Further reading

Chapter One – Presenting philosophy


One of the most acclaimed and, equally, one of the most reviled books in recent decades. Snow argues for the greater appreciation between scientists and ‘literary intellectuals’ of one another’s accomplishments and modes of thought.


Two of the best known, most virulent attacks on Snow’s *Two Cultures*. It is both sad and discouraging to read Yudkin’s outrageous proclamation: “To read Dickens, or to hear Mozart, or to see a Titian can be in itself a rewarding activity; but to find out what is meant by acceleration is to gain a piece of factual information which in itself has no value” (p. 54). Inadvertently, Yudkin has provided the strongest possible illustration of precisely the ignorance and frame of mind which Snow was lamenting.

Chapter Two – The metaphysical impulse


An introduction to metaphysics. Easy reading.


A discussion of the existence of natural evil. Although not a ‘philosophy’ book, it sets out the problem better than most philosophical texts. A recent, popular best-seller.

Further Reading

Covers a number of topics not pursued in this book, e.g. ‘How do we know anything?’, ‘other minds’, ‘free will’, ‘right and wrong’, and ‘justice’. Easy reading (101 pp.).


A first-rate history of mathematics which argues that modern mathematics has lost its roots in practical problems.

Chapter Three – Theories: What they are and what they are not


An important work, by a major philosopher. The book becomes progressively more difficult. Newcomers to philosophy will want to read selectively in this volume.


An attempt to rebut the views of Kuhn, Feyerabend, etc., that there is neither objectivity nor truth in scientific theories.


A modern-day classic. Highly controversial attack, by a historian, on the traditional view that science is objective.


In the same vein as Kuhn, but written by a philosopher.


A defense of Darwinism against Creationism. The Appendix contains an order form for a Macintosh software program by which to ‘breed’ biomorphs on one’s home computer. A portent of future philosophy instruction?

Chapter Four – Underdeterminism (I)


“How curious, after all, is the way in which we moderns think about our world! And it is all so novel, too. The cosmology underlying our mental processes is but three centuries old – a mere infant in the history of
thought – and yet we cling to it with the same embarrassed zeal with which a young father fondles his new-born baby.” (chapter 1)


Several case studies of clashes between competing philosophical theories.


Rescher looks at the problem of the superabundance of philosophical theories through the opposite side of the lens used in this book in chapter 4. Where I had argued that factual data _underdetermine_ our philosophical theories, Rescher argues that our philosophical theories _overdetermine_ their empirical base, in particular that our philosophical theories originate in self-inconsistent sets of beliefs (what Rescher calls “apories” or “aporetic clusters”). These two approaches are complementary.

Chapter Five – Underdeterminism (II)


Not to be confused with David Lewis’ similarly named _On the Plurality of Worlds_ ([122]). Dick’s book traces from antiquity to the eighteenth century the debate about extraterrestrial life.


Between this book and the immediately preceding one the entire history of the debate up to the present century is covered.


Appearances to the contrary (see preceding two items), Cambridge University Press does not have exclusive rights to this topic. This particular volume is an anthology of fourteen contemporary papers, most of which are written by philosophers. The article by Rescher contains a good bibliography and cites a more complete one.


A good introduction to modern astronomy and exobiology. Probably easier reading than the three foregoing volumes.
Further Reading

Chapters Six and Seven – Putting concepts under stress, (I) and (II)


An introduction to philosophy through the vehicle of science fiction. Each topic is illustrated by a short science-fiction story and then followed by a discussion by a philosopher.

Chapter Eight – Space and time


In the tradition of Abbott’s *Flatland* ([1]). Updated in an ingenious fashion for a generation familiar with computers.


The best introduction to problems of symmetry, etc.


There are, gratifyingly, many good books written for the nonscientist on this important topic. Hoffmann’s is among the very best.


The best introduction, known to me, to these classical problems. This volume was out-of-print for many years, but has been reprinted.

Chapter Nine – Properties


An excellent collection. Of intermediate difficulty.

ADVANCED READINGS


The term “identity” in the title refers not to an examination of identity per se, but to one of several different theories of the ontology of properties, viz. that instances of a property “constitute an identical quality which is present in distinct individual things at the same time” (p. 7).
Further Reading

Chapters Ten and Eleven – Individuation and Identity-through-time

A short, eminently readable introduction to the question whether a machine could be conscious.

A superb introduction to the present state of research in Artificial Intelligence, including both ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ approaches and contemporary controversies in the field. Do not miss this book.

Simons’s thesis is that “computers and robots, appropriately configured, can be properly regarded as emerging life forms” (p. ix).

Dreyfus is one of the major critics of the claims made by researchers in Artificial Intelligence.

Intermediate to advanced material.

Advanced Readings


Chapter Twelve – Persons

The best available introduction for the general reader to the problem of personal identity. In just a handful of pages, Perry introduces, and makes live, the major problems addressed by current philosophers on this topic.
Further Reading


An anthology of seventeen philosophical papers on death and dying. The editor provides a Bibliographical Essay. Unfortunately, the book lacks an index. Highly recommended.


A debate waged in the medium of print. Swinburne argues that personal identity can be accounted for only in terms of soul; Shoemaker argues for personal identity in terms of psychological continuity.


An anthology of papers by several of the best-known writers on this topic in recent years. Intermediate to advanced.


A selection of major historical writings on mind, body, and consciousness, from c. 400 BC to 1960.