this book reflects the Socratic mission, which is unfortunately often neglected by philosophers these days. Like Socrates, we aim *to use reason in service of goodness*. There are two aspects to this idea that we should spell out in order to make clear our ultimate aims in writing this book. First, this means that, when done properly, philosophical inquiry should culminate in one's living a more virtuous life. As important as it is to grow in knowledge, this is wasted if it is put to poor use. Whatever philosophical insights may be gleaned by readers of this book, it is our sincere prayer that these insights will help you to live more faithfully, serving God and other people.

Second, reason must serve goodness in the sense that the latter is a prerequisite for proper use of the former. Scripture teaches that God grants understanding to the simple and wisdom to the humble (see Pss 19:7; 25:9; and Prov 1:4). And, on the negative side, we are told that sin corrupts good thinking, that a person's vice can cause her to suppress ob-

vious truths (see Rom 1:18–32). The biblical theme here is that rational inquiry is not a morally neutral matter. Our spiritual condition directly impacts the process of belief-formation and our sensitivity to evidence and arguments. Again, this is especially so when it comes to ultimate issues, such as are dealt with in philosophy, particularly in philosophy of religion and ethics, where one's conclusions will have significant implications for how one should live. It therefore behooves us not only to be morally serious but also to be wary of how our personal biases may at any time cloud our judgment. We must constantly consider how what we *want* to be true may impact what we actually *believe* to be true. The Bible says that “the heart is more deceitful than anything else” (Jer 17:9), and keeping this in mind is essential to doing Christian philosophy.

Wherever appropriate throughout the book we have brought theological considerations to bear on the subject at hand. The degree of illumination that Scripture provides on different philosophical questions varies widely. In some cases, biblical teaching will settle a particular question, such as in the case of God's existence or the debate over the objectivity of moral values. Still, in such cases we are no less thorough in our exploration of the available philosophical arguments and positions, though we are also happy to draw a strong conclusion on the issue. In other cases, theological opinion is as varied as that among philosophers, such as regarding theories of knowledge and some metaphysical issues.

In the medieval period theology was regarded as the queen of the disciplines, in the sense that all other disciplinary studies were seen as subservient to our understanding of God. Accordingly, some dubbed philosophy as the “handmaid to theology” in the sense that, when done responsibly, philosophy is especially helpful to the study of God. We, the authors, share this conviction and have used this as our model in introducing you to philosophical studies. Toward this end we have integrated theological reflections throughout. Sometimes these show the implications of philosophical ideas for theological doctrine, and in other cases we consult Scripture to illuminate the philosophical discussion.

The organization of this book reflects the major subfields in philosophy, as all philosophical inquiry deals with knowledge, being, or value. The first chapter is devoted to an introduction to logic and the concept of truth. Since the entire book and, indeed, all of human thought depend upon logic, we begin here. We lay out what might be called the “philosopher's toolbox,” a summary of the principles of sound reasoning. This discussion is foundational to the remainder of the book since the rules of logic will be utilized to assess and propose various philosophical views throughout. Also, since the philosophical quest is essentially a search for truth, it is essential that the subject of truth be discussed at the

outset. This we do in the second part of the first chapter, as we explore the three major theories of truth.

The second chapter deals with another foundational concept—knowledge. In this chapter we first deal with the challenge of skepticism: How do we respond to arguments which intend to show that we don't know anything? Next we discuss the two major epistemological traditions—rationalism and empiricism. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to more recent philosophical debates about the definition of knowledge. We explore such questions as these: What distinguishes knowledge from mere opinion? Must a person be able to provide evidence for her beliefs to have knowledge? And is knowledge the same thing as certainty?

By far the most influential category of knowledge is science. Moreover, there are many controversies at the intersection of science and other subject areas, especially theology and the study of human nature. For this reason we have devoted an entire chapter to the philosophy of science. We discuss such questions as these: How is science to be defined? What are the laws of nature? Is the scientific method more reliable than other methods of acquiring knowledge? And what are the ultimate aims of science? Or is it even correct to suggest that science really has ultimate aims? We close the chapter with a discussion of the relationship between science and theology.

The next major section of the book begins with a look at metaphysics, the study of what is real. Though several of the other chapters in the book deal with metaphysical issues, here we focus primarily on the most basic metaphysical topics that sometimes go under the heading of *ontology* (the nature of being). For example, what is the underlying “stuff” of reality—material, spiritual, or both? We also take up the question of universals. Are there such things as essences that are shared by all objects of a particular sort, such as baseballs and dogs? Or are there only particular objects? And what, after all, *is* a particular object?

We continue our metaphysical inquiries in chapter five, but here the questions all have to do with human beings. Do we have souls or are we entirely material in composition? And how do we account for personal identity through time? Am I the same person I was ten years ago or even as an infant? If so, then in virtue of what factors? Also, are human beings free or are all our choices determined? Or are freedom and determinism compatible? And can human freedom and responsibility be reconciled with God's foreknowledge? The chapter ends with a discussion about the end of life. What evidence is there for life after death?

In chapter 6 we discuss what is arguably the most important philosophical issue, namely the existence and nature of God. This chapter

could very well have been placed earlier in the book, but we chose to put it here as the capstone to earlier discussions of epistemology and metaphysics. Though the existence of God can inform the answers one gives to many of the earlier questions, it is also true that the answers to those questions prepare the way for discussing issues in philosophy of religion. In this chapter, we explore questions such as: What evidence is there that God exists? Do we need arguments for God in order to believe rationally? What characteristics does God have? If God exists, why is there evil?

The book's third main section is devoted to the subject of values. In chapter 7 we discuss ethics, or the study of the good life. We discuss the nature of moral values and consider the question whether moral values are entirely relative. Or are there absolute moral standards that apply to everyone? If so, then where do they come from? Are they dictated by something in the physical world or do they have a transcendent source, namely God? If moral values originate from God, then what role do divine commands and the Golden Rule play in ethics?

Chapter 8 applies value inquiry to the state, asking what a just society would look like. We begin by providing some clarity about such basic political concepts as justice, rights, and laws. Then we look at several major theories of the state, including anarchy, monarchy, and social contract theory. Next we take up the question of distributive justice. How much, if at all, should resources be redistributed by the state? We consider a variety of responses to this question then close the chapter with a discussion of some difficult issues at the interface of politics and religion. What is the proper role of religion in public discourse? And when, if ever, are we justified in engaging in civil disobedience?

In the book's final chapter, we take up issues in the philosophy of art. This subject is placed under the heading of "values" because it pertains to beauty, which is the primary aesthetic *value*. In this chapter we discuss a variety of views regarding the essence of art. We also discuss the question whether there are standards for art. If so, then are they all local and relative? Or are there absolute aesthetic standards? Is beauty a real quality of things or is it in the eye of the beholder? We close the chapter with a discussion of the relationship between art and ethics. How should we approach instances of art that are morally problematic? We offer several guidelines for navigating cases where aesthetic and moral values seem to clash.

In each chapter we list important technical terms pertinent to that chapter. These terms are fully defined in the glossary at the end of the book. We also include questions for reflection at the end of every major section. These may be used to facilitate classroom discussion or simply

to enhance the reader's interaction with the material. Throughout the book we have strived for balance in covering the issues and have tried to present each viewpoint as fairly as possible. We only defend firm positions on those topics that are most central to the Christian worldview. Where Christian philosophers differ significantly, we have left the discussions more open-ended. We think this approach will make the text more user-friendly for instructors who may not agree with the authors at certain points, and hopefully it will encourage students to dig deeper.

As you read this book and explore the Big Questions, we hope that you find the discussion helpful in clarifying and assessing your own worldview. And whether or not you happen to be a Christian, we hope that you gain a deeper appreciation for philosophical studies and that you grow in the love and acquisition of wisdom.