

Preface

The publication of this sixth edition of *Questions That Matter* comes 24 years after its initial printing and over a quarter century since the manuscript was first completed. This provides a sort of landmark because for the first time the book is older than many of the students likely to be enrolled in a traditional introduction to philosophy course. Obviously much has changed in the world in the past twenty plus years, and the book has evolved in response to these changes. But the majority of the material has not changed. It is a hallmark of philosophy that most of the “questions that matter” are timeless and remain as pressing today as they were more than 2,000 years ago when Socrates and his contemporaries were debating the nature of existence. The attempt throughout the life of this textbook has been to sustain the timeless while adapting to changing times. Hopefully we have succeeded in this attempt.

While maintaining the basic structure and approach, two major changes mark this sixth edition. First, the book is shorter by three chapters than previous editions. We responded to feedback from teachers and reviewers that the text was simply too long for the one-semester introduction to philosophy courses in which it is used. Three chapters have been cut from this edition to make a leaner, more user-friendly text. In each case, some key elements of the old have been adapted into neighboring chapters, so the basic questions are not lost even as the treatment is condensed significantly. Although we recognize that anything cut from the fifth edition will be missed by some users, we have listened to feedback in deciding where to trim the text. We hope you will agree that the benefits of a slightly shorter text outweigh the loss of important material. The second major change comes in the final section of the book, “The Question of Society,” which deals with issues in social and political philosophy. Here a new chapter on

democracy and a reworking of the material on liberalism update this area of philosophy that changes the most because of its inherent ties to our society and the real world of politics. We have attempted to make this section more relevant to our contemporary world while remaining firmly committed to a historical approach to the subject matter.

In addition to these changes, we have, of course, made minor adjustments throughout in the interest of accuracy, readability, and updating. Some new sections have been added and the whole has been enhanced by some new boxed material. We have continued the ongoing attempt to do justice to recent philosophical developments, especially the philosophical role and contributions of women. Beyond these improvements the book remains basically unchanged—which we take to be a plus.

As stated in previous prefaces, the book is intended as an introductory text for students whose college experience may not include a subsequent course in philosophy. We have endeavored to make lucid a very difficult and often confusing subject and, at the same time, to do justice to its history and importance. We hope that the integrity of the subject has survived our efforts at simplification and abbreviation.

In the pursuit of this goal we have been mindful of the classroom setting: (a) *The instructor's task*. The best way of showing respect and concern for the goals and methods of the individual instructor is to provide a text that is not confining or burdensome. Instead, it provides instructors with a point of departure that will enhance and strengthen their personal approaches to the subject and their goals for their students. (b) *The student's task*. Most of the students using this text will have no background in philosophy and are likely to be baffled by their first encounter with the subject's language, distinctions, concepts, and the like. This first encounter is likely to be the student's best (and for many, only) opportunity to master a subject that really does pose the questions that matter. A student can be cheated of that mastery but can never avoid the questions. Thus we have been guided throughout by a concern to represent and discuss the issues in a coherent, readable, and stimulating style. Furthermore, we have attempted to organize the content so that the students will be able to appreciate for themselves that there really are coherence and direction amid the twists and turns. We have also been guided by a conviction that explanatory aids can be utilized to promote understanding in an often difficult subject.

Our attempts to present the material in a way that will most profit the student and the classroom are evident in the following:

- Major historical thinkers have been discussed, but not to the exclusion of contemporary contributions.
- Appropriate and extended selections from primary sources have been included, interspersed throughout the discussions, making it possible for students to read the major thinkers for themselves.
- Major fields in philosophy have been included, as well as the major issues and traditions in those fields.

- No topic or issue has been excluded on the grounds that it was too difficult.
- The book seeks to accommodate the instructor's creative use of the primary materials, thus allowing him or her to develop self-designed exchange with the students.
- Fields and issues have been chosen that are most likely to be relevant to the student's mastery of elementary philosophy.

Each part of the book represents a major topic in philosophy, though instructors are encouraged to consider these topics in whatever order they deem appropriate. Each chapter contains a discussion of the relevant issues, plus a variety of supplemental material. The discussion is presented in as logical and historical a manner as possible, showing connections, roots, and influences. The issues and positions are documented with frequent and usually copious quotations from philosophers, woven into the text. The rather generous margins contain running summaries of the adjoining section. These serve the student not only as an indexing device, but also as a method for quick review of the most important ideas. At those points where basic terms, concepts, or positions need to be explained, summarized, or emphasized, the section is interrupted with a boxed insert. Still other insertions contain relevant information—for example, biographical sketches. Illustrations have been included so as to provide, on occasion, visual relief and reinforcement. Each chapter concludes with a review section that includes a brief summary, a list of basic ideas, a self-test, questions for reflection and possible discussion, and an annotated bibliography (“For Further Reading”) of works of varying levels geared to assist especially in research and writing projects.

An introduction precedes the whole. Here we explain the nature of philosophy and include various definitions and concepts, as well as a discussion of issues and problems involved in the philosophical enterprise itself and its relation to other fields. We have shortened the introductory discussion of logic and focused more on informal arguments and fallacies.

With respect to the broad outline of the book, we feel that the more or less standard way of organizing and presenting philosophical material is, after all, the best. The reader will find here a much more restrained approach than may be found in some texts, which verge on the flamboyant and far-flung, and at the same time an attempt to provide, nonetheless, a visually arresting format. Furthermore, the interest in treating (whenever possible) *historical* contexts, connections, and developments can only benefit both the study and the teaching of philosophy.

This book has grown out of many years of teaching beginning philosophy courses to innumerable students. We have tried to pay attention to what works and what doesn't in the attempt to confront, engage, and instruct.

Beyond that, we have been much helped at every stage by editors at McGraw-Hill, most recently, Mark Georgiev, and previously, Jon-David Hague,

Judy Cornwell, Cynthia Ward, Kaye Pace, and Anne Murphy, and by those who reviewed the material for the sixth edition:

Christopher Eubanks, University of Arkansas
Thompson M. Faller, University of Portland
Barbara Hands, University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Andrew G. Kampiziones, Francis Marion University
Edward N. Martin, Liberty University
Norah Martin, University of Portland

Closer to home Professor Miller again thanks his colleagues at the University of Colorado, including Wes Morrison, Diane Mayer, John O. Nelson, Phyllis Kenevan, Carol Cleland, Chris Shields, and my philosopher-friend, Lee Speer, who made invaluable contributions regarding the basic concept of the book and has provided excellent counsel all along the way, and other philosopher-friends, Beth and Paul Losiewicz, Paul Keyser, Paul Saalbach, and Garry Deweese. With respect to manuscript preparation, much thanks goes to several assistants; Craig Hubbard, Dan Handschy, Michael Thompson, Paul Awald, John S. Meyer, Michael McCloskey, Damian Baumgardner, Richard P. Becker, Jeff Brower, Erik M. Hanson, Glenn F. Ashton, Greg Johnson, and Deborah Nutter.

Jon Jensen wishes to thank his philosophical mentors, those people who taught me what it means to think clearly and carefully about the most important questions. Though many people have been influential, I wish to thank especially John Moeller, Richard Ylvisaker, Claudia Mills, Dale Jamieson, Jim Nickel, Bill Throop, and, of course, Ed. Miller. For help with the fifth edition, I am grateful to Anthony Smith for his diligent work. On this sixth edition, Matt Simpson, my colleague next door, was invaluable. His keen philosophical eye prevented many an error and his guidance improved Part Five significantly. Finally, and most importantly, I thank my dearest Rachel, the light and love of my life, whose support and friendship make everything possible.

“For us who have undertaken the toil of abbreviating, it is no light matter, but calls for sweat and loss of sleep.”

—II Macc. 2:26 (Revised Standard Version)

Ed. L. Miller
and
Jon Jensen