

Rafael Ferber

Key Concepts in Philosophy

An Introduction

Translated from German
by Ladislaus Löb

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“To be useful as a foundation,
a textbook must contain no more
than the core of a science or art in
the briefest concentration so that
the teacher will easily find cause to
explain the topic concerned.”

Georg Christoph Lichtenberg

Preface

This book is addressed not so much to expert philosophers as to students of philosophy and interested laypersons. It aims to introduce the reader to six key concepts that provide a first understanding of the contents, methods and claims of philosophy. Being an introduction, it is elementary, but not unsophisticated. I try to elucidate those elementary issues clearly, simply and without the use of jargon. At the same time, I do not shrink from adopting a position of my own. My philosophy is indebted in several respects to the analytical school, but its spirit, in a broader sense, is Platonic in so far as it assumes that the concepts under discussion have meanings that are accessible to us all, at least to a certain extent. Some new aspects, which could also be of interest to professional philosophers, are found in particular in the chapters about knowledge, truth and the good.

The following people were kind enough to read and make critical comments on selected chapters: Hans Ambühl, Jean Louis Arni, Marcel Zentner. However, I also benefited from the help of the students and non-specialists I have had the privilege of teaching in recent years, and it is to them that I dedicate this book.

Sachseln (Switzerland), autumn of 1993

R. Ferber

Preface to the English Translation

As a result of its warm reception, the book has now appeared in eight editions, the latest of which also provides the basis for this English translation. As well as a few minor additions, I have included a section about the problem of universals (pp. 155–166) and a reference to the power of judgment (pp. 210–215). I thank Ladislaus Löb for the translation and Elisabeth Longrigg for looking through most of the book. I wish to thank all those readers who have sent me suggestions for improvement or critical remarks, which I have taken on board as far as I could. I am also grateful to those colleagues who use the book or parts of it in their teaching.

Each entry of the footnotes begins with a reference to the texts used by the author. The abbreviations of many titles are designed to save space. Quotations from English-language texts are traced to the originals. Quotations from other languages are borrowed from existing translations or translations from the author's German translations.

Sachselsn, August 2014

Rafael Ferber