

## What Philosophy Can Do

By Gary Gutting

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### What Philosophy Can Do By Gary Gutting

**A leading American philosopher brings the tools of his trade to contentious contemporary debates.**

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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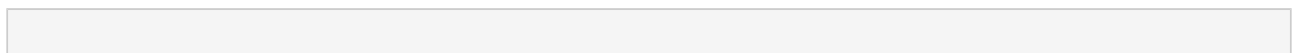
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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

“This book is a brilliant demonstration of what philosophy can do and how it is essential to human integrity and identity. Gutting’s is a distinctly American voice: straightforwardly intelligent, generously sympathetic, but always forcefully critical, without ever being mean or scornful. Reading this book, one feels whole clouds of dogma and nonsense suddenly evaporate and one sees the landscape of a whole series of debates. Highly recommended.” (Simon Critchley, co-editor of *The Stone Reader: Modern Philosophy in 133 Arguments*)

“With this splendid book, Gary Gutting joins the great tradition of leading philosophers who venture from the ivory tower to speak with the public. Covering a range of topics?politics, science, religion (including atheism), art, and more?*What Philosophy Can Do* never condescends, never tries to evade the difficult. With wit and flair, Gutting shows how philosophical thinking permeates life’s decisions and can enrich our overall personal sense of worth and happiness.” (Michael Ruse, Lucyle T. Werkmeister Professor of Philosophy, Florida State University)

“Clearheaded, sensible, and teacherly in the best sense, Gutting in *What Philosophy Can Do* accomplishes what American philosophy today too rarely attempts?he illuminates how leading academic thinkers see ideas such as science, happiness, work, God, evil, capitalism and education in a voice any open-minded reader can appreciate.” (Carlin Romano, author of *America The Philosophical*)

“Gutting challenges readers who view philosophy as a merely academic discipline by showing them again and again how philosophy can do hard work in the rough-and-tumble world. ...Compellingly updates for the modern world the timeless Socratic quest for wisdom.” (Bryce Christensen - *Library Journal*)

### **About the Author**

Gary Gutting holds an endowed chair in philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. He is an editor of *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* and writes for the *New York Times*’s philosophy blog, *The Stone*. He is also the author of *What Philosophy Can Do*.

## **Users Review**

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**William Sinclair:**

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