

# The Future for Philosophy

*Edited by*  
*Brian Leiter*

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*Samuel James Leiter*

*William Elias Leiter*

*Celia Rose Leiter*



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Austin, Texas  
20 October 2003

B.L.

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## Introduction

### *The Future for Philosophy.*

BRIAN LEITER

#### Philosophy Today

Philosophy, perhaps more than any other discipline, has been plagued by debates about what the discipline is or ought to be. Partly, this is due to the fact that "philosophy" has a currency in everyday parlance and ordinary self-reflection that "linguistics" or "sociology" or "anthropology" do not. One doesn't need an advanced degree to have a "philosophy of life", and this has bred an expectation, even among those with advanced degrees, that the discipline of philosophy ought to be continuous with ordinary attempts to forge a philosophy of life.

Most of philosophy, both contemporary and—importantly—historical, does not, alas, live up to this expectation. Earlier and contemporary philosophers worry, to be sure, about truth, knowledge, the just society, and morally right action, as well as the nature of science, beauty, death, law, goodness, rationality, and consciousness. From reflections on these worries one might even extract a "philosophy of life", though it would hardly be obvious, on an initial reading of Aristotle, Leibniz, Hume, Kant, Hegel, or Husserl that this is what they were after.<sup>1</sup>

Meta-philosophical questions, i.e. questions about what philosophy is, its proper concerns, methods, and limitations, and its rightful ambitions are inevitably on the table in any consideration of philosophy's future. Yet "what philosophy is" is also the implicit subtext anytime one "does philosophy". Indeed, often one of the best (and most convincing) answers to the former question is given by the latter, by *the doing of philosophy*. In this volume, the reader will find both approaches to philosophy's future, essays in which some of the very best and most influential contemporary philosophers are asking meta-philosophical questions and essays in which they are *doing* philosophy of mind, language, and science, as well as ethics, epistemology, feminist philosophy, and the history of philosophy—and in the "doing" they show the reader what philosophy is today, and what it ought to be tomorrow.

The picture that emerges will no doubt be surprising to many readers outside philosophy. Philosophy today—especially, though not only, in the English-speaking countries—is not a monolith, but a pluralism of methods and topics. "Analytic" philosophy, for example, the target of many polemics by those with little knowledge of the discipline, is defunct. As Philip Kitcher has written elsewhere, there was "a period"—roughly, the 1940s to the 1970s in the Anglophone world—when analytic

<sup>1</sup> For a compelling exploration of "philosophies of life" in post-Kantian figures (not Husserl, however), see Julian Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life* (London: Routledge, 2003).