



About Philosophy (11th Edition)

By Robert Paul Wolff

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Four Decades of Student-Friendly Philosophy

About Philosophy is an introductory text that covers all the major fields of philosophy in an easy-to-read language, interspersed with short selections from the major philosophers. It has been a best-selling leader in the field for more than forty years and it is written by an internationally recognized author of more than twenty books.

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Editorial Review

Review

I think the author has a very well-developed sense of where introductory philosophy students are, intellectually, and has a good feel for how to explain difficult concepts to them.

-Professor Jennifer Mundale, *University of Central Florida*

Each chapter begins very accessibly and amusingly, and leads seamlessly to an excerpt from a primary source. This is quite a remarkable feat!

-Professor Jay Newhard, *East Carolina University*

Wolff has maintained a clear personal voice while covering most of the basics of Philosophy, making for a truly interesting text.

-Instructor James Bower, *Walla Walla Community College*

About the Author

In This Section:

I. Author Bio

II. Author Letter

I. Author Bio

Robert Paul Wolff was born in 1933 in New York City. He was educated at Harvard University, receiving his doctorate in philosophy in 1957. Following a brief period of service in the military, he taught at Harvard, The University of Chicago, Columbia University, and the University of Massachusetts, from which he retired in 2008 after a career spanning half a century. Wolff is the author or editor of twenty-three books, which have been translated into sixteen languages. He is best known around the world for a short book titled *In Defense of Anarchism*, which has most recently appeared in Croatian, Malaysian, and Korean. For a somewhat more extended biography, you may consult the article on him on Wikipedia.com. Those who want to know every last detail of his life may read his eight hundred page, three volume, autobiography, which is posted on box.net and is accessible from his blog: www.robertpaulwolff.blogspot.com. Wolff is married to his childhood sweetheart, Susan, and lives in Chapel Hill, NC. He has two sons: Patrick Gideon Wolff, a famous International Chess Grandmaster who now is the Managing Director of a hedge fund, Grandmaster Capital, and Tobias Barrington Wolff, a leading Gay Rights legal activist and Professor of Law at the University of Pennsylvania. Wolff has one cat, named Christmas Eve.

In 1990, after several years of activity in the movement to end apartheid in South Africa and liberate the South African people, Wolff founded University Scholarships for South African Students, which has in the past two decades helped more than one thousand five hundred young Black men and women in South Africa get a higher education. In March, 2011, Wolff was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of the Western Cape in South Africa in recognition of his work for South African higher education.

II. Author Letter

Dear Colleagues,

With this eleventh edition, *About Philosophy* approaches the completion of its fourth decade. Now, we philosophers are trained to view questions under the aspect of eternity, *sub specie aeternitatis*, so forty years is as nothing to us. But though we live with the eternal, our students very definitely do not! Despite our best efforts to remain *au courant*, we cannot keep up with the ever-changing world in which they live. Just this past semester, I mentioned Gilbert and Sullivan's light operas to a class of bright graduate students, and they looked at me blankly. As Heraclitus reminded us a mere two and a half millennia ago, "you can never step into the same river twice, for other waters are ever flowing onto you."

In a continuing effort to accommodate *About Philosophy* to the mercurial frame of reference of our students, I have regularly replaced old "Contemporary Applications" with new ones. Almost that entire portion of the text has been completely redone for this edition. My favorite is the Contemporary Application for the chapter on the Philosophy of Art, which features a painting done by a dog. I have looked at that painting right side up, upside down, and sideways, and I have to confess that I cannot see how it differs from the abstract expressionist paintings now commanding six and seven figure prices at art auctions.

Anyone my age grew up in a linear world of books, but my grandchildren inhabit a multi-dimensional world of hypertexts. They move easily from text to text, site to site, linking ideas and texts in ways I never would have thought to do.

I am confident that we have struck the right balance between the eternal and the fleeting. The basic philosophical ideas and arguments are still here — they do not change. But this material will now be available to our students in ways that they are comfortable with. I look forward to hearing from you about how it all works together.

Thank you once again for your loyalty to this text, and for the invaluable suggestions you have made over the years for its improvement. My email address is rwolff@afroam.umass.edu.

Sincerely,

Robert P. Wolff

Professor Emeritus
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Blog: www.robertpaulwolff.blogspot.com

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Aaron Ryan:

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Harold Singleton:

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Jennifer David:

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Elmo Bragg:

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