



The Oxford Companion to Philosophy

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Philosophy can be intriguing--and at times baffling. It deals with the central problems of the human condition--with important questions of free will, morality, life after death, the limits of logic and reason--though often in rather esoteric terms. Now, in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, readers have the most authoritative and engaging one-volume reference work on philosophy available, offering clear and reliable guidance to the ideas of all notable philosophers from antiquity to the present day, and to the major philosophical systems around the globe, from Confucianism to phenomenology.

Here is indeed a world of thought, with entries on idealism and empiricism, ethics and aesthetics, epicureanism and stoicism, deism and pantheism, liberalism and conservatism, logical positivism and existentialism--over two thousand entries in all. The contributors represent a veritable who's who of modern philosophy, including such eminent figures as Isaiah Berlin, Sissela Bok, Ronald Dworkin, John Searle, Michael Walzer, and W. V. Quine. We read Paul Feyerabend on the history of the philosophy of science, Peter Singer on Hegel, Anthony Kenny on Frege, and Anthony Quinton on philosophy itself. We meet the great thinkers--from Aristotle and Plato, to Augustine and Aquinas, to Descartes and Kant, to Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, right up to contemporary thinkers such as Richard Rorty, Jacques Derrida, Luce Irigaray, and Noam Chomsky (over 150 living philosophers are profiled). There are short entries on key concepts such as personal identity and the mind-body problem, major doctrines from utilitarianism to Marxism, schools of thought such as the Heidelberg School or the Vienna Circle, and contentious public issues such as abortion, capital punishment, and welfare. In addition, the book offers short explanations of philosophical terms (qualia, supervenience, iff), puzzles (the Achilles paradox, the prisoner's dilemma), and curiosities (the philosopher's stone, slime). Almost every entry is accompanied by suggestions for further reading, and the book includes both a chronological chart of the history of philosophy and a gallery of portraits of eighty eminent philosophers, from Pythagoras and Confucius to Rudolf Carnap and G.E. Moore. And finally, as in all Oxford Companions, the contributors also explore lighter or more curious aspects of the subject, such as "Deaths of Philosophers" (quite a few were executed, including Socrates, Boethius, Giordano Bruno, and Thomas More) or "Nothing so Absurd" (referring to Cicero's remark that "There is nothing so absurd but some philosopher has said it"). Thus the *Companion* is both informative and a pleasure to browse in, providing quick answers to any

question, and much intriguing reading for a Sunday afternoon.
An indispensable guide and a constant source of stimulation and enlightenment, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* with appeal to everyone interested in abstract thought, the eternal questions, and the foundations of human understanding.

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The Oxford Companion to Philosophy From Oxford University Press Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #660729 in Books
- Brand: Oxford University Press
- Published on: 1995-08-31
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 6.30" h x 2.10" w x 9.30" l,
- Binding: Paperback

- 1040 pages

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Editorial Review

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Editor Honderich sees this book not only as a reference work, but as "something more amiable than that. It diverts. It suits a Sunday morning." *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* is an authoritative, alphabetically arranged encyclopedia. Honderich has assembled a distinguished roster of 240 contributors, including Isaiah Berlin, Anthony Kenny, Michael Dummett, Alasdair MacIntyre, W. V. Quine, and John Searle. Contributors and affiliations are listed in the front matter. The 1,931 signed entries are directed toward general readers fascinated with philosophy as well as philosophy students and professional philosophers.

Among the lengthiest entries (2,000 words or more) are those on the great philosophers of the past (Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, etc.), on the dozen or so major branches of philosophy (epistemology, metaphysics, logic), and on the most prominent "national" philosophies (American, Indian, Japanese). Shorter biographies focus on others prominent in the field, including some 150 contemporary philosophers. Rounding out the book are hundreds of articles on philosophical terms and dozens on national philosophies of lesser impact on the Anglo-American tradition (Croatian, Spanish, Swedish). Short bibliographies follow most entries. Three appendixes cover logical symbols used in this book, "maps" or family trees of various branches of philosophy, and a chronological table of philosophy. The index directs readers to related entries. Portraits of several dozen major philosophers are grouped by period or culture (medieval, French, Eastern).

The diversity of contributors has resulted in a wide variety of interesting, idiosyncratic articles. The one on the late Paul Feyerabend, for instance, begins "Austrian-American philosopher of science who argues for the abolition of his subject." Feyerabend, author of the article on the history of the philosophy of science, was thus a far-from-unbiased viewer of his own discipline. It might be argued that the various biases in *The Oxford Companion* somehow balance out in a way that a single-author work like Simon Blackburn's *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* [RBB Ja 15 95] cannot. Blackburn has more (2,500) but generally much shorter entries. A more apt comparison might be the venerable multivolume *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Macmillan, 1967), edited by Paul Edwards (a contributor to the present work). It boasts much longer articles but is necessarily silent on the last quarter-century of philosophy. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* is highly recommended for academic, public, and high-school libraries.

Review

"A first-rate book that belongs in every philosophy collection."--*Library Journal*

About the Author

Ted Honderich is Grote Professor of the Philosophy of Mind and Logic at University College London, and has also taught at Yale and CUNY. He is the author of *A Theory of Determinism: The Mind, Neuroscience, and Life-Hopes* and *How Free Are You?*

Users Review

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