***Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (9th Edition)**

**Part I Summary: Philosophy**

**Bertrand Russell, “The Value of Philosophy”**

In this selection, Bertrand Russell draws attention to many aspects of philosophy that he finds especially valuable. He begins by pointing out that philosophy is different from other fields in that it does not typically have *direct* effects on the world and society in general. Instead, philosophy influences the lives of the people who study it and, thus, has an *indirect* effect on the world. Thus, Russell encourages us to look at what effects philosophy has on the lives of those who study it to ascertain the value of philosophy.

There are three aspects of philosophy that are especially valuable. First, philosophy is valuable because it is a “good of the mind.” Russell points out that even if we lived in a society utterly without poverty and without any sort of suffering due to lack of financial and physical resources, there would still be much to do to improve society. We need more, as a society, than the mere necessities that help to sustain biological life. We also need food for the mind, and that is what philosophy can help give.

Second, philosophy helps to keep alive a certain “speculative interest” in the universe that would otherwise be missing from our lives. Because philosophy rarely (if ever) gives definitive answers (and even when it does come up with definitive answers in a particular field, that field ceases to be part of philosophy), it is a field that is quite different from other sciences, which do give definitive answers. Were we to remain satisfied with those answers that could be had definitively, we would lose the wonder and awe that philosophy helps keep alive. This, according to Russell, would be an unfortunate loss.

Finally, philosophy helps break us of a sort of dogmatism that would otherwise overtake our minds. Because philosophy is so uncertain, studying it encourages us to question every aspect of our lives, and not merely accept the dictates of custom and habit. As a result, we become freed from certain prejudices. Because the questions that philosophy studies are so wide-ranging and because its methodology is supposed to be so impartial, it helps us to escape our own private worlds by encouraging us to contemplate the whole world from a completely different perspective.

Overall, Russell maintains that philosophy is to be studied for the sake of the questions that it asks and not for the sake of attaining definite knowledge of any particular topic. The greatness of the questions that philosophy studies helps to make our minds great, too.

**Plato, “Apology: Defence of Socrates”**

Perhaps the best courtroom drama ever written, this selection from Plato’s *Apology* has defined what the philosophical life is all about for centuries of subsequent philosophers. In it, we see Socrates defending himself in front of the Athenians against the charges of impiety and corrupting the youth. Along the way, we get a glimpse of Socrates’ views about politics, philosophy, wisdom, life, and death. This selection is much too rich to be captured in a short summary, but what follows brings out some of the highlights.

As Socrates presents his defense, we first learn why he has been living his life the way he has. A friend of his, Chaerephon, asked the god at Delphi whether there was anyone wiser than Socrates, and the god said that there wasn’t. This puzzled Socrates, as he did not think himself wise, so he proceeded to question those people who were generally considered to be wise, only to find out that although they thought they knew many things, they really knew very little. And so, Socrates concluded that what the god must have meant was that Socrates is wisest because he at least knows that he knows nothing, whereas everyone else thinks they know when they do not. Thus, Socrates continued to question and examine everyone, supposedly obeying the god at Delphi by showing everyone who thought they knew something that they, in fact, did not. Not surprisingly, Socrates gained many enemies.

Socrates next defends himself against the charge that he has been corrupting the youth. His defense consists of an extended cross-examination of Meletus, the man who has brought the charge against him. A dialogue ensues in which Meletus’s arguments are brought to one absurdity after another.

Perhaps the most famous line in this work, if not in all of philosophy, is Socrates’ proclamation that “an unexamined life is no life for a human being to live.” This line has often been taken to be indicative of the attitude that any true philosopher must have, although it is certainly worth asking what precisely Socrates meant by it and whether it is true.

Despite Socrates’ wholehearted defense, he is found guilty and sentenced to death. However, Socrates faces the prospect of death with equanimity, because death is either the cessation of all conscious awareness or else it is like taking a trip to another place altogether. Either way, Socrates points out, there is nothing to fear. Indeed, there may be much to look forward to.

Plato’s chronicle of Socrates’ defense speech gives us an interesting glimpse into the mind of one of the first, and one of the most respected, members of our field. It is therefore crucial reading for anyone interested in philosophy.