

# The Philosophy Shop

Ideas, activities and questions to get people,  
young and old, thinking philosophically

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# Preface



## Philosophy Shopping

'Look at all these things I don't need!' the philosopher Socrates is said to have declared as he stood before the many stalls filling the marketplace of ancient Athens. In contrast to the stalls in the *agora* (Greek for 'marketplace'), and by engaging the citizens there with big, philosophical questions, Socrates offered an exchange of a very different kind. His currency was ideas; a wiser, more reflective person housed within a life well-lived was his aim. This anecdote shows how one can trace the origins of philosophy – as we know it in Western Europe at least – back to shopping.

We can perhaps identify with Socrates here as we too stand amid a dizzying marketplace – albeit a much larger, global one – bombarded from all sides by promises of a better life from 'peddlars of wares'. And we too may feel the need for an alternative kind of shop as an antidote to the pressures and promises of the modern-day *agora* – one that guards against the many 'snake-oils' on offer by insisting on an 'account' or 'reason' or *logos* in Greek. Perhaps we need an alternative shop such as this in order to reach that 'better life' by other than financial, consumerist means.

*The Philosophy Shop* stands as Socrates to the reader: sometimes beguiling, humorous and inspiring; other times irritating, like a gadfly, goading us into wakefulness; and sometimes frustratingly circular or inconclusive. But always – it is hoped – stimulating.

This book aims to guide the reader through it with as few words as possible and without the reader necessarily knowing what it is they want. One way I hope to have done this is through the structure – or topography – of the book. The main body has been divided into four sections, or 'departments', each with its own series of subheadings:

1. Metaphysics or What There Is
2. Epistemology or What Can Be Known About What There Is

3. Value or What Matters In What There Is
4. Language and Meaning or What Can Be Said About What There Is

Finally, there is a small collection of entries under the heading 'Afterthoughts' that may well benefit from being visited after reading through the rest of the book. That said, the entries in the book can be read in almost any order, but to help the reader/participant(s) further, I have provided a 'Works well with ...' section at the end of each entry that aims to provide the reader with a multitude of thematic maps through the book (and beyond). The 'Start Questions' and the 'Questions to take you further' are also structured so as to guide the reader or participants (see 'What is this book?' on page 1 for more on this). 'Afterthoughts' contains some useful information and guidance on developing philosophical writing of different sorts: Dr John Taylor has provided some helpful notes on how to produce good philosophical writing for philosophy papers and projects; although written primarily for school projects many of the tips would be relevant for first year undergraduate students as well. David Birch introduces the writing of philosophical poetry to children and teachers; ideas that lend themselves to all kinds of development and variation at the hands of creative teachers and pupils.

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- ✓ *The If Machine: The Ceebie Stories, The Ship of Theseus, Yous On Another Planet, Where Are You?*

*Philosophy:* Thomas Hobbes and materialism, John Locke and identity through time.

## Identity Parade (3): Body Copy Andrew Routledge



*Starting age:* 12 years

---

A number of government computers have been hacked into. Somebody has got access to highly sensitive information. Police believe that the information has been sold on and think they know who was involved. But the person responsible had an escape plan ready. Whereas in the past criminals might have used a getaway car, in this day and age (in the future from now) some criminals are able to afford *getaway machines*. When a person steps into one of these machines, it scans their entire body and sends the information about what it is like to a machine on the other side of the world via satellite. Following this blueprint, the second machine then builds an exact copy of the person out of some new chemicals. They have an identical body and an identical brain. They look the same and behave the same, believe all the same things and want all the same things. Then, at the exact moment that the second machine builds this copy, the body in the first machine is zapped and destroyed so that there is only one of them. Unfortunately for the person who stepped out of this machine, Interpol had been tracking the sale of these new pieces of technology and arrested the person within an hour.

This person is now sat in the cage in front of us today. What we need to decide is this:

---

**Start Question** Are they still the *same person* as the hacker? Should they be punished?

### Questions to take you further

- ❖ How important is our *body* to making us who we are?

- ❖ What is it about our body that is most important?
- ❖ Does it matter which stuff it is made of or just how it is put together or arranged?
- ❖ Would *you* step into a getaway machine if you were on the run?

### Your Questions

- ❖
- ❖
- ❖

### Works well with

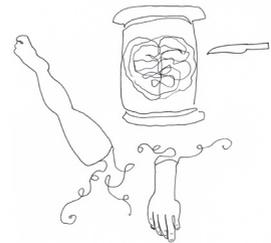
- ✓ Other entries in the 'Personal Identity' section (particularly Identity Parade: Memory, Body, Brains, Cloning, Change, The Copying Machine)
- ✓ Pencil Person Meets Pencil Person!
- ✓ The 2 Square
- ✓ *Thoughtings: You, Me, Aliens and Others*
- ✓ *The If Machine: The Ceebie Stories, The Ship of Theseus, Yous On Another Planet, Where Are You?*

*Philosophy: Derek Parfit's Reasons and Persons.*

## Identity Parade (4):

### Brains

Andrew Routledge



*Starting age: 12 years*

---

A daring criminal has managed to escape with the Crown Jewels. Everybody in the country has seen the dramatic CCTV footage of their escape and has been urged by the police to keep a look out for the person. The criminal goes into hiding, while a small group of accomplices arrange for a state-of-the-art brain transplant. Their brain is taken out of their body and hooked up to another body. Their old body is buried, secretly. The person now looks completely different and only has the same

brain as before. Unfortunately for them, they try to sell the stolen Crown Jewels to the wrong person and are double-crossed. When they go to pick up the money, armed police are waiting for them.

This person is now sat in the cage in front of us today. What we need to decide is this:

---

**Start Question** Are they still the *same person* as the thief? Should they be punished?

**Questions to take you further**

- ❖ If your brain was put into another body, where would you be: where your old body is or where your brain now is?
- ❖ What is more important to who we are: our body or our personality?
- ❖ If your brain was put into another body do you think you would have the same personality?
- ❖ If you had to choose, would you rather keep your brain or the rest of your body?
- ❖ Would your memories be the same? What about your personality?

**Your Questions**

- ❖
- ❖
- ❖

**Works well with**

- ✓ Other entries in the 'Personal Identity' section (particularly Identity Parade: Memory, Body, Body Copy, Cloning, Change)
- ✓ Mind the Planet
- ✓ Pinka and Arwin Go Forth (2): Making Up Their Minds
- ✓ *Thoughtings*: You, Me, Aliens and Others
- ✓ *The If Machine*: The Ceebie Stories, The Ship of Theseus, You On Another Planet, Where Are You?

## Identity Parade (5): Cloning

Andrew Routledge

*Starting age: 12 years*

---

A rich Hollywood actor is being blackmailed. The blackmailers want one hundred million dollars to guarantee the safe return of his wife. Police manage to trace the letters and raid the garage where the woman is being held captive. Although they manage to free the actor's wife, the criminal already has an elaborate escape plan in place. Whereas in the past criminals might have used a getaway car, in this day and age (in the future from now) some criminals are able to afford *getaway machines*. When a person steps into one of these machines, it scans their entire body and sends the information about what it is like to a machine on the other side of the world via satellite. Following this blueprint, the second machine then builds an exact copy of the person out of some new chemicals. They have an identical body and an identical brain. They look the same and behave the same, believe all the same things and want all the same things. Then, at the exact moment that the second machine builds this copy, the body in the first machine is zapped and destroyed. Unfortunately, in this case the machine malfunctions when the criminal steps into it. It starts making funny noises and smoke begins to pour out of the side. Instead of making just one copy of the person, it makes three. All of them are exactly the same as the original that has now been destroyed. Each of them remembers stepping into the machine! They are later tracked down by Interpol and put on trial separately.

One of the three is now sat in the cage in front of us today. What we need to decide is this:

---

**Start Question** Are they still the *same person* as the blackmailer? Should they be punished?

### Questions to take you further

- ❖ If there are now three different people, how can we decide which of them is the same as the original?
- ❖ Does the malfunction mean that none of them are the same?
- ❖ Has the machine killed the blackmailer?

- ❖ What if the machine had malfunctioned and failed to destroy the original blackmailer. Which one of the four should then be punished? Or should it be all of them?

### Your Questions

- ❖
- ❖
- ❖

### Works well with

- ✓ Other entries in the 'Personal Identity' section (particularly Identity Parade: Memory, Body, Body Copy, Brains, Change)
- ✓ Pencil Person Meets Pencil Person!
- ✓ How Many Dogs?
- ✓ The 2 Square
- ✓ *Thoughtings: You, Me, Aliens and Others*
- ✓ *The If Machine: The Ceebie Stories, The Ship of Theseus, You On Another Planet, Where Are You?*

## Identity Parade (6): Change

Andrew Routledge

*Starting age: 12 years*

---

During a war many years ago, a certain individual was responsible for killing and torturing many innocent people. When the war ended they fled the country, fearing punishment for their crimes. They made their way to Latin America and settled there, in hiding. Years and years passed and the person began to grow older. They no longer remembered what happened all that time ago and they would no longer behave that way if they were in a similar circumstance now. The way that they think about the world is very different. Their personality has completely changed. Their body has also aged and looks drastically different. Almost every cell in their body has died and been replaced by a different cell. Campaigners for justice are tipped

off by locals, however, that this person may be a war criminal. The person is arrested.

This person is now sat in the cage in front of us today. What we need to decide is this:

---

**Start Question** Are they still the *same person* as the war criminal? Should they be punished?

**Questions to take you further**

- ❖ What matters about the way that we change?
- ❖ Are some ways of changing more natural than others? If so, why?
- ❖ Why is it that we can survive changes of one kind but not another?
- ❖ Does how *slowly* or *gradually* we change matter?

**Your Questions**

- ❖
- ❖
- ❖

**Works well with**

- ✓ Other entries in the 'Personal Identity' section (particularly Identity Parade: Memory, Body, Body Copy, Brains, Cloning, All That Glistens ...)
- ✓ *Thoughtings*: You, Me, Aliens and Others
- ✓ *The If Machine*: The Ceebie Stories, The Ship of Theseus, Yous On Another Planet, Where Are You?

## Random 4

---

Imagine that some scrabble letters were somehow thrown into the air and that they fell to make the following arrangement of letters:

ara flehiniteors iw h tyue shav efuod

btgs i apomsta nttlanie odnrtyh eaoro u

Another time the Scrabble letters are somehow thrown into the air and they fall to make the following arrangement of the same letters:

an array of letters is what you have found

but is it a poem that lies on the ground

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**Start Question 4** Is either of these arrangements of letters more or less random than the other?

### Questions to take you further

- ❖ If so, which one and why?
- ❖ If not, why not?
- ❖ **What is ‘random’?**
- ❖ The second one is meaningful to us (humans). Where does the meaning come from? Is the meaning somehow in the arrangement of letters? If not, where is it?
- ❖ What if the first arrangement of letters made a meaningful sentence in another (possibly alien) language? Would it be a sentence?

## Random 5

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Suppose there was a monkey that would never die typing randomly on a keyboard for an infinite amount of time. Just suppose.

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**Start Question 5** Is there a chance that the monkey would type out a play by Shakespeare by accident, or would that simply never happen no matter how long he typed for?

### Questions to take you further

- ❖ Is there a chance that the monkey would type out the entire works of Shakespeare or is that just crazy?
- ❖ If you have a finite set of symbols such as the alphabet, which consists of 26 symbols, and you continue to write random words using only these symbols for an infinite amount of time, what would happen?

## Random 6

**Start Question 6** If you threw a die six times and threw six 6s in a row does that mean that you must have thrown a weighted die?

### Questions to take you further

- ❖ Is it lucky?
- ❖ **What is luck?**
- ❖ Does luck exist?
- ❖ **What is probability?**

### Your Questions

- ❖
- ❖
- ❖

### Works well with

- ✓ Other entries in the 'Language and Meaning' section (particularly Negative Nelly, The Accidental Confession, Jack's Parrot and Wind-Spell)
- ✓ Are There Cogs Beneath the Wind?
- ✓ *Thoughtings*: Infinity Add One and Poems To Do
- ✓ *The If Machine*: To the Edge of Forever

*Philosophy*: The philosophy of probability and chance, the philosophy of meaning, teleology, chaos theory.

# Negative Nelly

David Jenkins

Starting age: 7 years

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No matter what question you ask Nelly, she always says 'no'.

We want her to admit that her name is Nelly. We cannot ask, 'Is your name Nelly?' since she will simply reply 'no'.

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**Start Question** How can we rephrase the question so that 'no' *really* means 'Yes, my name is Nelly'?

## Questions to take you further

- ❖ Can 'no' mean 'yes'?
- ❖ If you can find a way to get her reply to mean 'Yes, my name is Nelly', even when she replies 'no', has she *admitted* that her name is Nelly? (See *The Accidental Confession* for more on this.)
- ❖ What does 'non-swimmer' mean? What does 'non non-swimmer' mean? What does 'non non-swimmer' mean if it is stammered by the speaker? Does it have the same meaning as when it is said but not stammered? (The 'non-swimmer' questions all came from 7- and 8-year-olds Marco and Patrick.)

## Your Questions

- ❖
- ❖
- ❖

## Works well with

- ✓ This entry is paired with *The Accidental Confession* and should be done first
- ✓ *Jack's Parrot* and *Wind-Spell*
- ✓ *A Random Appetizer*
- ✓ *Said and Unsaid*

*Philosophy*: Logic, syntax, semantics, meaning and intention.

## The Accidental Confession

Peter Worley

Starting age: 7 years

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Nigel has been pulled into the head teacher's office accused of hitting another child. Nigel protests to the head teacher: 'But I didn't do nothing!' The head teacher says, 'Well done for admitting that you were responsible for hitting Matthew. You will be punished, but not as much as you would have been if you had not admitted that you were responsible.' Matthew leaves the head teacher's office very confused. *But I didn't admit it!* he thinks to himself.

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**Start Question** Did Nigel *admit* that he was responsible for hitting Matthew when he said 'But I didn't do nothing'?

[You, or your class, would do well to bear in mind that it is not known whether Nigel really did what he has been accused of.]

### Questions to take you further

- ❖ Why did the head teacher say that he had admitted it?
- ❖ Even if the grammar of his sentence means that he 'did do something' does it mean that he admitted responsibility?
- ❖ Is *admitting* logical or intentional? What's the difference?
- ❖ In English two negatives have the effect of expressing a positive ('she's not not here' means 'she is here') but in French or Italian, for example, two negatives provide emphasis for the negative mood of the sentence (in Italian 'Non sei felice mai' literally means 'not she is happy never', which expresses that she is *absolutely never happy*). Should a double negative mean a positive or an emphasised negative? Should language be the same as maths or logic (where two negatives always express a positive:  $2 - -1 = 2 + 1$ )?

### Your Questions

- ❖
- ❖
- ❖

### Works well with

- ✓ This entry is paired with Negative Nelly which should be done first
- ✓ Some Sums with Zero
- ✓ *The If Machine*: Goldfinger
- ✓ *Thoughtings*: Word Wonders

*Source*: The many children who mean 'I didn't do anything' but express it in a double negative form: 'I didn't do nothing'.

*Philosophy*: Logic and meaning, syntax and semantics, intentionality.

## The Txt Book

Peter Worley

*Starting age*: 10 years (they need to be of 'texting age' for this one)

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Professor Pen and Professor Utterance are both employed by the University of Language. Professor Pen is the world's leading expert on writing and Professor Utterance is the world's leading expert on talking. With the recent introduction of 'texting' between people, using mobile phones, the university has decided to include *texting* as part of its research and would like to have a big textbook written on the subject of texting to be called *The Txt Book*. The problem that the University of Language has is to decide who should be appointed with the task of writing the textbook. Should it be Professor Pen or Professor Utterance?

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**Start Question** When you text, are you writing or talking?

### Questions to take you further

- ❖ **What is writing?**
- ❖ **What is talking?**
- ❖ What is the difference between the two?