For my grandson Louis Bunnin
N.B.

In memory of my grandparents
J.Y.
The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy

NICHOLAS BUNNIN AND JIYUAN YU
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Although the Dictionary covers a wide historical range and explores many subject areas, it focuses on terms and individuals at the center of current philosophical discussion. Many readers will consult the Dictionary for help in understanding individual terms and the contributions of individual philosophers, but others will explore a given philosophical issue or area by reading a range of related entries. A philosopher browsing through the text will learn much about the history and structure of Western philosophy and its sources of creative dispute. We hope that the Dictionary will be an invitation to further thought and that it will not be taken as the last word on any topic.

Entries for philosophical terms are intended to provide clear and challenging expositions that give access to major philosophical issues. Queries and objections are often included to capture the perplexity arising from philosophical questions and to encourage readers to be active and critical in their response to the Dictionary as a whole. Many entries give the derivations from Greek, Latin, French, or German. Entries for terms state the areas of philosophy in which the terms have their main use, provide cross-references to entries on philosophers and other terms, and conclude with illustrative quotations from a classical or modern source. The reference section at the end of the book gives details of the works cited in these quotations. Biographical entries discuss the philosophical contributions and list at least some of the major works of their subjects.

(Duckworth, 1990); A. C. Grayling (ed.), *Philosophy: A Guide Through the Subject* (Oxford University Press, 1995); Nicholas Bunnin and E. P. Tsui-James (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy* (Blackwell, 1996); Ted Honderich (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 1995); the *Blackwell Companions to Philosophy* series; the *Blackwell Philosopher Dictionaries* series; and the *Cambridge Companions to Philosophers* series.

In addition to those mentioned above, we wish to thank the Leverhulme Trust and the People’s Publishing House, Beijing. A grant from the Leverhulme Trust supported our preparation of the *Dictionary of Western Philosophy: English–Chinese* (People’s Publishing House, Beijing, 2001). The present Dictionary is a revised and augmented version of that earlier work. The Philosophy Library and the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford made their philosophical riches available to us. Edward Craig and Chad Hansen were referees for our Leverhulme Trust project, and Sir Peter Strawson assessed our initial list of headwords. Finally, we thank Nick Bellorini and Kelvin Matthews of Blackwell Publishing for their encouragement and support, and Valery Rose and Caroline Richards for their excellent editing. We both enjoyed our intensive work in compiling this Dictionary, and each learned so much from the philosophical insights of the other.

Nicholas Bunnin

Jiyuan Yu
abandonment

Modern European philosophy. An experience gained through realizing that there are no objective principles or authorities to guide one’s life. According to existentialism, this experience helps us to recognize that one cannot attain authenticity by appeal to God or to philosophical systems. We should each understand our own unique existential condition, reject bad faith, and assume full responsibility for life. The conception of abandonment is hence related to the existentialist account of the autonomy of the agent.

“When we speak of ‘abandonment’ – a favourite word of Heidegger – we only mean to say that God does not exist, and that it is necessary to draw the consequence of his absence right to the end.”

Sartre, Existentialism and Humanism

abduction

Philosophy of science. C. S. Peirce’s term for the logic of discovery, a creative process that is one of the three fundamental types of reasoning in science, along with induction and deduction. When we encounter a new phenomenon that cannot be explained through the application of a general law, we should pick out certain characteristic features of this new phenomenon and attempt to find relations among these features. After forming several theories or hypotheses that might explain the phenomenon, we should select one of them to test against experience. Such a process of reasoning to form empirical theories or hypotheses for testing is called abduction. Peirce also called it retroduction, hypothesis or presumption, but other philosophers have normally called it induction. Peirce distinguished abduction from induction by defining induction as the experimental testing of a theory. He held that abduction is what Aristotle discussed as apagago (Greek, leading away, substituting a more likely premise for a less acceptable one).

“Presumption, or more precisely, abduction . . . furnishes the reasoner with the problematic theory which induction verifies.” Peirce, The Collected Papers, vol. II

Abelard, Peter (1079–1142)

Medieval French philosopher, born near Nantes, Brittany. Abelard, whose main concern was logic, made valuable contributions to discussion of issues such as inference, negation, predicate-expressions, and transitivity. He sought to discuss theological problems by analyzing the propositions used to state these problems. He steered a middle course between realism and nominalism and maintained that the reference of a universal term is not necessarily something that exists. In ethics, he focused on the intention of the agent rather than on the action itself and considered sin to be an intention to act against God’s will and virtue to be living in love with God.
major works include *Dialectica*, *Theologian Scholarium*, *Ethics* (*Scito te ipsum, or Know Thyself*) and *Dialogue between a Christian, a Philosopher and a Jew*. He also wrote commentaries on Porphyry’s *Isagoge* and Aristotle’s *Categories* and *De Interpretatione*. The story of love between Abelard and Heloise has fascinated many later generations.

**abortion**

*Ethics* The intentional killing of a fetus or fertilized human egg by causing its expulsion from the mother’s womb before its birth. Whether abortion should be morally permitted has been intensively debated in the past few decades and has become a major political and legal issue in many industrialized countries. One focus of the debate is on the moral status of a fetus. Is a fetus a person with a substantive right to life? The anti-abortion argument holds that a fetus is already a person and therefore should be within the scope of the moral rule that “you should not kill.” This view leads to a discussion concerning the concept of personhood, that is, at what stage between conception and birth does a fetus become a person? Another focus concerns the rights of the pregnant woman. Does she have a right to bodily autonomy, including the right to decide what happens to her own body? Even if a fetus is a person, how shall we balance its rights and the woman’s rights? Still another problem concerns the extent to which we should take into account the undesirable consequences of the prohibition of abortion, such as poverty and overpopulation. Different sides of the debate hold different positions resulting in part from the moral principles they accept. There is currently no common basis to solve all the disagreement. Nevertheless, abortion, which was legally permitted only in Sweden and Denmark until 1967, has become accepted in the majority of Western countries.

“Induced abortion is the termination of unwanted pregnancy by destruction of the fetus.” *Rita Simon, Abortion*

**Absolute, the**

*Metaphysics* [from Latin *absolutus*, in turn originating from *ab*, away, from and *solvere*, free, loosen; free from limitations, qualifications or conditions] To call something absolute is to say that it is unconditional or universal, in contrast to what is relative, comparative or varying according to circumstances. In metaphysics, the Absolute, as a technical term, is a single entity that is ultimate, unchanging, overriding and all-comprehensive. *Nicholas of Cusa* uses this expression to refer to *God*. Subsequently, the Absolute is always associated with concepts such as the one, the perfect, the eternal, the uncaused, and the infinite and has been regarded as the reality underlying appearance and providing rational ground for appearance.

The revival of the notion of the Absolute in modern philosophy derives from the debate in the 1770s between Mendelssohn and Jacob about *Spinoza*’s definition of substance. *Schelling*, employing Spinoza’s notion of substance, defines the Absolute as a neutral identity that underlies both subject (mind) and object (nature). Everything that is mental or physical is an attribute of the Absolute or of “indefinite substance.” He further claims that the Absolute is a living force, an organism, and something that is self-generating rather than mechanistic. *Hegel* claimed that the Absolute is the unity of substance and its modes, of the infinite and the finite. Such an Absolute is both a substance and a subject, developing from the underlying reality to the phenomenal world and reaching absolute knowledge as its highest phase. Thus, the Absolute is a self-determining activity, a spirit, and a concrete dynamic totality. Its development mirrors the development of knowledge. Hegel’s metaphysics sought to work out the process and implications of this development.

In the twentieth century, this term is particularly associated with *Bradley*, who conceives the Absolute to be a single, self-differentiating whole. Anti-metaphysical thought argues for the elimination of the Absolute as an entity that cannot be observed and that performs no useful function in philosophy.

“Absolutes are the limits of explanation, and as such they have been the main theme of traditional philosophy.” *Findlay, Ascent to the Absolute*

**absolute conception**

*Metaphysics* A term introduced by Bernard *Williams* in his study of *Descartes* for a conception of reality as it is independent of our experience and to which all representations of reality can be related. To gain such a conception requires overcoming the limitations of our enquiry and any systematic bias,
distortion, or partiality in our outlook. Such a conception may enable us to view our representations as one set among others and to avoid assessing the views of others from our own standpoint. Williams claims that our notion of knowledge implies that such a conception is possible.

“This notion of an absolute conception can serve to make effective a distinction between ‘the world as it is independent of our experience’ and ‘the world as it seems to us’.” B. Williams, Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy

absolute idea
Metaphysics The absolute idea, for Hegel, is equivalent to absolute truth in his Phenomenology of Mind and to the absolute in his Logic. It is also called absolute spirit. For Hegel, an idea is not something mental or separate from particulars, but is the categorical form of spirit. The absolute idea is the idea in and for itself, an infinite reality and an all-embracing whole. It exists in a process of self-development and self-actualization. As a metaphysical counterpart of the Christian God, it is the basis for the teleological development of both the natural and social worlds. Its determinate content constitutes reality. The absolute idea is what truly is, and the final realization of truth. For Hegel, the absolute idea is a dynamic self, involving inner purposiveness and normative ideals. By characterizing reality as the absolute idea, Hegel showed that his notion of reality is fundamentally conceptual. It is a unity of the ideal of life with the life of cognition. The core of Hegel’s idealism is the claim that the being of all finite things is derived from the absolute idea. In terms of this notion, Hegel integrated ontology, metaphysics, logic, and ethics into one system.

“The defect of life lies in its being only the idea implicit or natural, whereas cognition is in an equally one-sided way the merely conscious idea, or the idea for itself. The unity and truth of these two is the Absolute Idea, which is both in itself and for itself.” Hegel, Logic

abstract/concrete
Epistemology, metaphysics [from Latin abstrahere, to remove something from something else and concrescere, to grow together] At the outset of a process of recognition our concepts are likely to be expressed in two theorems: (1) reflexivity: \( x = x \) (everything is identical with itself) and (2) the indiscernibility of identicals (or Leibniz’s law): if \( a \) and \( b \) are identical, whatever is true of \( a \) is true of \( b \), and vice versa. Hence, “\( a \) is identical with \( b \)” means simply “\( a \) is the same as \( b \).”

Peter Geach calls this account the classical theory of identity and believes that it is mistaken. Instead, he claims that identity is always relative, so that \( a \) is not simply the same as \( b \), but rather that \( a \) can be the same as \( b \) relative to one concept but not the same as \( b \) relative to another concept. In response, some argue that relative identity is qualitative identity, while numerical identity remains absolute.

“Absolute identity seems at first sight to be presupposed in the branch of logic called identity theory.” Geach, Logic Matters

absolute rights, see rights, absolute

absolute spirit, another term for absolute idea

absolutism
Metaphysics, ethics, political philosophy A term with different references in different areas. In metaphysics, it is opposed to subjectivism and relativism and claims that there is an ultimate, eternal, and objective principle that is the source and standard of truth and value. Ethical absolutism holds that there is a basic universal principle of morality that every rational being should follow, despite their different empirical circumstances. Moral absolutism is opposed to moral relativism, which denies that any single moral principle has universal validity. In political theory, it is the view that the government’s power and rights are absolute and that they always have priority when they come into conflict with the rights, interests, needs, preferences, or desires of citizens or groups in society.

“In ethics, the rejection of absolutism leads initially to the recognition of multiple moral authorities, each claiming its own local validity.” Toulmin, Human Understanding

abstract/concrete

vague or superficial. We must first abstract them in order to understand their diverse determinations. Being abstract is the product of abstraction, that is, of drawing away something common from diverse perceptible or sensory items and disregarding their relatively inessential features. Concepts and universals are thus formed. To say that something is abstract means that it is conceptual, universal, essential, or a matter of principle, while to say that something is concrete means that it is contextual, particular, personal, sensible. To be concrete is equivalent to being rich and vivid. Since what is abstract is drawn from what is concrete, to be abstract is equated with lacking the detail and individuality of the concrete and is thought to be meager, dependent, and lifeless. The existence and nature of abstract entities such as numbers and universals has long been a matter of dispute.

In another usage, which is especially prominent in Hegel’s philosophy, being abstract means being cut off from thoughts or from other sensory items, while being concrete is to be relational. Hence, a particular is abstract if it is isolated from other particulars, while a concept or universal is concrete if it is related to other concepts or universals and is one item in an organic system. Hegel called such a concept a “concrete concept” or “concrete universal.”

"What we abstract from are the many other aspects which together constitute concrete objects such as people, economies, nations, institutions, activities and so on." Sayer, Method in Social Science

abstract entities

Metaphysics Objects that are not actualized somewhere in space and time, that is, non-particulars such as numbers, properties, relations, proposition, and classes. They stand in contrast to spatio-temporal physical objects. Whether these entities actually exist – whether we should ascribe reality to them – is a question of persistent dispute in philosophy. Empiricists and nominalists try to conceive of abstract entities as having merely a linguistic basis. However, if mathematics embodies general truths about the world and has abstract entities as its subject matter, abstract entities would be objects of reference and hence real existents. This is the claim of Platonism and is also a position admitted by Quine’s criterion of ontological commitment. The discussion of abstract entities is related to the problem of being, to the problem of universals, and also to the theory of meaning.

“Empiricists are in general rather suspicious with respect to any kind of abstract entities like properties, classes, relations, numbers, propositions, etc.” Carnap, Meaning and Necessity

abstract ideas

Epistemology, philosophy of language How can an idea stand for all individuals of a given kind even though the individuals vary in their properties? How can we form general statements about kinds of things and reason with regard to them? Locke introduced the notion of abstract ideas, also called general ideas, and claimed that they are universal concepts generated as a result of a process of abstraction from our ideas of individual exemplars of a kind, by leaving out their specific features and keeping what is common to all. As an empiricist, Locke believed that only particulars exist in the world. An abstract idea does not refer to something individual or particular, but is a special kind of mental image. This image is the meaning of the abstract general term. The function of abstract ideas is to classify individuals into different kinds for us. As classically understood in Locke, abstraction is something in the mind between reality and the way we classify it. He believed that an abstract idea encompasses a whole kind of thing. This claim was rejected by Berkeley, who insisted that all ideas are particular and only become general through our use of them. Berkeley’s criticism of Locke’s notion of abstract ideas, like his criticism of Locke’s theory of real essence, has been very influential, but it is a matter of dispute whether his criticism is sound.

“This is called abstraction, whereby ideas taken from particular beings become general representatives of all of the same kind; and their name general names, applicable to whatever exists conformable to such abstract ideas.” Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding

abstract particular

Metaphysics An individual property that is peculiar to the individual or particular possessing it, for example the white color possessed only by Socrates and not shared by any other white things. A property is generally regarded as being universal, that is,
capable of being exemplified in many individuals or particulars. But some philosophers believe that there are also particularized qualities or property-instances. These are abstract particulars.

The issue can be traced to Aristotle. He classified all the realities into four kinds in his Categories: (1) that which is neither predicated of a subject nor inherent in a subject, namely, primary substances; (2) that which is predicated of a subject but not inherent in a subject, namely, secondary substances such as species and genus; (3) that which is predicated of a subject and also inherent in a subject, namely, universal attributes or properties; and (4) that which is not predicated of a subject, but which is inherent in a subject. For this last kind of reality, Aristotle’s example is a particular piece of grammatical knowledge. He seems to be distinguishing universal properties and particular properties. In contemporary metaphysics, some philosophers claim that individual properties are constitutive of concrete particulars, that is, of events and physical objects, while others apply Ockham’s razor to deny their existence. Alternative terms for abstract particulars are perfect particulars, particularized qualities, unit of properties, tropes, cases, and property-instances.

"Stout calls particulars which he postulates ‘abstract particulars’. In calling them ‘abstract’ it is not meant that they are other-worldly . . . It is simply that these particulars are ‘thin’ and therefore abstract by comparison with the ‘thick’ or concrete particulars which are constituted out of the abstract particulars.” D. Armstrong, Universals and Scientific Realism, vol. 1

abstract terms

Philosophy of language, philosophy of science, philosophy of mathematics The terms naming abstract entities, such as “natural number,” “real number,” “class,” or “property.” Different abstract terms can name the same abstract entity, and abstract terms can be either singular or general. Such terms have been used in mathematics and physics. In relation to the problem of the ontological status of abstract entities, it is also disputed whether the use of these terms will indicate the truth of Platonic realism. For according to Quine’s theory, to admit names of abstract entities commits us to the existence of the abstract entities named by them.

"The distinction between meaning and naming is no less important at the level of abstract terms.” Quine, From a Logical Point of View

abstracta

Metaphysics [plural of Latin abstractum] Abstract entities or objects, which are not perceptible and have no spatio-temporal location. Because we cannot point to them, abstracta are not objects of ostensive definitions. It is generally thought that abstracta do not have causal powers, but this point is controversial in contemporary epistemology. Abstracta are contrasted with concreta (plural of Latin concretum), which are the things that make up the observable world. It is widely held that abstracta are dependent on concreta.

"Abstracta . . . are combinations of concreta and are not directly observable because they are comprehensive totalities.” Reichenbach, The Rise of Scientific Philosophy

abstraction

Epistemology [from Latin abs, away from + trahere, draw, draw away from] A mental operation that forms a concept or idea (an abstract idea) by picking out what is common to a variety of instances and leaving out other irrelevant properties. This is a process of deriving universals and establishing classifications. From this mental act we may form concepts, and then build them up into judgments involving combinations of concepts, and further join judgments into inferences. In ancient philosophy there was a persistent problem about the ontological status of abstract things, and this is also the central point in Aristotle’s criticism of Plato’s Theory of Forms. Aristotle also refers to abstraction as a mental analysis that separates form from matter. Locke takes abstraction as the means of making ideas represent all objects of the same kind by separating ideas from other existence. For him it is the capacity for abstraction that distinguishes between human beings and animals. His theory of abstract ideas is criticized by Berkeley.

"This is called abstraction, whereby ideas taken from particular beings become general representatives of all of the same kind; and their names general names, applicable to whatever exists
absurdity

Epistemology, modern European philosophy [from Latin absurdus, out of tone] Used as a synonym for “the irrational.” In epistemology, an obvious and undeniable contradiction or incoherence in a belief or a proposition, such as “the square is a circle.” Absurdity is stronger than an error arising from a misapplication of a name to an object. The aim of a reductio ad absurdum argument is to reveal the absurdity of a proposition and by these means to show the truth of its negation. Absurdity is associated primarily with language and hence with human beings. Philosophical absurdities can arise from using terms belonging to one category as though they belonged to another category. Gilbert Ryle called such absurdities “category mistakes.”

For existentialism, there are two other uses of “absurdity.” The first concerns the meaninglessness of human existence that derives from its lack of ground or ultimate purpose. In the second use, absurdity transcends the limitations of the rational and requires our whole power of conviction and feeling to be embraced. As an equivalent of the transcendental, the absurd is profound and valuable. Absurdity in this latter sense is derived from existentialist criticism of the absolute claims of reason and displays the characteristic irrationalism of existentialism.

“This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity.” Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus

academic freedom

Ethics The free performance of academic activities, especially research and teaching, without externally imposed constraints. Academic freedom is a necessary condition for the pursuit of unknown truths and for passing them on by teaching. Academic freedom needs protection because the search for new ideas and knowledge is crucial for the development of any society. Historically, academic activities, especially regarding controversial and unpopular subjects, have always been interfered with by authorities and other forces, who characteristically claim that developing this kind of knowledge is harmful to society. Various original and creative scholars in each generation have therefore been suppressed and even prosecuted for the new ideas they have developed. But history has repeatedly proved that such interference is mistaken. Since nobody and no organization can decide beforehand which knowledge is harmful, we have no reason to censor any scholarly performance on the grounds that it will produce harm. Academic freedom also requires justice in distributing research and teaching facilities, including job security for academics, research support, publication space, and appropriate ways of evaluating teaching.

“The greatest external threats to academic freedom come from ideologies and governments; and most of all from governments in the service of ideologies.” Kenny, The Ivory Tower

Academy

Ancient Greek philosophy The school that Plato founded around 385 BC, so named because it was located near a park with a gymnasium sacred to the hero Academus. The Academy was like a college in an ancient university, with all members sharing the same religious connections and the ideal of a common life. It was a progenitor of European educational institutions. The curriculum of the Academy is generally believed to have been similar to the scheme presented by Plato in the Republic for training rulers.

“Academy” is a term also used to refer to the philosophy of Plato and his followers. Historians differ regarding the history of the Academy. Some divide it into the Old Academy (Plato, 427–347 BC, Speusipus, 407–339 BC, and Xenocrates, 396–314 BC) and the New Academy (Arcesilaus of Pitane, 316–241 BC and Carneades, c.214–129 BC). Some prefer to ascribe Arcesilaus to the Middle Academy, and Carneades to the New Academy. Others want to add a Fourth Academy (Philo of Larissa, 160–80 BC), and a Fifth Academy (Antiochus of Ascalo, 130–68 BC). The general position of the Academy was to explain and defend Plato’s doctrines. Plato’s successors in the Old Academy were more interested in his “Unwritten Doctrines.” The leaders of the Middle and New Academies were skeptics. Philo tried to reconcile their position with that of the Old Academy, and Antiochus is known for his eclecticism.
Aristotle studied with Plato in the Academy for 19 years and left only when Plato died in 347 BC. Much of our information about the Old Academy comes from his writings. The Academy should be distinguished from Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism, although it was one of the main proponents of Neoplatonism. Along with other pagan schools, the Academy was closed by the Eastern Roman emperor, Justinian I, in 529.

During the Renaissance, the intellectual circle led by Ficino in Florence was also called the Platonic Academy. Most of its activities involved commenting on Plato’s works. From the eighteenth century, all societies organized for advanced learning, and subsequently all universities and colleges, have also been called academies.

"The Academy that Aristotle joined in 367 was distinguished from other Athenian schools by two interests: mathematics . . . and dialectic, the Socratic examination of the assumptions of mathematicians and cosmologists." G. Owen, Logic, Science and Dialectic

accie

Ethics, medieval philosophy [Latin, generally, but inadequately, translated as sloth; also spelled accidie]

One of the "seven deadly sins," a spiritual attitude that rejects all the pleasures of life and turns away from what is good. In accie the mind is stagnant and the flesh a burden. Acciede resembles apathy, but they are not the same. Accedie concerns the lack of feeling and has a negative sense, while apathy concerns mental states in which emotion is governed by reason and is regarded as a virtue.

"Accedia . . . is sadness over a spiritual value that troubles the body’s ease." Aquinas, Summa Theologiae

acceptability

Philosophy of science Philosophers of science disagree about what it means for a theory to be acceptable and about what determines degrees of acceptability. In this debate, the degree of acceptability is closely associated with issues concerning the degree of confirmation and the degree of probability. Some hold that to be acceptable a theory has to be proven. Others claim that a theory is acceptable if it is rendered probable by the available evidence. Others argue that the acceptability has nothing to do with reliability, but is simply related to the fact that a theory performs more successfully than its competitors when undergoing testing.

“If we mean by the degree of acceptability of a theory the degree to which it is satisfactory from the point of view of empirical knowledge – that is, from the point of view of the aims of empirical science – then acceptability will have to become topologically equivalent to corroboration.” Popper, Realism and the Aims of Science

Metaphysics [from Latin accidens, something that happens, related to the Greek sumbebekos, from the verb sumbanein, to come together, to happen, and better translated coincident or concomitant]

For Aristotle, a technical term that contrasts with essence and has three major meanings: (1) the permanent features of a thing that are inherent and inseparably bound up with it, but that do not constitute part of its essence. Aristotle sometimes called these features properties (Greek, idia); (2) the features that belong to the subject only for a time, with their addition or loss not affecting whether the subject remains the same thing. These correspond to the modern notion of accidental properties, which contrast with essential properties, the loss of which will change the identity of a thing; (3) the secondary categories (categories other than substance) that are accidents to substance. In another sense, they are essential, for example white is an accident to Socrates, but it is essentially a color. Accidents of this sort are more properly called attributes or properties, although they still do not contribute to the identity of individual substances. They can only inhere in a substance and do not have independent existence.

Medieval philosophers distinguished accident per se, which as an attribute is itself an entity, from accident per accidens, which is a way of talking about something inessential to an object. Modern philosophy has tended to reject the distinction between substance and accident and has understood accident, in a manner similar to Aristotle’s third sense, as an attribute, quality, or property. Accordingly, Descartes claimed that there is no science except the accidental, Locke distinguished primary qualities from secondary qualities, and Berkeley claimed that substance itself is nothing but a set of accidents.
accidental property

**Metaphysics** A property that is not a defining or essential feature of a particular. The identity of a particular is not affected by the change or loss of its accidental properties. For instance, the color of a wall or roof is an accidental property of a house. The relationship between an accidental property and the particular of which it is a property is external rather than internal. Accidental properties are contrasted to “essential properties,” the change or loss of which alters the identity of the particular. Traditionally, rationality has been taken to be an essential property of being a human being. When people mention a particular, it is its essential properties rather than its accidental properties that are crucial in determining the identity of that particular and the kind of thing that it is. Although the discussion of accidental and essential properties goes back to Aristotle, the revival of essentialism in the work of Kripke and Putnam has renewed interest in the distinction.

> “P is an accidental property of members of class A, if ‘A’ is not defined in terms of ‘p’.” *Pap, Elements of Analytic Philosophy*

Achilles and the tortoise

**Logic, Metaphysics, Ancient Greek Philosophy** The most widely discussed of Zeno’s paradoxes, which were designed to show that the concept of motion is incoherent. Achilles, the Olympic champion in running, can never catch up with the slow-moving tortoise if the latter is given a head start. Achilles has to take some time to reach the place where the tortoise started, but when he reaches that place, the tortoise will have moved to a further point. The same is true when Achilles reaches that further point, because the tortoise will again have moved on. This process will be repeated endlessly, and the gap, which may get smaller and smaller, will remain. So as long as the tortoise keeps moving forward, Achilles cannot possibly overtake it, yet the paradox arises because we know that faster runners do overtake slower ones. The difficult problem is to explain the concepts of space, time, and motion in a way that shows what goes wrong in Zeno’s reasoning. This paradox, which is closely connected with the dichotomy paradox, depends on the assumption that space and time are continuous and infinitely divisible. Our source for all of Zeno’s paradoxes is Aristotle’s account in *Physics*.

> “Zeno’s paradoxes of motion, such as his ‘Achilles and the Tortoise’, revealed grave and subtle difficulties in the notion of infinite divisibility.” *Copi, The Theory of Logical Types*

acosmism

**Metaphysics, Philosophy of Religion** [from Greek, *a*, not + *cosmos*, world, order] Spinoza’s identification of God and world has often been interpreted as an assertion of atheism, but Hegel interpreted Spinoza as claiming that God rather than the world really exists. He entitles this position “acosmism.” This position does not mean that God and the world are two distinct entities, but Hegel believed that it left unsolved questions about the appearance of the world and of the philosophizing metaphysical subject.
“[T]he system of Spinoza was not Atheism but acosmism, defining the world to be an appearance lacking in true reality.” Hegel, Logic

acquaintance
Epistemology The way in which a knowing subject is aware of an object by experiencing it directly and immediately. Acquaintance contrasts with description, where an object is known through an intermediary process of inference. There is controversy over what are the objects of acquaintance. Among the items proposed for this role are sense-data, memories, and universals such as redness, roundness. The notion of acquaintance has been used to constrain what we can be said to experience. Russell calls the knowledge derived through acquaintance knowledge by acquaintance, which is the direct knowledge of things and is distinguished from knowledge by description, which reaches truth through inference.

“Acquaintance: an animal is said to be acquainted with an object when the object, or an image of it, is part of the animal at the moment.” Russell, Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell

acroama
Philosophical method [from Greek akroama, a thing heard] For Kant, a basic principle, especially of philosophy. In contrast, an axiom is a basic principle of mathematics or science. This is a distinction between axioms and discursive principles or between mathematical and philosophical principles. An axiom requires the intuition of objects and thus considers the universal in the particular, while an acroama is discursive and considers the particular in the universal. All principles of pure understanding are acroama, for they are established by the analysis of language and a discursive process of proof. Kant drew this distinction to criticize the tendency in traditional metaphysics to apply mathematical principles to philosophy.

“It [the acts and omissions doctrine] holds that there is an important moral distinction between performing an act that has certain consequences – say, the death of a disabled child – and omitting to do something that has the same consequences.” P. Singer, Practical Ethics

act-centered, see agent-centered morality

act-consequentialism
Ethics Consequentialism is generally divided into act-consequentialism and rule-consequentialism. Act-consequentialism holds that an action is right if it produces a better consequence than alternative actions available to the agent. Rule-consequentialism, on the other hand, claims that the rightness of an action depends not on its direct consequences but on whether it conforms to a set of rules that lead to better consequences than other alternative rules. Act-utilitarianism is the most typical and familiar form of act-consequentialism. But there are also other forms of act-consequentialism that hold that pleasure or happiness are not the only factors by which we assess the goodness of the consequences.
Like act-utilitarianism, act-consequentialism is criticized for considering all things from an impersonal standpoint.

“Different act-consequentialist theories incorporate different conceptions of the overall good . . . but all such theories share the same conception of the right which requires each agent in all cases to produce the best available outcome overall.” Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism*

**act-object theory**

Theory of knowledge An analysis of sensation introduced by Moore and Russell in their sense-data theory, which suggests that sensation consists of sense-data (objects) and the act of sensing. Sense-data are entities that are distinct from the act of seeing. A sensation is a genuine relation between a subject and a really existent object. Objects exist independently of acts. Moore uses this distinction in criticizing Berkeley’s idealist thesis that esse est percipi by saying that it fails to distinguish between the object sense-datum and the act of consciousness that is directed upon it. “Yellow” is an object of experience, and the sensation of “yellow” is a feeling or experience. Russell claims that perceiving and other cognitive processes are acts of attention, directed at some object. But under the influence of adverbial analysis, Russell later abandons this act-object analysis. For Broad, sensa-data cannot exist independent of the act of sensing, and he call them “sensa.”

“It the sensum theory . . . holds that this [sensation] is a complex, and that within it there can be distinguished two factors: X itself, which is the sensum and is an object, and a subjective factor, which is called the ‘act of sensing.’” Broad, *Scientific Thought*

**act type** see act token

**action**

Philosophy of mind, philosophy of action, ethics [from Latin agere, to do] Some philosophers draw a distinction between acts and actions and suggest that while an act is the deed that is done, an action is the doing of it. But most believe that this distinction is hard to maintain and take an act as a synonym for an action.

Although there are actions in nature, such as the action of a river on its bank, an action is generally defined as what is intentionally done by a human rational agent. Natural action is described as a mere process, happening, or occurrence. Action has been the focus of much discussion in recent philosophy of mind, especially concerning human intention and deliberation. Many theories have been developed to explain what it means to act intentionally and to show how to distinguish actions from other events involving persons. On one standard account, an action is an event by which an agent brings about changes through bodily movement. A rival mental action theory argues that not all actions involve bodily movement and identifies actions with primary mental events in the causal chain between the agent and behavioral events. According to the causal theory of action developed by Davidson, Searle, and Goodman among others, actions are the effects of primary mental events. Other philosophers reject such primary mental events and deny that actions are events at all.

One bodily movement can bring about, directly and indirectly, many changes and the consequences of this for identifying and explaining actions are unclear. X moves his hand; by moving his hand, he turns the steering wheel; and by turning the steering wheel, he drives his car; and so on. Is there one action in this case or are there many? When should

act tokens that belong to it are wrong. There has been a debate about the identity conditions for actions. Generally, two act tokens are thought to be identical if and only if they involve the same agent, the same property, and the same place and time.

“A particular act, then, consists in the exemplifying of an act-property, by an agent at a particular time. I shall call such particular acts ’act tokens’.”

Goldman, *A Theory of Human Action*
we distinguish an action from its consequences? Some philosophers suggest that we can deal with these problems by identifying basic actions that cause other actions but that are not themselves caused by actions. But there is much dispute regarding how to identify basic action.

Actions can be discussed in isolation, but they often occur in a pattern of activity either in a single life or involving others. Social action was profoundly explored by Weber.

If we seek a causal account of action, are actions caused by reason, desire, or both? Would another framework be more appropriate for explaining or understanding action either within a causal account or as a rival to it? It is unclear whether an explanation by reasons that is not a form of causal explanation is coherent. Answering such questions requires the analysis of many key notions, such as motives, intentions, voluntary and involuntary action, practical reason, wants, and desires. The question of explaining action is closely associated with the problem of free will and determinism and the problem of responsibility.

Another much debated problem in philosophy of law and moral philosophy is the relation between action and omission, inaction or negligence.

“The word ‘action’ does not very often occur in ordinary speech, and when it does it is usually reserved for fairly portentous occasions. I follow a useful philosophical practice in calling anything an agent does intentionally an action, including intentional omission.” Davidson, Essays on Actions and Events

action (Aristotle)

Ancient Greek philosophy, ethics [Greek, praxis, from the verb prattein, to do] Broadly, everything that an agent does intentionally, in contrast to speech and to being acted upon. Humans, including children, and some non-human animals are capable of this sort of action. More strictly, action is confined to carrying out rational choice, something that non-humans cannot do. It is doing what is or could be the outcome of deliberation on the part of the agent or for what the agent is held responsible. This sense, which is central to moral philosophy, is related to the problem of free will and responsibility. Only in this sense is action open to moral praise and blame. Aristotle also used praxis narrowly for rational action that is its own end, and that is not done merely for the sake of some further end. This sense contrasts with production (Greek, poiesis), which is for the sake of some end product. According to this contrast, ethical actions, unlike technical performances, are done and valued for their own sake. Philosophers also discuss the conceptual relations between these sorts of action and action in nature that does not involve intention, reason, or purpose, such as the action of a river on its bank.

“[An unconditional goal is] what we achieve in action, since doing well in action is the goal.” Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics

action at a distance

Metaphysics, philosophy of physics Action at a distance is contrasted to action by contact or local action. Whether one thing can act on another at a distance without postulating some kind of intervening medium as involved in the interaction has been a topic of debate in physics and philosophy since ancient Greece. The dominant tendency is to reject any such possibility. Atomism claims that atoms cannot interact without contact. Aristotle believes that every object in local motion must have a conjoined mover. This is also the main attitude in physics and philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Descartes, Newton, Locke, and Leibniz all reduce actions at a distance to actions through a medium of some sort, yielding actions that are continuous, although there is no agreement about what the medium is. In contemporary field theory the question is still disputed. The problem of action at a distance is related to the question of whether causality is something more than correlation.

“The formula by which we determine what will happen in a given region will contain references to distant regions, and it may be said that this is all we can mean by ‘action at a distance’.” Russell, The Analysis of Matter

active intellect

Metaphysics, philosophy of mind, ancient Greek philosophy, medieval philosophy Aristotle claimed in De Anima III, 5 that, as with anything else, one can draw a distinction between form and matter and between actuality and potentiality within the soul. The formal and actual aspect of the soul is
active intellect, and the material and potential aspect of the soul is passive intellect. Passive intellect amounts to ordinary apprehension that is receptive of the sensible and intelligible forms of objects. This kind of knowing is only potential. Passive intellect will perish at the death of an individual. Active intellect is the agent that brings the passive intellect’s potential knowledge of objects to actuality. Active intellect is separable, unmixed, and impassable. The distinction between active and passive intellect and the nature and function of active intellect are ambiguous in Aristotle’s writings and gave rise to many debates among commentators in the later Hellenistic and medieval periods and in contemporary Aristotelian scholarship as well. Controversial questions include: Is the distinction between active and passive intellect realized only within the human soul, or does active intellect exist outside human beings? Is active reason identical with God as described in the Metaphysics? If active intellect is entirely independent of body, how can we reconcile it with Aristotle’s standard view that soul is the form of body?

“I assume the truth of what may be called actualism. According to this view, we should not postulate any particular except actual particulars, nor any properties and relations (universals) save actual, or categorical, properties and relations.”

D. Armstrong, What is a Law of Nature?

actuality/actualization

Ancient Greek philosophy (Greek, energeia, actuality, from ergon, function or action, etymologically associated with motion or activity; entelecheia, actualization (Greek), from enteles echein, having an end within, etymologically associated with the completion of an action or a process) Aristotle used these two terms interchangeably and ignored their different etymologies. In many places, he contrasted energeia with motion (kinesis) saying that motion is an incomplete activity that aims at some end beyond itself, while energeia is a complete activity which is its own end. Both energeia and entelecheia are used in contrast to potentiality for the fulfillment or realization of different kinds of potentiality. In Aristotle’s discussion of substantial change, actuality or actualization is identical with form, and sometimes even with the composite of matter and form, that which has been shaped out of the matter.

“The word ‘actuality’ which we connect with actualisation has in the main been extended from motion to other things; for actuality in the strict sense is thought to be identical with motion.”

Aristotle, Metaphysics

actuality (Hegel)

Metaphysics (German, Wirklichkeit, from wirken, to be active, or effectual) In the preface to Philosophy of Right, Hegel claimed that “what is rational is actual, and what is actual is rational.” This has been criticized as a conservative doctrine that allows no
attack on existing political systems and institutions, however tyrannical or perverse they might be. But this response is based on a mistaken understanding of Hegel’s notion of actuality. Hegel employed the standard contrast between actuality and possibility or potentiality, but also contrasted actuality to mere existence or appearance, so that not everything existing is actual. In his Logic, actuality is the unity of existence and essence, of inward reality and outward reality. Something actual is fully developed according to the inner rationality of the species to which it belongs. For Hegel, everything has its own teleological necessity and can be said to be actual only when this necessity has been fully worked out. Hence, an infant, although it exists, is not actual with respect to the essence of human species.

“Actuality is the unity, become immediate, of essence with existence, or of inward with outward.” Hegel, Logic

actualization, see actuality/actualization

actus reus, see mens rea

additive fallacy, an alternative expression of the additivity assumption

additivity assumption

Ethics Also called the additive fallacy. Utilitarianism argues that we can add individual utilities together to make up a total utility and that any action that results in a larger amount of total utility is morally more acceptable than other actions that result in less total utility. Here a working hypothesis is assumed that individual utilities can be quantitatively measured, compared, and combined into an overall outcome. This is the additivity assumption. It is not only central to utilitarianism, but is also active in many other moral theories, insofar as they appeal to notions such as “balancing,” “weighing,” and “simple-complex.” Critics, however, maintain that individual utilities are always qualitatively different and incommensurable and therefore that it is impossible to compare and contrast them. Furthermore, even if an aggregation is possible, this would not be sufficient to establish the moral status of an action, for a larger amount of utility does not entail an equal or just distribution.

“The view that the moral status of an act is the sum of individual positive and negative contributions – the particular reasons for and against performing the act – is, as I suggested, a familiar and attractive one. Nonetheless, I believe that the additive assumption should be rejected.” Kagan, “Additive Fallacy,” Ethics 99

adequacy conditions on definitions of truth, see material adequacy

adequate ideas

Epistemology For Spinoza, adequate ideas are the ideas from the second grade of cognition, reason, and from the third grade of cognition, intuitive knowledge, in contrast to the ideas formed from the first grade of cognition, sense experience. Adequate ideas are wholly caused from within individual minds, either by seeing them to be self-evident or by deriving them from other ideas that are self-evident. Adequate ideas are coextensive with true ideas, and bear all the internal marks of truth. In Leibniz, adequate ideas are those that are clearly and distinctly conceived.

“By adequate idea I understand an idea which, in so far as it is considered in itself, without reference to the object, has all the properties or internal marks of a true idea.” Spinoza, Ethics

ad hoc hypothesis

Epistemology, Philosophy of Science [Latin, ad hoc, for this, to this] Something that is ad hoc is only for the purpose at hand. A theory might be saved from a challenge that is inspired by contrary evidence if we introduce an additional hypothesis. Such a hypothesis, if it has no independent rationale but is used merely to preserve the theory, is called an ad hoc hypothesis. An ad hoc hypothesis is generally rejected by a satisfactory scientific explanation, for it is not testable independently of the effect to be explained, and hence does not have any theoretical power. In another sense, ad hoc also means an explanation introduced to account for some fact after that fact had been established.

“A satisfactory explanation is one which is not ad hoc.” Popper, Objective Knowledge
Adorno, Theodor (1903–69)

German philosopher, sociologist, and musicologist, born in Frankfurt, a leading member of the Frankfurt School of critical theory. Adorno joined the Institute for Social Research before emigrating to the United States in 1934 following Hitler’s rise to power. He rejoined the Institute in 1938 in New York, but returned to Frankfurt in 1953 and became director of the Institute in 1959. His most important work, Negative Dialectics (1966), is a critique of thinking based on identity and the presentation of a negative dialectic of non-identity that has exerted great influence on postmodern and post-structuralist thought. He was co-author of The Authoritarian Personality (1950), a study of the psychological origins of fascism and Nazism. With Horkheimer, he published Dialectic of the Enlightenment (1947), which traces totalitarianism and scientism in modern society to the Enlightenment conception of reason. He criticized Husserl in Against Epistemology (1956) and Heidegger in The Jargon of Authenticity (1965). His Aesthetic Theory was left unfinished at his death.

adventitious ideas

Epistemology [from Latin ad, to + venire, to come] Descartes’s term for those ideas that we get through senses and that are caused by things existing outside one’s mind. Adventitious ideas contrast both to innate ideas and to fictitious ideas. Innate ideas are not obtained by experience, but are carried by the mind from birth. Fictional ideas are created by mind in imagination. Descartes argued that it is impossible for all ideas to be adventitious. In contrast, British empiricists claimed that all ideas can be reduced to adventitious ideas and specifically denied the existence of innate ideas. On their account, all universals result from the operation of mind on the basis of adventitious ideas. The treatment of adventitious and innate ideas became one of the major divergences between rationalism and empiricism.

“This [theory of adverbial materialism] is the theory that each sensory experience consists in an objectless sensing event that is not only identical with but also nothing but some physical event, presumably a neuronal brain event.” Cornman, Perception, Common Sense, and Science

adverbial materialism

Philosophy of Mind A theory of mind that combines the adverbial analysis of sense-experience with materialism or physicalism, developed by the American philosopher J. W. Cornman. In the spirit of adverbial analysis, the theory claims that when people perceive something red in the appropriate conditions, they do not sense red sense-data, but rather they sense red-ly. It further takes this sensing event to be identical with a brain event. Every sensing event is reduced to a physical event. The theory is opposed to phenomenalism and is compatible with direct materialism. Critics suggest that this analysis leaves out the most central element of perception, the perceptual experience itself.

adverbial theory

Epistemology An analysis of sensing that intends to convert the objects of sensation into sense-experience characterized in an adverbial way. An adverb is introduced to describe the way a sensing activity is taking place; thus, “I sense a red color patch” should be regarded as a statement of how I sense, that is “I sense red-ly.” The purpose of this analysis is to deny that sense-data are independent entities; rather, it takes them as sense-contents that cannot exist independent of the act of sensing of them. Sense-data are considered as modes of awareness instead of internal objects of awareness. The starting-point of this theory is the idea that sensations cannot exist when not sensed. It eliminates mental objects by reducing all statements about sensations to statements about the way or mode in which a subject is sensing. The analysis influenced both Moore and Russell with regard to their act-object theory of sensation and was later advocated by C. J. Ducasse, Ayer, and Chisholm. The analysis becomes difficult once a complex sensation is involved, such as, “I sense a red color patch to the left of a blue color patch.” It is also challenged for its inability to distinguish sense-experience from purely mental imaging.
“If the adverbial theory is right, it tells us how I am sensing and does not require for its truth that there be an object being sensed.” Jackson, *Perception*

**aesthetic attitude**

Aesthetics A special attitude with which to approach art, nature, and other objects. First, it differs from a practical attitude and has no concern with practical (sensual, intellectual, or moral) *utilities*. An aesthetic attitude takes nature or a work of art “for its own sake.” In this sense it is “disinterested,” as *Kant* emphasized in his *Critique of Judgement*. Secondly, it does not involve personal desires, motives, or feelings in dealing with an object. This freedom from desire or emotion is called “aesthetic distance” or “aesthetic detachment.” Thirdly, in contrast to a cognitive or scientific attitude, it is indifferent to the real existence, the content or the meaning of a thing. It does not appreciate an object through bringing it under concepts. Instead it is a pure appreciation or contemplation of the perceptual qualities of an object as an object of sensation. It is claimed that in this way we can live in the work of art as an embodiment of our feeling. *Schopenhauer* and *Heidegger* ascribe a metaphysical importance to the aesthetic attitude by saying that it can reveal the essence of reality more profoundly than conceptualization. The possible existence and role of a pure aesthetic attitude are topics of dispute.

“All appreciation of art – painting, architecture, music, dance, whatever the piece may be – requires a certain detachment, which has been variously called the ‘attitude of contemplation’, the ‘aesthetic attitude’, or the ‘objectivity’ of the beholder.” Langer, *Feeling and Form*

**aesthetic detachment**, see aesthetic attitude

**aesthetic distance**, see aesthetic attitude

**aesthetic education**

Ethics, Aesthetics Education directed at developing a person’s aesthetic capacities and experiences of art. Its purpose is to educate a person’s feeling and to enhance the harmony between *emotion* and *reason* in order to elevate our character. Its function regarding one’s soul is analogous to the function of physical education for one’s body. As early as *Plato’s Republic*, there is a detailed discussion to show that education should have an aesthetic concern. An account of this education is most systematically developed in *Schiller’s Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*. There are contrasting views of what such an education should be, according to different theories of art.

“All appreciation of art is possible only if it involves criticism; and edifies only when its mirror images are not merely produced or consumed, but when they are critically grasped and appropriated.” Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*

**aesthetic imagination**

Aesthetics The imagination that plays a role in the production and appreciation of artworks. Aesthetic imagination explores the possibilities suggested by the connection of aesthetic experience. It accompanies indispensably our interactions with art. While scientific imagination is bound by agreement with reality and is in the service of theoretical work, aesthetic imagination is free and operates in the service of human beings should be liberated from various instrumental attitudes towards art and that the development of art should not be unjustifiably subjected to the service of extra-aesthetic concerns. In this century, aesthetic autonomy has gained popularity in the face of the danger of submerging the aesthetic attitude into the cognitive attitude.
of aesthetic feeling. Its purpose is the satisfaction of the feeling that inspires it. It broadens our understanding, gives rise to emotional identification with the object, and enables us to experience a wider range of feelings than we can experience in actual life. For Kant, aesthetic experience involves a free play of the imagination and the understanding.

“Aesthetic imagination can perceive the ennobling beauty and truth of past art produced in more harmonious times.” Shusterman, Pragmatist

**aesthetic judgment**

**Aesthetics** The ascription of an aesthetic property or value to an object, as distinguished from cognitive or logical judgment that gives us knowledge. The determining ground for such an ascription has been hotly disputed. For objectivism, an aesthetic judgment attributes an objective property to a thing judged and does not essentially involve the feelings of the person who is judging. It is hence a universal judgment. For subjectivism, the feelings, such as liking or disliking, of the person who judges are the decisive ground, and hence aesthetic judgment is not universal. The most influential frameworks of analysis of aesthetic judgments were developed by Hume and Kant. According to Hume, although aesthetic properties are not inherent in things, aesthetic judgments are not merely an expression of personal pleasure or displeasure. Like judgments of color, they are determined by contingent causal relations between object and subject, although their ultimate ground is the sensibility of human beings. Kant claims that aesthetic judgments do not depend on a set of formulated rules or principles. Unlike objective knowledge claims, they rest on subjective response and personal acquaintance. He suggests that in a broad sense aesthetic judgments include empirical aesthetic judgment and “judgments of taste.” An empirical aesthetic judgment judges the agreeable or the pleasant and concerns that which simply gratifies desire. A judgment of taste is an aesthetic judgment in its narrow sense. It is the judgment of beauty and is “disinterested,” in the sense that it is independent of all personal desires and motivations. Hence, a person making such a judgment expects other people to have similar responses under the same circumstance. Hence, judgments of taste have a type of subjective validity or universality.

“Aesthetic judgements, just like theoretical (i.e. logical) ones, can be divided into empirical and pure. Aesthetic judgements are empirical if they assert that an object or a way of presenting it is agreeable or disagreeable; they are pure if they assert that it is beautiful. Empirical aesthetic judgements are judgements of science (material aesthetic judgements); only pure aesthetic judgements (since they are formal) are properly judgements of taste.” Kant, Critique of Judgement

**aesthetic pleasure**

**Aesthetics** Distinguished from both sensual pleasure and intellectual pleasure, aesthetic pleasure or aesthetic enjoyment is the emotional element in our response to works of art and natural beauty. It can vary from pleasure in its mildest form to rapturous enthusiasm. To characterize the peculiar nature of aesthetic pleasure has been a challenging job for aesthetics. Since Kant, many theorists have accepted that aesthetic pleasure is a result of a disinterested and non-conceptual engagement with an object. But it is a point of dispute whether this pleasure arises from apprehending the formal character of the object, its content, or both. It is also unclear how much subjective elements contribute to this process. Other major issues concern the relation between aesthetic pleasure and the aesthetic attitude and the distinction, if there is one, between aesthetic pleasure in response to nature and to art.

“Aesthetic pleasure is manifested in a desire to continue or repeat the experience.” Sheppard, Aesthetics

**aesthetic property**

**Aesthetics** A quality that contributes to determining the aesthetic value of an artwork. Such properties can be subject either to positive evaluation, such as being beautiful, charming, elegant, sublime, balanced, graceful, or majestic, or to negative evaluation, such as being ugly, boring, clumsy, garish, or lifeless. There can, of course, be beautiful depictions of ugly objects or lifeless depictions of beautiful ones. Some aesthetic qualities, such as being sad or joyful, can be non-evaluative. It is widely agreed that we require a special sensitivity, “taste,” to perceive them. Aesthetic properties are the ultimate sources of “aesthetic value,” and contribute to determining the nature of artworks. Positively aesthetic properties make artifacts into works of art and figure in a
subject’s account of why an artwork pleases him. Some philosophers argue that as emergent properties aesthetic properties supervene on non-aesthetic properties, but others insist that aesthetic properties must be seen as entirely independent of non-aesthetic properties.

“I imagined explaining my emotional response to the painting by pointing out some of its aesthetic properties; the colours, although pastel, are warm rather than faded, the faces of the saints ‘sweet and gentle.’” Mothersill, Beauty Restored

aesthetic value
Aesthetics The properties rendering a work of art good or successful, such as balance, charm, elegance, grace, harmony, integrity, or unity. Aesthetic value is whatever contributes to the "beauty" of a piece of art, in contrast to which contributes to its usefulness, truth, or moral goodness. "Beauty" is the supreme name for aesthetic value, and "ugliness" is the supreme name for aesthetic disvalue. The history of aesthetics has been characterized by disputes about whether aesthetic value is waiting to be discovered objectively in the objects, independent of the responses of observers, or exists subjectively in the experiences of human agents, or lies in the connection between the object and the feelings of its observers.

“Instead of saying that an aesthetic object is ‘good’, they [philosophers] would say that it has aesthetic value. And correspondingly, instead of saying that one object is better than another, but not because it has a higher cognitive or moral value, they would say that it has a higher aesthetic value, or is aesthetically more valuable.” Beardsley, Aesthetics

aestheticism
Aesthetics The position that art should be valued only according to its intrinsic aesthetic properties, such as beauty, harmony, unity, grace, or elegance. It maintains the supreme value of art over everything else. A work of art is nothing more than a work of art and should not be viewed as a means to further ends. Its internal aesthetic value is supreme. Pure beauty has nothing to do with utility. The pursuit of such beauty is the supreme source of human happiness and should not be constrained by moral or other considerations. In its extreme form, aestheticism claims that any art that has external functions or purposes is ugly. The slogan of aestheticism is “art for art’s sake” (French, L’art pour l’art). An art critic should not be concerned with art for the sake of citizenship, patriotism, or anything else. Aestheticism is rooted in Kantian aesthetic formalism and flourished in the nineteenth century, first in French literature, represented by Flaubert, and then in English literature, represented by Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde. Aestheticism opposes society’s interference with artistic creation, for artworks characterized by adventurousness are always subject to criticism based on customs and established modes of thought and feeling. But it is problematic whether an artwork can be completely isolated from its environment and social consequences. The opposite view, which can be called “instrumentalism,” proposes that art should serve the needs of the people and the community.

“[Aestheticism] is the view that aesthetic objects are not subject to moral judgements, that only aesthetic categories can be, or ought to be, applied to them.” Beardsley, Aesthetics

aesthetics
Aesthetics Although many problems discussed in contemporary aesthetics as a branch of philosophy can be traced to Plato’s dialogues (especially Ion, Symposium, Phaedrus, Republic, and Philebus) and Aristotle’s Poetics, aesthetics did not become an independent discipline until the eighteenth century. The term was coined by the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten in his Reflections in Poetry (1735), based on the Greek word aisthesis (sensation, perception). Baumgarten defines it as “the science of sensitive knowing,” which studies both art and sensible knowledge. Kant inherited these two senses. The first part of Critique of Pure Reason, the “Transcendental Aesthetic,” deals with a priori sensible form; the first part of Critique of Judgement, called “Critique of Aesthetic Judgement,” is a critique of taste, concerning the judgment of beauty and the sublime and the “autonomy of taste.”

Nowadays the word “aesthetics” is confined to the study of experience arising from the appreciation of artworks and covers topics such as the character of aesthetic attitude, aesthetic emotions, and aesthetic value; the logical status of aesthetic judgments; the nature of beauty and its allied notions; and the relation between moral education
and works of art. It also encompasses problems dealt with by the “philosophy of art” such as the nature of art and the perception, interpretation, and evaluation of artworks. Philosophy of art is thus a part of aesthetics. The development of aesthetics in the twentieth century has been deeply influenced by developments in the philosophy of mind, theories of meaning, and hermeneutics.

“[The Germans are the only people who currently make use of the word ‘aesthetic’ in order to signify what others call the critique of taste. This usage originated in the abortive attempt made by Baumgarten, that admirable analytical thinker, to bring the critical treatment of the beautiful under rational principles, and so to raise its rules to the rank of a science.”] Kant, Critique of Pure Reason

**Aeterni Patris**, see neo-scholasticism

**aether**

Ancient Greek philosophy, philosophy of science

A rarified element believed to fill the heavens. Anaxagoras considered aether to be derived from *ai*thein (Greek, to ignite, to blaze) and identified it with fire. Some other pre-Socratic philosophers considered aether to be derived from *ai*thein (Greek, runs always), and took it to be a divine element, different from other basic elements. Aristotle developed their idea by arguing that aether is a fifth element in addition to the usual four elements: fire, air, earth, and water. He divided the cosmos into two levels. While the lower world, which is within the sphere of the moon, is composed out of the four elements, the upper world, from the moon upwards to the first heaven, is composed of aether. Aether has no property in common with the four simple elements in the lower world and cannot be transformed into them, and the four elements cannot go up to the outer region. Aether as a divine body has no movement except uniform circular motion and is indestructible. This cosmology became the foundation of the Ptolemaic system of astronomy. Seventeenth-century science postulated aether as the medium of interactions in the heavens. Nineteenth-century science postulated aether as the medium of transmission in the wave theory of light. This term is also retained in contemporary quantum field theory.

“[They [natural philosophers], believing that the primary body was something different from earth and fire and air and water, gave the name aether to the uppermost region, choosing its title from the fact that it ‘runs always’ and eternally.”] Aristotle, De Caelo

**affirmative method**

Philosophy of religion [from Latin *via affirmativa* or *via positiva*] A Christian theological method for obtaining knowledge of God, in contrast to negative method (*via negativa*). The affirmative method rejects the claim of the *via negativa* that God cannot be apprehended by human concepts and discourse. On the basis of the doctrine that man is made in the image of God, it claims that the highest human qualities are pointers and signs of the perfection of God. We can, therefore, deduce divine attributes through analogy to these qualities. The basic procedure is to start with the highest human categories and to proceed through intermediate terms to particular divine titles. In this way we can indicate how human terms such as goodness, wisdom, and power are applicable to God in a manner that transcends our experience. Because knowledge obtained in this way is pre-eminent, the *via positiva* is also called the *via eminentiae*. Some theologians, such as Aquinas, claim that the *via negativa* cannot be used in isolation, but is a necessary preliminary step to the *via positiva*. There are difficulties in applying a method of analogy like the affirmative method beyond the possibility of our experience.

“[The affirmative method means ascribing to God the perfections found in creatures, that is, the perfections which are compatible with the spiritual nature of God, though not existing in Him in the same manner as they exist in creatures.”] Copleston, A History of Philosophy, vol. II

**affirming mode**, another term for *modus ponens*

**affirming the consequent**

Logic A logical fallacy of the form “If p then q; q; therefore p,” that is, the categorical premise affirms the consequent of the conditional premise, while the conclusion affirms its antecedent. For instance, “if he is sick, he does not come to work; he does not come to work; therefore he is sick.” This is invalid
because in the conditional premise the truth of the consequent does not entail the truth of the antecedent. The correct form should infer from the antecedent of a true implication to its consequent; that is, it should be of the form “If p then q; p; therefore q.” This was called *modus ponens* by the medieval logicians and is also called the affirming mood.

“P ⊃ Q, Q, therefore P’ bears a superficial resemblance to the valid argument form modus ponens and was labelled the fallacy of affirming the consequent.” *Copi, Introduction to Logic*

*a fortiori*

Logic [Latin: for a stronger reason, even more so or with more certainty] An argument that if everything that possesses A will possess B, then if a given thing possesses A to a greater degree, it has a stronger reason (*a fortiori*) to possess B. For example, if all old men who are healthy can run, then *a fortiori* a young man who has greater health than old men can run.

“All the so-called relational (or *a fortiori*) syllogisms depend on the transitivity of the relations.” *Cohen and Nagel, An Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method*

*age of adventure*, another name for the Renaissance

*age of reason*, another name for the Enlightenment

*agent*

Philosophy of action, ethics [from Latin *agens*, what is acting, referring to a rational human being who is the subject of action] An agent can decide to act or not. Having decided to act, an agent can deliberate how to act. Once the means of acting are chosen, an agent can apply the means to bring about certain changes. The kind of capacity intrinsic to an agent is called agency. The change caused by an agent is called agent-causation, in contrast to event-causation in which one thing is caused externally by another. In ethics, only agents are members of a moral community and bearers of moral responsibility.

“The way a cause operates is often compared to the operation of an agent, which is held responsible for what he does.” *von Wright, Explanation and Understanding*

*agent-centered morality*

Ethics Also called agent-related ethics. It demands that moral consideration should be given to moral agents rather than merely to the consequences of the agent’s acts. It is a thesis opposed to consequentialism, in particular to utilitarianism, which it labels outcome-centered ethics. It accuses consequentialism of ignoring the integrity of the characters of moral agents, for consequentialist ethics requires that what an agent is permitted to do in any situation is limited strictly to what would have the best overall outcome impersonally judged. In contrast, agent-centered morality focuses on the agent’s rights, duties, or obligations. It holds that our primary responsibility as agents is to guarantee that our actions conform to moral rules and do not violate our obligations towards others. Agents should perform such actions even if they know that the consequences of what they do would be better if they were willing to compromise their principles. Major issues for this view are to classify the forms of agent-relativity, to justify agent-relative principles, and to offer an adequate rationale for agent-centered restrictions.

“Agape is that form of love in which God loves us, and in which we are to love our neighbour, especially if we do not like him.” *Tillich, Ultimate Concern*
“Agent-centred morality gives primacy to the question of what to do, a question asked by the individual agent, and does not assume that the only way to answer it is to say what it would be best if he did.” T. Nagel, *Mortal Questions*

**agent-neutral reason**

Ethics The evaluation of something objectively, independently of one’s own interests. This is in contrast to “agent-relative reason,” which values things by taking one’s situations into consideration. Agent-neutral reason cares about everyone, while an agent-relative reason cares more particularly about oneself. The introduction of this dichotomy of reasons for acting is credited to Derek Parfit, but Thomas Nagel borrows it (using the terms objective reason and subjective reason) and uses it widely. It plays a great role in the contemporary debate between “consequentialism” and “agent-related ethics.” Consequentialism is generally characterized as “agent-neutral,” for it requires that everyone should act so as to maximize the amount of happiness for all involved. Some philosophers therefore claim that it asks moral agents to consider their actions from an impersonal point of view and is thus in conflict with common sense. On the other hand, agent-related ethics is believed to be based on “agent-relative reason” because it allows moral agents to base their moral aims on their moral characters. Consequentialism is also called “agent-neutral morality” or “act-centered ethics,” and its opposite is called “agent-related ethics” or “agent-centered morality.”

“Nagel calls a reason objective if it is not tied down to any point of view. Suppose we claim that there is a reason to relieve some person’s suffering. This reason is objective if it is a reason for everyone – for anyone who could relieve this person’s suffering. I call such reasons agent-neutral. Nagel’s subjective reasons are reasons only for the agent. I call these agent-relative.” Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*

**agent-related ethics**, another expression for agent-centered morality

**agent-relative reason**, see agent-neutral reason

**agglomeration principle**

Ethics, Logic A term introduced by Bernard Williams and now used as a rule of inference in deontic logic. According to the principle, if one has a duty to do a and if one also has a duty to do b, then one has a duty to do a and b. The principle also extends to cover all situations in which a property can be conjoined out of two other properties. The validity of the principle has been a matter of controversy because it needs to be reconciled with the principle that ought implies can. In some cases, a person can do a and can do b separately, but cannot do both of them and will therefore not have a duty to do both.

There is a converse to the principle of agglomeration, called the division principle, which states that if one has a duty to do both a and b, then one has a duty to do a and has a duty to do b.

“... that ‘I ought to do a’ and ‘I ought to do b’ together imply ‘I ought to do a and b’ (which I shall call the agglomeration principle) ...” B. Williams, *Problems of the Self*

**agnosticism**

Philosophy of Religion [from Greek α, not + γνωστικός, one who knows] A term used by T. H. Huxley for a position that neither believes that God exists nor believes that God does not exist and denies that we can have any knowledge about the nature of God. Agnosticism is contrasted both to theism, which holds that we can know the existence and nature of God, and to atheism, which denies the existence of God. Many agnostics argue that human reason has inherent and insuperable limitations, as shown by Hume and Kant. Therefore, we cannot justify any claims supporting either theism or atheism and should suspend our judgment over these issues. The attitude of agnosticism has persisted in many periods, but it became important philosophically in nineteenth-century debates concerning science and religious belief. Agnosticism is also used more generally for the suspension of judgment about the truth or falsity of claims going beyond what we directly sense or commonly experience.

“Agnosticism: this is the theory that we have no means of telling what are the characteristics of those relatively permanent things and processes which manifest themselves partially to us by the interrelated sensa which we from time to time sense.” Broad, *The Mind and its Place in Nature*