



Selected Philosophical Works

Primary Sources, Basic Concepts, Commentaries, and Quizzes
A Companion for Undergraduate Students in Philosophy

II



Hossein Mesbahian

**A Companion for
Undergraduate Students in
Philosophy**

(II)

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Department of Philosophy
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Selected Philosophical Works (II)
Primary Sources, Basic Concepts, Commentaries, and Quizzes

A Companion for Undergraduate Students in Philosophy

Second Part:

Medieval Period

Augustine

Anselm

Aquinas

Ockham

Boethius

Gaunilo

Scotus

For Undergraduate Courses:

Interpretation of Philosophical Texts in English II: Medieval philosophy

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2019

Contents

Introduction	9
II. Medieval Period	13
Part 1: Readings	13
Reading 1: Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430) (I)	13
Transcript from DVD Excerpt.....	13
Selected Philosophical Text: The City of God	15
Book XI.....	15
Reading 2: Saint Augustine of Hippo (II)	18
Selected Philosophical Text: The City of God	18
BOOK XII.....	18
Reading 3: Saint Augustine of Hippo (III)	24
Selected Philosophical Text: The City of God	24
Reading 4: Saint Augustine of Hippo (IV).....	31
Selected Philosophical Text: The City of God	31
Reading 5: Boethius (c. 480–524) (I).....	37
Selected Philosophical Text: Consolation of Philosophy	38
Book V	38
Reading 6: Boethius (II).....	45
Selected Philosophical Text: The Consolation of Philosophy.....	45
Reading 7: Anselm (1034–1109) and Gaunilo (994–1083)	50
Selected Philosophical Text: Prosloguim, Gaunilo’s Objection, and Anselm’s Reply	50
Prosloguim	50
Gaunilo’s Reply on Behalf of the Fool.....	53
Anselm’s Reply to Gaunilo	54
Reading 8: Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) (I).....	55

6 | A Companion for Undergraduate Students in Philosophy (II)

Transcript from DVD Excerpt.....	55
Selected Philosophical Text: The Summa Theologica	56
Question II: The Existence of God (In Three Articles)	56
Reading 9: Thomas Aquinas (II).....	62
Selected Philosophical Text: The Summa Theologica	62
Question II: The Existence of God.....	62
Question LXXV (Treatise on Man): Of Man Who Is Composed of a Spiritual and a Corporeal Substance: and in the First Place, concerning What Belongs to the Essence of the Soul (Seven Articles)	66
Reading 10: Thomas Aquinas (III).....	69
Selected Philosophical Text: The Summa Theologica	69
Question LXXV (Treatise on Man): Of Man Who Is Composed of a Spiritual and a Corporeal Substance: and in the First Place, concerning What Belongs to the Essence of the Soul (Seven Articles)	69
Reading 11: Thomas Aquinas (IV)	77
Selected Philosophical Text: The Summa Theologica	77
Question LXXV (Treatise on Man): Of Man Who Is Composed of a Spiritual and a Corporeal Substance: and in the First Place, concerning What Belongs to the Essence of the Soul (Seven Articles)	77
Reading 12: Thomas Aquinas (V).....	85
Selected Philosophical Text: The Summa Theologica	85
Question LXXV (Treatise on Man): Of Man Who Is Composed of a Spiritual and a Corporeal Substance: and in the First Place, concerning What Belongs to the Essence of the Soul (Seven Articles)	85
Question XCIV: Of the Natural Laws	88
Reading 13: Thomas Aquinas (VI)	94
Selected Philosophical Text: The Summa Theologica	94
Question XCIV: Of the Natural Laws	94
Reading 14: Thomas Aquinas (VII)	100
Selected Philosophical Text: The Summa Theologica	100

Question XCV: Of the Human Laws.....	100
Reading 15: Duns Scotus (c. 1266–1308).....	106
Transcript from DVD Excerpt.....	106
Selected Philosophical Text: Ordinatio II, d. 44, q. un.....	108
“Is the power for sinning from God?”.....	108
Reading 16: William of Ockham (c. 1285–1349).....	112
Selected Philosophical Text: Summa Logicae.....	114
Part 1.....	114
Part 2: Assignments.....	122
Assignment 1: Saint Augustine of Hippo (I).....	122
Basic Philosophical Concepts.....	122
Assignment 2: Saint Augustine of Hippo (II).....	125
Quiz.....	125
Basic Philosophical Concepts.....	126
Assignment 3: Saint Augustine of Hippo (III).....	128
Quiz.....	128
Assignment 4: Saint Augustine of Hippo (IV).....	132
Basic Philosophical Concepts.....	132
Assignment 5: Boethius (I).....	135
Basic Philosophical Concepts.....	135
Assignment 6: Boethius (II).....	138
Quiz.....	138
Assignment 7: Anselm and Gaunilo.....	140
Quiz.....	140
Basic Philosophical Concepts.....	142
Assignment 8: Thomas Aquinas (I).....	143
Basic Philosophical Concepts.....	143
Assignment 9: Thomas Aquinas (II).....	146
Quiz.....	146
Basic Philosophical Concepts.....	147

8 | A Companion for Undergraduate Students in Philosophy (II)

Assignment 10: Thomas Aquinas (III)..... 149

 Basic Philosophical Concepts..... 149

Assignment 11: Thomas Aquinas (IV)..... 153

 Basic Philosophical Concepts..... 153

Assignment 12: Thomas Aquinas (V)..... 155

 Quiz..... 155

Assignment 13: Thomas Aquinas (VI)..... 158

 Quiz..... 158

 Basic Philosophical Concepts..... 159

Assignment 14: Thomas Aquinas (VII) 161

 Basic Philosophical Concepts..... 161

Assignment 15: Duns Scotus..... 164

 Basic Philosophical Concepts..... 164

Assignment 16: William of Ockham..... 167

 Quiz..... 167

 Basic Philosophical Concepts..... 168

Answer Key for Quizzes 170

Bibliography 171

Index of Basic Philosophical Concepts 173

Introduction

This book is based on a documentary DVD containing expert commentary and analyses by leading scholars in philosophy, followed by selected primary sources, basic philosophical concepts and interactive philosophy quizzes. This book has five main aims:

- 1- To draw comprehensive and methodologically appropriate picture of the history of philosophy in the Western world;
- 2- To provide students with an understanding of philosophy in the English language;
- 3- To encourage students to interpret philosophical subjects, to ask fundamental questions about human nature and our world, and to gain critical perspective on philosophical issues;
- 4- To examine historical development of philosophical thought, and an exploration of its relationship with contemporary philosophical issues;
- 5- To encourage students to think about the role philosophy can play in the modern world.

In pursuit of these aims, it is necessary to highlight the importance of the following questions: What is philosophy? What does it mean to philosophize? How can philosophy be studied? It will be suggested that few concepts have come to dominate the human life as much as philosophy, yet there is very little agreement over what the term actually means. Thus, it will become obvious that

philosophy is a controversial concept involved in numerous and frequently inconsistent understandings. Philosophy, as we will explore, is not the same as “life” but on the other hand, almost any other definition would seem too narrow. Although attempts at definition and interpretation of philosophy are certainly important, the study of philosophy often doesn’t begin with a solid definition of the subject. Instead, it seems easier to define philosophy by doing philosophy.

One way of doing philosophy is to explore major points of disagreement among prominent philosophers of history. Examining their positions and the arguments they present in support of them will undoubtedly lay the foundation for the critical insight required in advanced academic research. Not only does philosophy foster our ability to construct and articulate our viewpoints, it also opens our horizon to a plethora of unasked questions about ourselves and our surroundings. Therefore, throughout the historical examination of Western philosophy, we find that the primary feature of doing philosophy is offering critical views that refute a philosopher’s claim, or reveal that some philosophical views are less defensible than others, and some are simply indefensible.

These four volumes begin with pre-Socratic philosophers and ends with the great 20th-century philosopher John Rawls. This volume focuses on medieval philosophy, from Saint Augustine to William of Ockham. It must be noted that the primary aim of structuring such a wide-ranging course is to provide a very basic conceptual framework of Western philosophy in the English language. In other words, the main purpose of this book is to introduce some fundamental English philosophical concepts related

to the philosophers listed in the course outline, rather than to provide an historical overview of Western philosophy.

Apart from the introductory session, each section of this book is organized in two interrelated parts. The readings begin with a short account of an excerpt academic commentator introducing key figures in the history of Western philosophy (transcript from the DVD), followed by selected primary sources covering the same time period and philosophers featured in the excerpts. The assignments begin with philosophical concepts and ends with an interactive philosophy quiz.

Given that this work is an official textbook for undergraduate courses, conforming to certain guidelines had become necessary. With regard to the overall structure and content of the book, I have followed the mandate of the Ministry of Science Research and Technology requiring all departments of philosophy to offer courses on interpreting texts in ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary philosophy. Similarly, quizzes have been added in order to reflect the overall structure of the educational system in Iran wherein students are required to take a national multiple-choice quiz for applying to graduate school. This book, accordingly, is suitable for students looking for an overview of historically-grounded philosophical thought.

I appreciatively acknowledge the help of Mahdi Kalantari Saghafi. Without his editing skills, this project hardly seems feasible. He helped me with fieldwork and spent many hours proofreading and systematizing the bibliography. A special word of thanks, accordingly, to Mahdi for sharing with me his help, and concern. As a final note, I would also like to thank my son, Ali, the

12 | A Companion for Undergraduate Students in Philosophy (II)

critical reflections of whom has undoubtedly improved the quality of the book.

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