

Philosophy for Highschoolers

By David Rudmin

Annotated Teachers' Edition 1.3

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About the Author:

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Course Overview:

Welcome to *Philosophy for Highschoolers!* This philosophy book is recommended as a full curriculum or reference-text for introductory philosophy classes at the high-school, college, or seminary level. The book consists of 113 short-read sections, each followed by a set of questions (with teacher-answers provided). These questions may be used as homework, class-discussion starters, or test questions.

The text is designed for use by Scholastic/Aristotelian philosophy and theology teachers. However, since the course is incremental in its nature, persons without any background in philosophy should be able to understand (and even teach!) the course, simply by progressing through all the sections in order, one-by-one.

Year-planning

For purposes of generating a departmental curriculum, it would be advisable (though not necessary) to precede this course with a rigorous course in Logic, and to follow it with the sequel course in Theology (to be released in Fall 2011). A slight background in Biology and/or Physics would also be helpful for students to better comprehend certain points in the course.

As a year-long course (180 days), this text should cover approximately 2/3 of the time (113 suggested readings + 6 tests/exams = 119 days). In that case, the teacher will either want to supplement the course with outside readings interspersed throughout the year, or will want to fill the last 1/3 of the course with a different text or assignment.

For a half-year course (90 days), then the teacher will have to move quickly, covering three sections every two days (114 sections \times 2/3 = 76 days + 6 tests/exams = 82 days). The teacher may also save time by omitting Unit V (113 - 10 = 103 sections).

It is recommended that every unit be followed with a Unit Test (5 tests), and that the course as a whole be completed with a final exam. The current edition lacks any testing materials, and so the teacher will have to create his/her own tests: The teacher may wish to generate his/her own test-questions, or may prefer to simply select and reuse questions from the ends of each section. Material for testing may also be gathered from the diagrams and Glossary.

The last unit (Unit V) is a spring-board to the sequel introductory theology textbook (vol. II) which is expected to become available in the Fall of 2011, for students who have already completed this introductory philosophy course. It is recommended that teachers should take special care to preview Unit V in order to determine whether they agree with its subject-matter and wish to include it in the course. Some teachers will appreciate its usefulness whereas others may consider the subject-matter too abstruse and/or theoretical. Although the author believes Unit V to be convincing in its own way, he admits that it does not have the same rigor and verifiable certainty as Units I-IV.

Overview (continued): How to Use the Text

Using the Highlighted “Teacher’s Comments”

Throughout the text you will see yellow-highlighted screen-tips, commonly known as “Teachers’ Comments.” These comments are primarily for giving the teacher a greater background-knowledge and enhanced understanding of various points throughout the text. Secondly they are also intended as extra information to be conveyed to the students, if the teacher so chooses. Although optional, it is highly recommended that the teacher pass on this information on to the students, as it may be essential to a particular student’s understanding and grasp of the topic, or even to the flow of the text as a whole.

In a hard-copy (paper) edition, these comments will probably be printed in the margins of each page. They will also appear in the margins if they are viewed electronically, using Microsoft Word 2007. However, if they are viewed electronically using an earlier version of Word, then they can be viewed by hovering the cursor over each yellow highlight, in order to view that comment.

A Typical Day.

Before each class, students should be expected to (1) read the section, (2) answer the questions (unless the teacher deems certain ones “too difficult”), and (3) be prepared to ask questions about things which were unclear to them, or which they didn’t understand.

Before class, teachers should thoroughly familiarize themselves with (1) the text itself (including diagrams, and any cross-references to other diagrams elsewhere in the text), (2) the Teachers’ Comments, (3) any underlined terms’ definitions (located in the Glossary), and (4) the questions at the end of the section.

It is envisioned that a class-period could follow any one or several of the following formats, with the first ones being preferable:

(1) Seminar format. The teacher identifies key points or themes that he/she wants to convey, and tries to ask leading and probing questions to cultivate vibrant and even passionate classroom-discussion about the matter-at-hand.

(2) Question-and-answer format. If the teacher is uncomfortable with leading a classroom-discussion, he/she may simply assign the reading, and instruct the students to come to class with questions about things they didn’t understand. Then during the class period, the teacher will briefly summarize the reading, paragraph by paragraph, and respond to any questions or problems that the students have about each particular paragraph. If the students have no more questions or problems, then the teacher can move on to discussing the extra material provided in the Teachers’ Comments.

(3) Dry-Read/Lecture format. If the teacher and/or students are completely unable to prepare beforehand for a class-period, then the class-period may still suitably be spent reading the section aloud, paragraph by paragraph, with the teacher occasionally interrupting the students’ reading at relevant points (i.e. at each **highlight**), to mention the extra material contained in the attached Teacher’s Comment.

To the Student:

Welcome to a this complete course in introductory philosophy. This book presumes no outside knowledge, although a little background in Logic would be helpful in Unit III, as well as any Biology and/or Physics that you may have studied. Throughout the book you will be treated to many diagrams and pictures. Be sure to study these carefully and gain the full understanding of them, as these will be one of the main avenues for arriving at comprehension. In the meantime you will also be using and learning many common philosophical terms, concepts, and tools. Be sure to use the Glossary. If necessary, or if advised by your teacher, memorize the various definitions word-for-word, as this alone—and nothing more—would already be a solid grounding in introductory philosophy. Even if you do not always agree with the conclusions of the course (esp. Unit V), nevertheless be sure to put in the time and energy to gain the whole understanding of all the parts along the way, as knowledge and the ability to reason is itself valuable. Completion of this course should enable you to move on to major texts in philosophy such as St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* and Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

Historical Background:

Philosophy for Highschoolers is a new way of studying metaphysics and human nature in a uniquely phenomenological (i.e. visual) way. Traditionally, metaphysics was a field limited to only those with a mind for abstract reasoning, and enough time to read the voluminous writings (Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, etc.) of those who had gone before them. However because of the abstruse nature of the subject, as well as difficulties in language (Greek, Latin, German, etc.), even after many years of reflection, often a person still didn't have enough of a 'grasp' or certainty about a matter to be able to solidly say or deduce something new, or definitively rule out something else as 'wrong.' Thus philosophy became vague and imprecise, as philosophers opted to instead become historians, focusing on one particular field, or one particular philosopher's worldview, rather than on becoming proficient at the art as a whole.

The beauty of Aristotle, and later St. Thomas Aquinas' philosophy (which together developed into medieval Scholasticism) is that it is a universal, complete system, theoretical as well as practical, and so it is perennially applicable. It considers all existence in the universe, from the very smallest building blocks of language (where we first get our concepts), to the regular processes and patterns that we find functioning in the world, all the way up to the very heights of divinity. Throughout all of this, particular concepts and natures function over and over in regular, dependable ways, just as functions and operators do in mathematics and physics. Thus the system is a broad-and-universal but also rigorous one, enabling us to come to definite, deep conclusions about the nature of our universe, and of our very selves. What we learn in philosophy then can, and will determine our attitude toward other sciences, society, and even toward life itself. Indeed, every person and every institution has an unspoken philosophy-of-action, whether or not they realize it. Scholastic philosophy is unique in that it goes to the heart of what it means to *be*, exposing the mystery of our human nature in a way more profound than any other modern philosophy or social system currently does.

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