Glossary

**a posteriori knowledge** Knowledge that depends entirely on sense experience.

**a priori knowledge** Knowledge gained independently of or prior to sense experience.

**absolute idealism** The doctrine that the universe is an objective reality consisting of ideas in the universal mind.

**absurdity** In existentialism, a sense of meaninglessness and irrationality in the world arising from the conflict between our need for meaning in life and the meaningless, indifferent universe.

**act-utilitarianism** The idea that the rightness of actions depends solely on the overall well-being produced by individual actions.

**ahimsa** The principle of not harming living beings (often referred to as the “non-harm” or “nonviolence” principle).

**Analects** Confucian text containing the conversations of Confucius and his followers.

**analytic statement** A logical truth whose denial results in a contradiction.

**anatta** The impermanence of the self; or not-self, or no-soul.

**ancient atomism** The theory that reality consists of an infinite number of minute, indivisible bits called atoms moving randomly in an infinite void, or empty space.

**anicca** Impermanence; the ephemeral nature of everything.

**appeal to ignorance.** The fallacy of trying to prove something by appealing to what we don’t know. It is arguing either that (1) a claim is true because it hasn’t been proven false or (2) a claim is false because it hasn’t been proven true.

**appeal to the person (ad hominem fallacy)** The fallacy of rejecting a statement on the grounds that it comes from a particular person, not because the statement itself is false or dubious.

**appeal to popularity** The fallacy of arguing that a claim must be true not because it is backed by good reasons but simply because many people believe it.

**appearances** The way things in the world appear to us.

**argument** A group of statements in which one of them (the conclusion) is supported by the others (the premises).

**aristocracy** A society ruled by a privileged class.

**asceticism** The denial of physical comfort or pleasures for religious ends.

**atman** One’s soul or self.

**axiology** The study of value, including both aesthetic value and moral value.

**begging the question** The fallacy of trying to prove a conclusion by using that very same conclusion as support.

**Bhagavad-Gita** The most highly venerated and influential scriptures in Hinduism.

**Brahman** The impersonal, all-pervading spirit that is the universe yet transcends all space and time.

**brahmin** A priest or teacher; a man of the priestly caste.

**capitalism** A socioeconomic system in which wealth goes to anyone who can acquire it in a free marketplace.
categorical imperative Kant’s fundamental moral principle, which he formulates as
(1) “I am never to act otherwise than so that I could also will that my maxim
should become a universal law,” and (2) “So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine
own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as a
means only.”

communism A term broadly synonymous with socialism but associated with nomi-
nally Marxist countries such as the Soviet Union in the twentieth century.

composition The fallacy of arguing erroneously that what can be said of the parts
can also be said of the whole.

conclusion In an argument, the statement being supported by premises.

consequentialist theory A moral theory in which the rightness of actions depends
solely on their consequences or results.

cosmological arguments Arguments that reason from the existence of the universe,
or cosmos (or some fundamental feature of it) to the conclusion that God exists.

cosmopolitanism The idea that we have moral duties to all persons, even those
outside our family and community.

cultural relativism The view that the truth about something depends on what cul-
tures believe.

Dao The “Way” in Taoism, the mysterious first principle of the universe; the eternal
source of all that is real and the under-
pinning of the world.

deduction A way of unpacking a text (philosophical, literary, or other) to reveal
hidden assumptions and contradictions that subvert the ostensible meaning.

deductive argument An argument intended to give logically conclusive support to its
conclusion.

democracy Rule by the people as a whole.

descriptive (or nonconsequentialist) theory A moral theory in which the
rightness of actions is determined not solely by their consequences but partly
or entirely by their intrinsic nature.

distributive justice (or social justice) The fair distribution of society’s benefits and
burdens—such things as jobs, income, property, liberties, rights, welfare aid,
taxes, and public service.

division The fallacy of arguing erroneously that what can be said of the whole can be
said of the parts.

doctrine of double effect The moral prin-
ciple that performing a bad action to bring about a good effect is never mor-
ally acceptable but that performing a good action may sometimes be accept-
able even if it produces a bad effect.

dualism The view that the mind (or soul) and matter (or body) are two disparate
things.

dukkha The inevitable suffering and dissi-
satisfaction inherent in existence.

efficient cause The main source or initiator of a change.

empiricism The view that our knowledge of the empirical world comes solely from
sense experience.

empiricists Those who believe that our knowledge of the empirical world comes
solely from sense experience.

Epicureanism The philosophy of Epicurus; the view that life’s highest aim is happi-
ness attained through moderate pleasures and the avoidance of mental disturbance.

epistemology The philosophical study of knowledge.

equivocation The fallacy of assigning two
different meanings to the same signifi-
cant word in an argument.

ethics (moral philosophy) The study of mor-
ality using the methods of philosophy.

ethics of care A moral perspective that em-
phazizes the unique demands of specific
situations and the virtues and feelings that are central to close personal relationships.
evidentialism The view that we are justified in believing something only if it is supported by sufficient evidence.

existentialism A term applied to different philosophies that share themes about the uniqueness of each human being, the central importance of choice, and the individual’s response to an indifferent, absurd universe.

fallacy A common but bad argument.

fallibilism The view that our claims to knowledge may turn out to be false.

false dilemma The fallacy of arguing erroneously that since there are only two alternatives to choose from, and one of them is unacceptable, the other one must be true.

feminist ethics An approach to morality aimed at advancing women’s interests, underscoring their distinctive experiences and characteristics, and advancing the obvious truth that women and men are morally equal.

fideism The notion that religious belief is grounded in faith, not reason.

final cause What a thing is for or for what purpose it exists.

form The shape, pattern, or function of material stuff.

formal cause A thing’s structure and properties that make it what it is.

Forms In Plato’s philosophy, the objectively real, eternal abstract entities that serve as models or universals of higher knowledge.

generic fallacy Arguing that a statement can be judged true or false based on its source.

hedonism The doctrine that pleasure is the supreme good.

Hellenistic era The period from the death of Alexander in 323 BCE to the end of the Roman Republic in 31 BCE in which Epicureanism, Stoicism, and skepticism flourished.

inductive argument An argument intended to give probable support to its conclusion.

instrumental good Something good because it helps us attain something else good; something good for the sake of something else.

intrinsic good Something good in itself; something good for its own sake.

invalid argument A deductive argument that fails to provide conclusive support for its conclusion.

justice The idea that people should get what is fair or what is their due.

karma The universal principle that governs the characteristics and quality of each rebirth, or future life.

language-game A pattern of social activity in which words play a crucial role and derive their meaning from how they are used in the activity.

li In early Confucianism, ritual, etiquette, principle, and propriety; conscientious behavior and right action.

logic The study of correct reasoning.

logos Heraclitus’ central idea—the principle, formula, or law of the world order.

Lyceum Aristotle’s school of philosophy and science, named after its location, a grove just outside Athens dedicated to the god Apollo Lyceus.

material cause A thing’s material composition.

meritocracy A system of rule by those most qualified to govern.

metaphysics The study of reality.

monads Leibniz’s term for the only true substances—immaterial, mental entities that constitute reality.

moral evil Evil that comes from human choices and actions.

moral theory A theory that explains why an action is right or wrong or why a person or a person’s character is good or bad.
morality Beliefs about right and wrong actions and good and bad persons or character.
mysticism The belief in the alleged ability to access, through trances or visions, divine knowledge that is unattainable through sense experience or reason.
natural law theory The view that right actions are those that conform to moral standards discerned in nature through human reason.
necessary truth A truth that could not have been false.
Neoplatonism The philosophical view consisting of a blend of Plato’s metaphysics (primarily concerning the theory of the Forms) and other nonmaterialist or religious ideas.
nirvana A state of bliss and well-being attained when one extinguishes the flames of desire and thus halts the repeating cycle of death and rebirth.
onological arguments Arguments that reason from the concept of God to the existence of God.
panentheism The view that God is in every part of the universe but is also more than the universe.
pantheism The view that God is identical with everything.
phenomenology A way of painstakingly describing the data of consciousness without the distortions of preconceived ideas.
philosophical method The systematic use of critical reasoning to try to find answers to fundamental questions about reality, morality, and knowledge.
picture theory of meaning The view that the logical structures of language mirror the structures of the world.
pragmatism The doctrine that the meaning or truth of a belief is synonymous with the practical results of accepting it.
premise A statement that supports the conclusion of an argument.
pre-Socratics The first philosophers, most of whom flourished before Socrates (fifth century BCE).
principle of induction The presumption that events that followed one another in the past will do the same in the future, that the future will be like the past.
propositional knowledge Knowledge of a proposition.
rationalism The doctrine that through unaided reason we can come to know what the world is like.
rationalists Those who believe that through unaided reason we can come to know what the world is like.
reductio ad absurdum An argument form in which a set of statements to be proved false is assumed, and absurd or false statements are deduced from the set as a whole, showing that the original statement must be false.
relativism The doctrine that the truth about something depends on what persons or cultures believe.
ren The essential Confucian virtues, including benevolence, sympathy, kindness, generosity, respect for others, and human-heartedness.
rhetoric The art of verbal persuasion.
rule-utilitarianism The doctrine that a right action is one that conforms to a rule that, if followed consistently, would create for everyone involved the most beneficial balance of well-being over suffering.
samsara One’s cycle of repeated deaths and rebirths.
skepticism The view that we lack knowledge in some fundamental way.
slippery slope The fallacy of arguing erroneously that a particular action should not be taken because it will lead inevitably to other actions resulting in some dire outcome.
social contract theory The view that justice is secured, and the state is made legitimate, through an agreement among citizens
of the state or between the citizens and the rulers of the state.

socialism The political and economic view that the means of production (property, factories, businesses) should be owned and controlled by the state for the general welfare.

Socratic method Question-and-answer dialogue in which propositions are methodically scrutinized to uncover the truth.

sophists Itinerant professors who, for a fee, would teach a range of subjects that could be of practical or intellectual benefit.

statement (or claim) An assertion that something is or is not the case and is therefore the kind of utterance that is either true or false.

Stoicism The view that we can attain happiness and peace of mind if we focus on controlling only what is up to us (attitudes, intentions, perceptions, and feelings) and ignoring what is not up to us (body, reputation, property, and political office), thereby restraining our desires, cultivating virtue, and conforming our lives to Nature (or God).

straw man The fallacy of misrepresenting a person's views so they can be more easily attacked or dismissed.

subjective relativism The notion that truth depends on what a person believes.

syllogism A deductive argument made up of three statements—two premises and a conclusion.

synthetic statement A statement that is not analytic.

teleological arguments Arguments that reason from apparent signs of design or purposeful creation in the world to the existence of a supreme designer.

teleology The existence of purpose or ends inherent in persons or things.

term A word that names a class, or category, of things in a deductive argument.

Upanishads Vedic literature concerning the self, Brahman, samsara, and liberation.

utilitarianism The view that right actions are those that result in the most beneficial balance of good over bad consequences for everyone involved.

valid argument A deductive argument that succeeds in providing conclusive support for its conclusion.

Vedas Early Hindu scriptures, developed between 1500 and 600 BCE.

virtue A disposition to behave in line with a standard of excellence.

will to power The fundamental nature of existence as a drive to control and dominate.