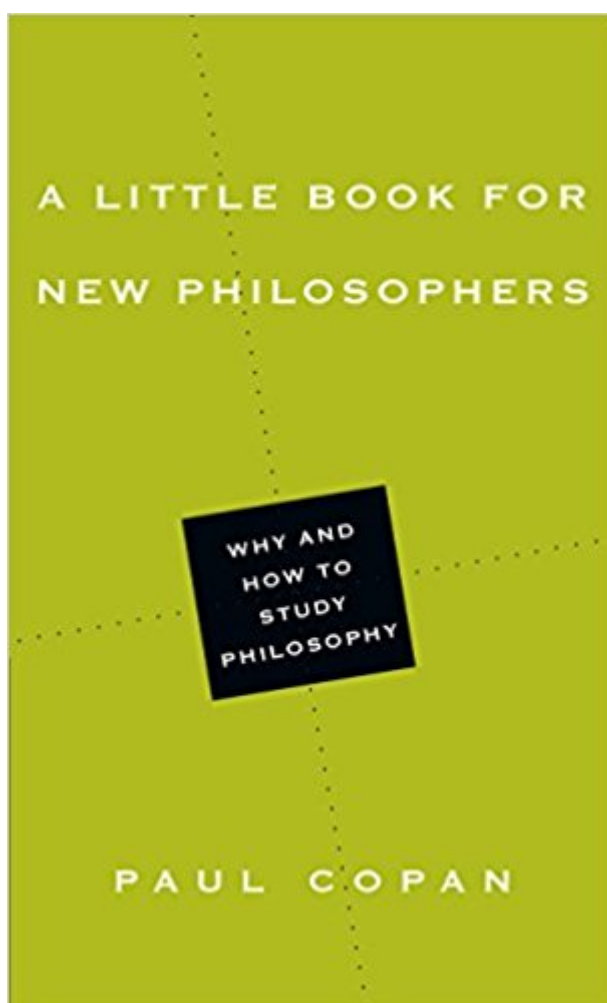


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# A Little Book For New Philosophers: Why And How To Study Philosophy (Little Books)



## Synopsis

What's the point of studying philosophy when we have theology? Is philosophy anything more than a preparation for apologetics? Often called "theology's handmaid," philosophy has sometimes suffered from an inferiority complex in the church. Many Christians see little point in it at all. But as Paul Copan contends, it is possible to affirm theology's preeminence without diminishing the value and contribution of philosophy. In *A Little Book for New Philosophers*, Copan offers a concise introduction to the study of philosophy. Aimed at newcomers, this brief overview is both a survey of philosophy's basic aims and categories and an apology for its proper function in the life of the Christian. "By God's grace," Copan writes, "philosophy can enhance our understanding and worship of God . . . and assist us in defending the coherence of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Over the last decade or so, professor Copan has risen in stature among Christians and non-Christians alike. Many look to him for counsel, for intellectual help and for spiritual wisdom. All of this and much more is incorporated into his delightful little book *A Little Book for New Philosophers*. Written with the warmth and wisdom of a pastor, yet exhibiting knowledge of an incredibly wide range of relevant philosophical literature, Copan has written the most important book to date as to what philosophy actually is (and should be) and why it is so important for all of us to study philosophy. This should be read by seminarians, people in vocational ministry and thoughtful lay folk, and is required reading as a text in worldview or apologetics classes. Today, the kingdom is

moving in philosophy, and Copan's book will expand that movement considerably. What a delightful read!" (J. P. Moreland, distinguished professor of philosophy, Biola University, author of *The Soul*) "Paul Copan's book is small in size but large in importance. The audience is not just aspiring philosophers, but anyone in the church who is interested in, curious about or even suspicious of philosophy. Copan does a wonderful job of explaining what philosophy is, how it should be done and the value it has for Christians." (C. Stephen Evans, professor of philosophy and humanities, Baylor University) "Paul Copan's short book addresses the questions of why and how to do philosophy within the framework of a Christian worldview. It is directed primarily toward that growing host of laypersons who find themselves interested in intellectual issues and thus drawn to philosophy. It is directed secondarily toward that diminishing group of Christians who remain suspicious of the value of philosophy and still need to be convinced that this discipline can deepen their faith and equip them to serve God more effectively. The book also contains healthy reminders for philosophical veterans of pitfalls, priorities and challenges of doing philosophical work as Christians. Paul Copan, a personal friend for many years, exemplifies the virtues that he says Christian philosophers should develop; his walk matches his talk. His reflections on this subject are convicting and humbling, making his book a worthwhile read." (William Lane Craig, research professor of philosophy, Talbot School of Theology, professor of philosophy, Houston Baptist University) "This little book is a rare gem! Paul Copan is the ideal guide to what makes philosophy distinctively important and crucial for the life of any intelligent Christian. If you have any suspicions or concerns about the role of the mind on the path of faith, read this book!" (Tom Morris, author of *Making Sense of It All*, *Philosophy for Dummies* and *The Oasis Within*) "Paul Copan has a special gift for making philosophy accessible to a wide audience. Here he focuses on philosophically inclined Christians who are fearful or cynical about philosophy. He contends that philosophy done right can benefit our understanding and worship of God. I highly recommend that all Christians who doubt the value of philosophy attend to Paul Copan's lucid case. They will not be disappointed." (Paul K. Moser, professor of philosophy, Loyola University of Chicago)

Paul Copan (PhD, Marquette University) is the Pledger Family Chair of Philosophy and Ethics at Palm Beach Atlantic University. His books include *The Gospel in the Marketplace of Ideas*, *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics*, *Creation Out of Nothing*, *Did God Really Command Genocide?* and *Holy War in the Bible*. He previously served with Ravi Zacharias International Ministries and taught at Trinity International University in Deerfield, Illinois.

Paul Copan teaches philosophy at Palm Beach Atlantic University. As the subtitle of this book indicates, this book talks about the advantages of studying philosophy. It seems to be aimed at people who wonder whether they should pursue philosophy as an academic study, perhaps for a career in academia. The book thoughtfully explores a variety of subjects: the increasing acceptance of theism within philosophical circles, arguments for the existence of God, the existence of the soul, verificationism, similarities and differences between the God of the Bible and the philosophical God (i.e., the picture of God influenced by Greek philosophy), the question of whether atheists bear any burden of proof, and what to do with religious doubt. Copan also defends the study of philosophy against Christians who regard it as antithetical to Christianity. Not only does Copan offer an alternative interpretation of Bible verses that have been cited against philosophy, but he also effectively argues that Scripture itself, along with Christian minds throughout history, have encouraged the life of the mind. Copan also offers a lay-of-the-land of academia, as he speaks from experience as an academic philosopher. For Copan, Christian philosophers should exemplify the fruit of the Spirit in how they treat colleagues, including those with whom they disagree. This may sound obvious, but Copan offers practical advice on how to be a Christian in academia: how to view one's own work, how to help others, and how being in a group of Christian philosophers can be important. Copan also shares how he went through Coppleston's series of books on philosophy, and that may be helpful to people who are seriously interested in the field, as well as people whose minds can easily wander when they are reading! I would like to quote some of my favorite lines in the book, just to give you a taste:

"Practicing philosophy in the way of Jesus, for instance, requires that professors never publicly dismantle a graduate student's paper at a conference" (page 81).

"So whether we publish much or little, whether our work is widely admired or falls stillborn from the press, we will be a faithful presence wherever God has placed us" (pages 82-83).

"My PhD advisor told me not to attempt anything earthshaking for my dissertation. He suggested I keep my nose to the grindstone, work hard and save any bold work for later" (pages 92-93). And, as someone who wonders if James 1:6-8 condemns all doubt, I appreciated Copan's interpretation:

"Actually, James is condemning a mindset of divided loyalty between God and the world—a spiritual adultery" (page 103). The book may help Christian students at secular universities to feel less alone when their Christianity is challenged. This book demonstrates that intelligent people have embraced Christianity and have pursued careers in academia. This book, by itself, may not provide Christian

students with sufficient arguments to use against atheists and skeptics, who can easily respond with “Where’s the proof for God’s existence?” “Dismiss some arguments as wishful thinking, or see some arguments as ‘God in the gaps’ arguments. Copan criticizes ‘God in the gaps’ arguments as lazy, but he also seems to prefer theistic explanations because they at least attempt to account for things that puzzle naturalists. Naturalists would probably see that approach itself as a ‘God in the gaps’ approach, believing that we should not dismiss the possibility of a natural explanation just because one currently eludes us. The book may still provide Christian students with a starting-point in addressing atheist and skeptical arguments. A disappointment, in terms of the book, is that it did not really explore how Christians can be edified by philosophical insights. Granted, it talked about how philosophy can sharpen one’s mind, but, when it came to philosophy, it largely focused on the questions of whether God and the soul exist. Can philosophy do more than buttress what Christians already believe to be true? Can it teach them anything new? On pages 38-39, Copan refers positively to analytic theologians who “haven’t focused primarily on Christian apologetics or arguments for God’s existence.” Copan’s book would have been better had its horizons been broader. The book also had somewhat of a siege mentality, in places: Christians must try to protect their faith, and Christians should hang around their own. I should stress, though, that, the opposite approach is in the book, too, as it encourages those interested in philosophy to learn the thoughts of major philosophical figures and to engage atheist and skeptical philosophers. Copan also has reasons for holding the Christian faith, which include arguments, its explanatory power, its satisfaction of human longings, and the experiences of the supernatural by people he knows. I doubt that Copan is insecure in his faith. It just seems that he is for exploration, but he wants it to arrive at Christian conclusions. Of course, there are atheists and skeptics who are the same way, with their own worldviews, but is there a way to be open-minded while holding a particular worldview, as opposed to being in a no-man’s land? I received a complimentary copy of this book from the publisher. My review is honest!

Not far into Paul Copan’s //A Little Book for New Philosophers: Why and How to Study Philosophy// I thought to myself, “This may become required reading for all introductory courses in Bible and theology programs.” The first two chapters are

absolutely fantastic and rightly demonstrate a place for philosophy within Christianity. However, Copan thereafter takes a sharp dive into axioms and poorly articulated arguments that leave the reader wondering how this was ever intended to be a primer on philosophy for Christians. It feels as if Copan assumes //a priori// knowledge of the very reasoning espoused so that it need not be articulated, which is contrary to the book's purpose. Unfortunately, rather than introducing the reader to philosophy's place in Christianity, this fits better as an exercise in dogma. (Concerning much of what is actually articulated, Copan relies heavily on Alvin Plantinga, which speaks to his tradition and philosophical presuppositions.) Concerning the positive note, the following are included in the first two chapters:

- "Philosophy is mind-sharpening." (20)
- "Philosophy helps us to see that ideas have consequences." (21)
- "Philosophy expands our horizons." (21)
- "Philosophy can help isolate bad or sloppy thinking." (22)
- "Philosophy can strengthen our theology." (24)
- "Everyone takes a philosophical view of things • a worldview, some call it • even if their philosophical assumptions are subconscious and unexplored. Like it or not, whatever your outlook or training, you are a philosopher!" (31)
- "Another way of looking at philosophy is as a kind of tool. In this sense it is a //way// of thinking, not the //result// of your thinking." (33, emphasis original.)

I expected more from IVP Academic with this one, but it does fit a theological trend in what I've seen from them recently. However, despite my overall opinions of the text, I would still recommend students read through chapter 2 of this book.\*I received a temporary digital copy for review from IVP Academic via NetGalley.

A Little Book for New Philosophers by Paul Copan is an excellent, short guide as to why and how to study philosophy. This book is notable for giving a very short, cogent summary of why it is reasonable to believe that God exists, as the author notes as follows:

- "We should also consider God's robust explanatory power. Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga says that theism "offers suggestions for answers to a wide range of otherwise intractable questions. The existence of consciousness, beauty, free will, personhood, rationality, duties and human value • not to mention the beginning and fine-tuning of the universe and the existence of life itself • are hardly surprising if a good, personal, rational, creative, powerful and wise God exists. Conversely, these 10 phenomena are quite startling if they are the result of deterministic, valueless, non-conscious and

non-rational material processes. Another key section of this book is a compelling answer to atheist Bertrand Russell's questions as to why God doesn't provide more evidence of his existence. According to Copan, God doesn't reveal himself to the proud, the apathetic or half-hearted. Rather, God reveals himself to those who seek him with all their heart. God rewards faith, not skepticism. Since philosophy is the love of wisdom, true philosophers will love this book.

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