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Donald M. Borchert

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Dr. Borchert teaches and publishes in his areas of specialization, which include ethics, philosophy of religion, and philosophy of Marxism. He was awarded the title of “University Professor” by Ohio University for excellence in teaching. He has authored or edited more than a dozen titles including *The Macmillan Compendium on Philosophy and Ethics* (1999); *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2nd edition (2006); and *Embracing Epistemic Humility: Confronting Triumphalism in Three Abrahamic Religions* (2013). He served as Associate Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences (1980–1986) and Chair of Philosophy (1987–2002).

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Dr. Petrik’s primary areas of specialization are early modern philosophy and philosophy of religion. In addition to numerous articles, he has authored the following books: *Descartes’ Theory of the Will* (1992); *Evil Beyond Belief* (2000); and *Fundamentals of Philosophy* with H. Gene Blocker and David Stewart (2013). He was awarded the title of “University Professor” by Ohio University for excellence in teaching. He is also the recipient of Ohio University’s Jeanette Graselli Award for Excellence in Teaching. In addition, he has considerable international teaching experience, having been a visiting professor at universities in Japan, Germany, and Kazakhstan. He currently serves as Graduate Chair of the Philosophy Department.

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Dr. Zucker teaches and publishes in his areas of specialization, which include applied ethics and philosophy of science. He was awarded the title of “University Professor” by Ohio University for excellence in teaching. He was the founding director of the Institute for Applied and Professional Ethics, which assists faculty in developing relevant ethics modules for their courses and in general serves to advance the understanding of ethical theory as it applies to everyday ethics. Among his publications are four textbooks: *Medical Ethics, A Reader*, with Donald Borchert and David Stewart (1992); *An Introduction to Modern Philosophy* with Donald Borchert (1994, 2001); *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Science* (1996); and *The Philosophy of Sex and Love* with Donald Borchert and Robert Trevas (1997). He has two entries, “Medical Ethics” and “Philosophy of Medicine,” in the 2nd edition of *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2006). He served as Chair of Philosophy (2002–2011).

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Preface to Series

This volume is part of a ten-volume series of interdisciplinary philosophy handbooks prepared especially for undergraduate college students. The publisher of the series is Cengage Learning, Inc., which holds the Macmillan Reference USA imprint under which the award-winning second edition of the ten-volume *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* was published in 2006. I had the privilege of serving as editor in chief for that edition. Now I have the honor of serving as editor in chief of this handbook series. Furthermore, I have the added delight of collaborating once again with Hélène Potter, Cengage's associate publisher for reference works, who played a major role in the production of the *Encyclopedia* and is the person Cengage called upon to develop this new series of interdisciplinary philosophy handbooks.

When Hélène Potter invited me to join her in this new publishing adventure, she described two features that would make these new philosophy handbooks truly innovative.

First, philosophy handbooks are usually written for an audience already knowledgeable about philosophy: philosophy majors, graduate students, and professors. In contrast, the people for whom these handbooks have been prepared are undergraduate college students who have had little or no exposure to philosophy. Each handbook provides an introduction to a subfield of philosophy, an exploration of fifteen to twenty-five topics in that subfield, and bibliographies to encourage students to explore the topics further. In other words, each handbook combines some features of an introductory textbook with some features of a reference resource. The teacher-scholars who wrote the chapters in these volumes have worked diligently to make their discussions comprehensible to philosophical novices and at the same time respectable in the eyes of philosophy scholars.

Second, the word *interdisciplinary* in the title for the project signals the other innovative aspect. Our project is interdisciplinary because it uses material from nonphilosophy disciplines—such as anthropology, film, history, literature, and other fields—to present illustrations of human experiences that raise the crucial questions philosophers try to address. These illustrations from nonphilosophy disciplines are used to initiate philosophical analysis.

This strategy seems to have been used by the ancient Greek philosopher Plato (427–347 BCE). For example, through the lens of the trial of Socrates, Plato masterfully explored vital philosophical questions. Socrates (470–399 BCE) engaged many leading citizens in public discourses in which he cleverly questioned their claims to possess important knowledge that enabled them to judge human affairs and guide society appropriately. His relentless questioning that exposed in public the flawed nature of the knowledge that these prominent citizens claimed to possess fomented increasing hostility toward Socrates.

Eventually, Socrates was put on trial in 399 BCE and charged with impiety toward the gods, turning moral values upside down, and teaching his socially disruptive ideas to others

for money. Despite his eloquent defense, Socrates was found guilty by a citizen jury and was given a death sentence that required him to drink a cup of poisonous hemlock.

Plato's account of the defense Socrates presented to the jury not only displayed Socrates's wisdom and verbal eloquence but also painted a verbal portrait of how Socrates practiced philosophy and what questions were of vital concern to him. Socrates appears as someone who pursued the examined life, cost what it may, and who encouraged others to pursue the examined life as well. Such a pursuit involves using one's reasoning capacity to explore and understand all facets of human life and experience. And such a pursuit can lead a person to know and practice the virtues or skills that can promote human flourishing and happiness.

In the first volume of the series, which serves as a primer on philosophy, portions of the trial of Socrates as reported by Plato in his *Apology* are displayed and discussed to expose the thoughts and passion of a model philosopher, Socrates. In addition, the primer volume discusses some of the challenges from various forms of skepticism that philosophers have faced when, in the footsteps of Socrates, they have tried to gain knowledge. The primer also provides a sample of the diverse philosophical traditions that have developed through the centuries in different parts of the world. Finally, the primer volume provides introductions to nine contemporary subfields of philosophy. To each of these nine subfields one of the nine volumes following the primer volume is devoted. Those subfields include environmental ethics, medical ethics, philosophy of education, philosophy of feminism, philosophy of mind, philosophy of religion, philosophy of sex and love, philosophy of sport, and philosophy of technology.

Allow me to encourage philosophical novices and their teachers to read those introductions to nine subfields in this primer. I daresay that one or two or perhaps even more of those introductions will generate a spark of interest and an eagerness to explore more fully those subfields presented in the individual volumes dedicated to them.

Please remember that numerous other subfields of philosophy are exciting and important—such as the philosophy of art, of science, of history, of language, of logic, and of metaphysics—for which additional interdisciplinary philosophy handbooks may be developed.

I am confident that I speak for the more than 150 teacher-scholars who have contributed chapters to this ten-volume series when I say, “We wish you an exciting and enlightening adventure as you pursue the examined life with the help of the words that we have written for you.”

It is important that I indicate my appreciation to Macmillan/Cengage for allowing me to invite two of my fine colleagues from the Philosophy Department at Ohio University to serve as associate editors for the series: James Petrik and Arthur Zucker. Both are excellent teacher-scholars who have given generously and joyfully of their time and talent to this project.

Professors Petrik and Zucker wish to join me in acknowledging with gratitude the steadfast and skilled support we have received from Cengage's senior editor for our project, Carol Schwartz, who, like Hélène Potter, was also an extraordinary colleague in the production of the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* several years ago.

Donald M. Borchert

Editor in Chief, Macmillan Interdisciplinary Handbooks: Philosophy
Editor in Chief, Macmillan's Encyclopedia of Philosophy
Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, Ohio University, Athens

Introduction

This volume is the first volume in the series of interdisciplinary philosophy handbooks and is intended to serve as a primer. A primer is a book that introduces a subject and prepares the reader to begin exploring that subject. As early as the fourteenth century the word *primer* was used to describe a layperson's prayer book, and more recently, it has been used to identify a small book for teaching reading. A volume that is introductory and preparatory is precisely what we have intended this primer to be. We have prepared this primer to be an open door that not only allows the reader to glimpse the landscape of philosophy but also helps the novice to enter the field of philosophy by familiarizing all beginners with some of the fascinating features of that philosophical landscape.

The primer volume is divided into four parts.

PART ONE: THE NATURE OF PHILOSOPHY

This part explores the nature of philosophy and humankind's enduring quest for knowledge. We pick up the story of that quest at the point at which Socrates (470–399 BCE), the ancient Greek philosopher, enters the scene and becomes a model philosopher for countless philosophers who succeed him century after century. Our story of the philosophic pursuit of knowledge discusses only a few of the many distinguished philosophers who have embarked on that pursuit, and examines the ever-present challenge of skepticism that confronted these philosophers. Our discussion concludes with a suggestion of how to deal with skepticism by taking it seriously without caving in to it.

PART TWO: SHOWCASING INTERDISCIPLINARY LENSES

This part of the primer shows how material from nonphilosophy disciplines has the capacity to display the human condition in such a way that the philosophical questions that seem to be embedded in human experiences are exposed. Once exposed and recognized, those questions can foster serious philosophical dialogue and an ongoing search for answers.

PART THREE: THE GLOBAL REACH OF PHILOSOPHY

Much of the philosophical discussion that appears in the volumes following this primer takes place in the context of the philosophical tradition that developed in Europe beginning with the ancient Greeks. Significant philosophical developments, however, have taken place beyond Europe. To present the global reach of philosophical inquiry, this part of the primer offers introductions to several non-European philosophical traditions.

PART FOUR: SUBFIELDS OF PHILOSOPHY

In their pursuit of knowledge, philosophers have examined more and more facets of the human experience. Accordingly, the number of subfields of philosophy has increased

INTRODUCTION

dramatically. Each of the volumes following this primer is devoted to one of the many contemporary subfields in which philosophers are actively engaged in research, writing, and debates with their peers.

Best wishes as you take a philosophical journey through the pages of this primer.

Donald M. Borchert

*Emeritus Professor of Philosophy
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