



What Philosophy Can Do

Gary Gutting

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“A brilliant demonstration of what philosophy can do and how it is essential to human integrity and identity.”?Simon Critchley, coeditor of *The Stone Reader*

How can we have meaningful debates with political opponents?
How can we distinguish reliable science from over-hyped media reports?
How can we talk sensibly about God?

In *What Philosophy Can Do*, Gary Gutting takes a philosopher’s scalpel to modern life’s biggest questions and the most powerful forces in our society?politics, science, religion, education, and capitalism?to show how we can improve our discussions of contentious contemporary issues.

Gutting introduces readers to powerful analytic tools in the philosopher’s arsenal that they can use to make new sense of current debates. One such tool is a crucial distinction between inductive and deductive reasoning that explains why both sides on a disputed issue often are sure they have compelling cases for their views. Another is the Principle of Charity, which requires opposing parties to present each other’s arguments in their strongest forms?a tool that would make critiques both more respectful and more effective. Gutting also shows how concepts introduced by philosophers from Plato and Aristotle to Michel Foucault and John Rawls can clarify public discussions about morality, the economy, and medicine.

From informed assessments of scientific claims to careful analyses of arguments for and against religious belief, Gutting brings a calm, clear-headed approach to some of the most divisive issues on the table today. He scrutinizes our relationship to work and freedom in capitalism; our modern understanding of happiness and the good life; the value of liberal arts education and the humanities; the role of science and politics in shaping public policy today; and the value of art and popular culture. Perhaps most meaningfully, Gutting shows how we can talk about our own deepest beliefs clearly and directly, while listening to what others have to say to us. *What Philosophy Can Do* makes a powerful case for philosophy’s importance to public discussions, and shows us that this ancient tradition of inquiry may yet have much to say about our future.

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Millie Goodman:

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