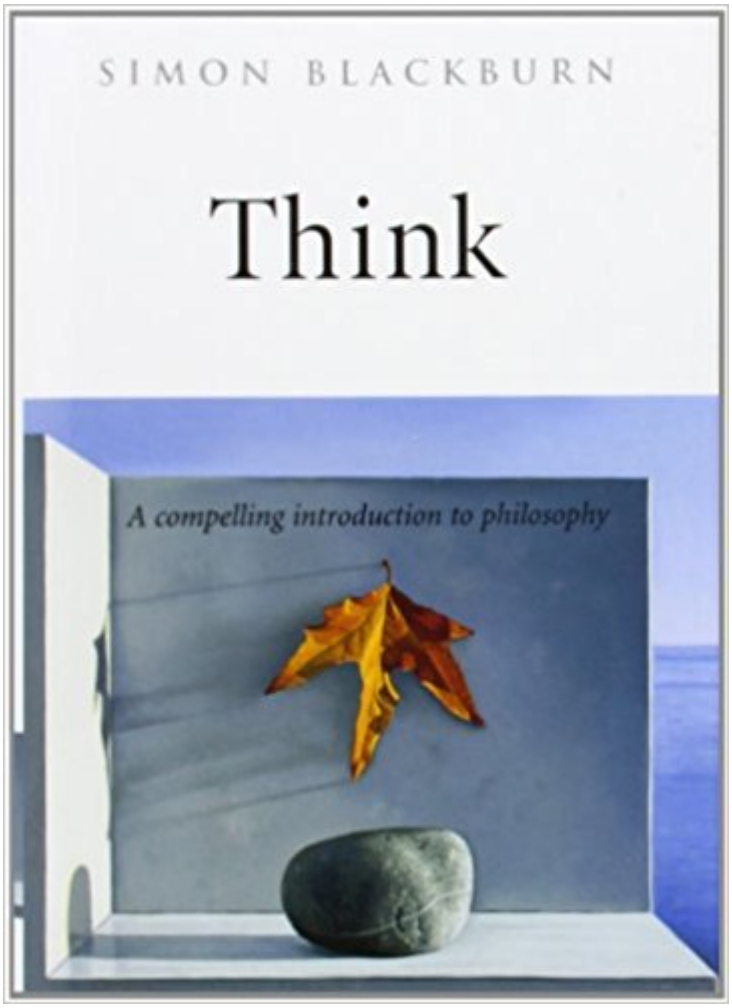
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Think: A Compelling Introduction To Philosophy



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Synopsis

Here at last is a coherent, unintimidating introduction to the challenging and fascinating landscape of Western philosophy. Written expressly for "anyone who believes there are big questions out there, but does not know how toapproach them," Think provides a sound framework for exploring the most basic themes of philosophy, and for understanding how major philosophers have tackled the questions that have pressed themselves most forcefully on human consciousness.Simon Blackburn, author of the best-selling Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy, begins by making a convincing case for the relevance of philosophy and goes on to give the reader a sense of how the great historical figures such as Plato, Hume, Kant, Descartes, and others have approached its central themes. In a lively and accessible style, Blackburnapproaches the nature of human reflection and how we think, or can think, about knowledge, fate, ethics, identity, God, reason, and truth. Each chapter explains a major issue, and gives the reader a self-contained guide through the problems that the philosophers have studied. Because the text approaches these issues from the gound up, the untrained reader will emerge from its pages able to explore other philosophies with greater pleasure and understanding and be able to think--philosophically--for him or herself.Philosophy is often dismissed as a purely academic discipline with no relation to the "real" world non-philosophers are compelled to inhabit. Think dispels this myth and offers a springboard for all those who want to learn how the basic techniques of thinking shape our virtually every aspect of our existence.

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Customer Reviews

Blackburn (philosophy, Univ. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill) has written this book "for people who want to think about the big themesAknowledge, reason, truth, mind, freedom, destiny, identity, God, goodness, justice"Abut, more importantly, to think about them philosophically. His method is to introduce what other philosophersAprimarily Plato, Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Leibniz, Hume, and KantAhave had to say about these themes. To make the arguments more understandable to the lay reader, he presents the problem and then makes extensive use of analogies to ordinary situations, thus making the philosophical point more perspicuous. To read this book is to sit down with an engaging, highly learned conversationalist; readers new to the subject could very well be captivated. Highly recommended for academic and public library collections.ALeon H. Brody, U.S. Office of Personnel Mgt. Lib., Washington, DC Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Sensing that many people are daunted by the big questions in philosophy, university professor Blackburn supplies this primer. Its capital weapon is logic, but Blackburn shrewdly postpones discussing that until he explores such areas as the self, free will, the reality of sensory perception, and God. Doubt, either initially or continually, infuses anyone who reflects on those spheres, and Blackburn illustrates ways to begin thinking about them by using the example of Descartes. Descartes gave yes answers to the question of whether the four spheres exist or not, through a logical process with which, after Blackburn has mapped it out, one can agree or not. One spoil sport was eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume, and Blackburn deploys further disputations of Descartes' beliefs, as in mind-body dualism. Blackburn does, however, subscribe to a species of free will, which he describes as "revised compatibilism." Finding out its definition is sufficient reason to consult Blackburn's book, written with exemplary concision and with conviction that philosophy needn't be an ethereal subject, alienated from practical concerns. Gilbert Taylor

Most of the book is a smooth read, but about half way through it gets a little monotonous. It was recommended to me, and I was engaged for the first 90 or so pages, but then it drags with repeated or relatively simple information. These portions just take too long to say what could be said in a lot less words - wordy, verbose... whatever you want to call it. The information is helpful enough for someone wanting to look a little beyond the surface of thought and the thinking processes. Not for a grad student or someone doing some in-depth research. It's more a survey piece.

When trying to understand more about ourselves and the world, the study of philosophy presents itself as a reasonable approach. This can be tackled in a couple of ways. The great works of

philosophical inquiry can be digested chronologically, like an ongoing discussion of ideas progressing through the ages, or one can look at specific topics such as free will, the problem of how we really know anything, or what is ultimately real in the world, and see what other thinkers have to say about them.Standout examples of the later approach include the short books Think, and Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction by Edward Craig, a volume in the excellent Oxford Press series of Very Short Introductions. Longer, more comprehensive books taking this approach include An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis by Edward Hospers and Modern Philosophy by Roger Scruton. Aside from just sitting down and chronologically plowing through the canonical works of philosophy one by one, several chronological surveys of philosophy (mostly western philosophy) exist, including History of Western Philosophy by Bertrand Russell, The Story of Philosophy by Will Durant, the multi-volume series History of Philosophy by Frederick Copleston, and the more populist The Dream of Reason by Anthony Gottlieb.As someone who has been devoting a good amount of time over the past ten years to the bullheaded, brute force approach and progressing with a glacial pace from the pre-Socratic thinkers in ancient Greece to now the early nineteenth century, I can comment on the refreshing clarity with which Simon Blackburn fences with some of the larger problems of human thought. Whether you have dipped into philosophy previously or not, the problem based approach has much to recommend it. The approach serves as an excellent introduction and guide to possible further topics and thinkers to investigate. For those with more extensive background, books such as this can provide an opportunity to draw back, examine a specific question using the resources of thousands of years of thinkers. The opportunity to compare, contrast, and hopefully integrate thoughts from a wide array of thinkers is a highlight of such an approach. The short format of this book requires a sharp focus on the essential elements, which lends a degree of lucidity to the arguments.The book is divided into discussions of eight philosophic problems:1. Knowledge: Given the problem of scepticism, the problem that our sensory input might be faulty, how can we establish a basis for gaining true knowledge about the world and our self?2. Mind: Is there a part of the brain which integrates sensory information and does the thinking, creates volitional acts, is the source of our volition? Is there a soul? Does my mind work the same as the way as the minds of others? Is my perception of reality the same as other people's?3. Free Will: Is our sense of freedom of thought and action illusory, or is it just a complex but ultimately predictable result of cause and effect?4. The Self: To what extent do we possess continuity as a constant self over time?5. God: Is there one?6. Reasoning: A relatively painless introduction to logic and rules of rational thought.7. The World: What is the nature of reality? Does a material world really exist outside of our own mind?8. What To Do: An investigation into the nature of human motivations and

actions. How should we act?Limitations include a somewhat obscure section on "the mind" and an idiosyncratic section on ethics which seems to bring less of the resources of the philosophic canon to bear on the problem than other sections of the book. Overall, however, I recommend this as a good introduction or an opportunity to synthesize the thoughts of thinkers throughout the western tradition.

This book was recommended to me as an overview of philosophy from a conceptual standpoint. It plows through all the Big Questions, one at a time, and fearlessly.I don’t consider myself shallow or lacking in thoughtfulness, but I really could have used some hand-holding. Parts of the reading were so thick with high-level concepts that I repeatedly lost my place in comprehending the author’s line of reasoning. Maybe that’s just what happens when you try to write about philosophy.Very solid read. If I further my readings in this field, this will have served as a good foundation.

Great introduction to the many different areas and schools of thought in philosophy. Would recommend to anyone that is eager to learn, and doesn’t mind a certain dryness in text. This is a step above a text book, and readers should be committed to paying attention to every word, and possibly rereading sections for total comprehension.

The whole world would benefit from taking a day off from 24 hour news stations, celebrity worship, obsessions with sports, & all the other fruitless endeavors we embark on to read a book like this. This is one of the best introductions out there, Blackburn’s writing style is engaging & interesting. Even after having read several of the most popular introductions to philosophy, I still came away from this book with a much better understanding of the issues, he presents the arguments in a very clear & concise manner & despite what some reviewers claim, is very fair in presenting both sides of a debate on any issue. While he may, after evaluating an issue, suggest that one side may have the advantage over the other, by no means does he ever say that an issue is settled & there is nothing left to say on the subject. I find it funny that those complaining about the objectivity of his chapters on philosophy of religion are the same people that will suggest an adamantly ’pro-christian’ introduction to philosophy of religion. How can you complain about bias & then suggest something that explicitly states that it is biased? I have read Craig & Moreland’s "Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview", in no way is it an objective introduction to both sides of the philosophy of religion debate.Complaints about other reviewers aside, this book is great for anyone who wants to start delving into philosophy, & will definitely prime you to enter the contemporary debate on just

about any major issue. One could nitpick here or there that a certain 'philosophy of x' is not well represented, but this is not meant to be a comprehensive overview of every single subject in philosophy. As he stated in the first chaper on knowledge, it's 'just the highlights', if you want the whole story, you have to watch the whole game.

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