

Michael Bruce and Steven Barbone (eds.): *Just the Arguments: 100 of the Most Important Arguments in Western Philosophy*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

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If you agree with the current discussion in didactics of philosophy that teaching philosophy should always and mainly be focused on philosophical problems, the ways of understanding and challenging them by producing arguments and using methods of reasoning, then you'll find the book of Bruce and Barbone very helpful. They fill a longstanding desideratum: On the one hand, „encyclopaedias of philosophy are great for limited descriptions of philosophers and concepts, but there is a need for reference tools that offer specific arguments“, as Bruce and Barbone write in the *Introduction*. On the other hand, many books and journal articles offer deep analyses and reconstructions of arguments in such a scholarly and profound way that it is quite tough to figure out what exactly it is that makes the argument in question valid and sound.

Therefore the 100 chapters (each 3-8 pages long) do only consider arguments. For example: Why do I have to accept, following Anselm, that it is impossible to claim the non-existence of God? Show me the argument! Sara L. Uckelman (*The Ontological Argument*, p. 25-28) answers this question on not more than 3 pages.

In general, it is helpful that all arguments in the 6 parts of the book (Philosophy of Religion, Metaphysics, Epistemology, Ethics, Philosophy of Mind, Science and Language) are discussed along the same format. First you will find a boxed area which offers a reference list of original and secondary sources of the text that originally presented the argument. It is followed by a short introduction explaining briefly and precisely what the philosophical problem is, in which philosophical context it was brought up and which strategy (argument) was chosen to deal with it. Problems, mistakes and fallacies are also discussed. Block quotations show how the argument was originally presented in a text (all texts are translated). But the main point of interest is the reconstruction of the argument itself that is presented in a deductive structure with premises (marked „P“ and numbered), also containing the methodological steps and inferences (e.g. „reductio ad absurdum“ or „modus ponens: P4, P5“), and conclusions (marked „C.“ and numbered). For example the ontological proof (Anselm) is presented in 7 premises and 4 conclusions. For sure there could be further discussions about the precise reconstruction but the core argument is clearly presented and is therefore a good starting point for further preparations in teaching.

One example I found especially useful for teaching is „Descartes' Arguments for the Mind–Body Distinction“ (p. 290-296) followed by „Princess Elisabeth and the Mind–Body Problem“ (p. 297-300). Students can first follow Descartes' reasoning in *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia* II and VI to understand this reasoning and its problems. (This could also be combined with „The Cogito Arguments of Descartes and Augustine“, p. 133-136). It should be made clear that even though the distinction of mind and body seems to be common

and familiar it leads to many theoretical problems. These philosophical problems could be easily addressed with Princess Elisabeth's perceptive argument against the mind-body distinction in Descartes. The conclusion of her argumentation is: either Descartes' definition of the mind is wrong or the mind is not able to move the body. In preparing the class one can save a lot of time by starting from this conclusion rather than from reading the letters of Descartes and Elisabeth or their other works.

Note: a copy of Bruce and Barbone is also available in German: *Die 100 wichtigsten philosophischen Argumente*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.