

A Philosophy of Life

The Philosophy of Oscar Geiger



A Ten-lesson Course
Text: A Seed Was Sown
by Robert Clancy



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A Philosophy of Life *(the Philosophy of Oscar Geiger)*

LESSON I: The Life of Oscar Geiger

Text: *A Seed Was Sown*, by Robert Clancy

Part I - Life

Oscar Geiger was first and foremost a follower of Henry George. He devoted most of his spare time to promulgating the Georgist philosophy, and his most important work was the founding of the Henry George School. But he was also a philosopher, and he developed a philosophy that he felt embodied "the wisdom of the ages." Much of his philosophy was based on George's. Though George was primarily an economist and social philosopher, he too was interested in general philosophical problems, and toward the end of his life was developing a broader philosophy (*A Perplexed Philosopher, The Condition of Labor, Science of Political Economy*). In this course we will follow the philosophy developed by Geiger, which touches the most important questions dealt with by philosophers, and so this course will serve as a good general introduction to philosophy.

1. Describe some activities of the followers of Henry George after his death. (from 1897 to about 1924).
2. In Oscar Geiger's opinion, what were the shortcomings of most of these activities in "putting across" the Georgist philosophy?
3. What were Geiger's reasons for starting a school instead of continuing with political action, etc.?

The Nature of Philosophy

4. What is philosophy?

5. What is the difference between (a) Philosophy and Science?

(b) Philosophy and Religion?

6. Why study philosophy?

Main branches of philosophy:

Metaphysics

Logic

Ethics

Politics

Esthetics

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LESSON II - The Road to Wisdom

Assignment: Proem: *The Road to Wisdom*, and Part II, *A Seed Was Sown*

In the quest for truth, how to proceed? What path to take? How can we obtain valid conclusions which will guide us?

1. In the quest for truth, discuss the advantages and shortcomings of the following:

a) The five senses

b) Experience (the things that happen to us in life)

c) Authority (what we read,, what others tell us)

d) Intuition, (impulse; instinct, the 6th sense")

2. Describe **reasoning**, and explain its importance in the quest for truth.

3. What are the two most important forms of reasoning? Define.

4. The following is an example of a correct syllogism: "All dogs are mammals. All mammals are vertebrates. Therefore, all dogs are vertebrates." Offer two more syllogisms of your own, one affirmative, one negative.

5. The following is a fallacious syllogism: "All dogs are mammals. All cats are mammals. Therefore all dogs are cats." You know this is wrong in fact. What is wrong with it logically? Explain.

6. Some modern thinkers say that we cannot speak of "cause and effect" but only of the "probability" of an event occurring. What is your own understanding of the matter?

John Stuart Mill's canons of induction:

1. the method of agreement (a presumed cause is present when the effect is present)
2. the method of difference (the presumed cause is absent when the effect is absent)
3. the method of concomitant variations (the presumed cause is present in the degree that the effect is present)
4. the method of residual variations (after eliminating all other possible causes, there is still a residual effect which can be accounted for by the presumed cause). The planet Neptune was discovered by this method. The astronomer Herschel noticed perturbations in the orbit of Uranus. He figured that there must be another planet beyond Uranus, calculated its probable size, distance and time of revolution around the sun, and predicted where and when it would be found; later his calculations were proven correct, and Neptune was discovered.

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LESSON III - Natural Law

Assignment: Part II, Chapter I

The main purpose of philosophy is to serve as a guide through life. This suggests that it can throw light on the path ahead of us. Can we “see” into the future? Can we predict?

1. How would you explain natural law to someone who had never heard of it?
2. How can we be sure that we have discovered a natural law?
3. "Out of a handful of seeds sown, some took root, others died. Therefore natural law is only approximate, not exact." How would you answer this?
4. Is natural law really natural, or is it man-made? Support your answer.

5. Justify the assertion that natural law operates in the social sciences. (Bear in mind the objection that "human nature is capricious.")

6. Give three examples of natural law in various fields or subjects. Include a social science.

Man can no more resist or swerve a natural law than he can build a world. They are acknowledged not only by all men in all times and places, but also by all animate and all inanimate things; and their sway extends not only over and throughout the whole earth of which we are constantly changing tenants, but over and through the whole system of which it is a part, and so far as either observation or reason can give us light, over and through the whole universe, visible or invisible. So far as we can see, either by observation or by reason, they know not change nor the shadow of turning, but are the same - yesterday, to-day, to-morrow; for they are expressions, not of the mutable will of man, but of the immutable will of God.

- Henry George, *The Science of Political Economy*

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LESSON IV - Unity

Assignment - Chapter 2 (Some supplementary reading on atomic theory would be helpful)

If we are to find a reliable guide through life, we must understand what kind of universe we are living in - its nature, and our place in it.

1. How does Geiger's concept of Unity differ from:

a. Supernaturalism (the belief in a being or beings distinct from nature)

b. Materialism (the belief that nothing exists beyond the scope of our senses)

c. Dualism (the belief in a two-fold world - the tangible one of physical reality and the intangible one of mind)

2. In what ways do the findings of science support the philosophic concept of Unity?

3. Describe briefly the way all matter is built up from combinations of the prime units, the electron and proton.
4. What is the nature of these ultimate particles (electron and proton)? Philosophically, why can't we stop there?
5. What is the place of the "Ether" in Geiger's concept of Unity?
6. Discuss the terms "space" and "ether". Why did Geiger feel justified in using the two synonymously? (A suggestion: See "The Universe and Dr. Einstein" by Lincoln Barnett - a Mentor book).

Interesting reading: *Science Matters* by Robert M. Hazen and James Trefil

Taking a look at the world around us today, a reconciliation of such diverse forces [as those identified by modern physics] appears far from possible. The reason is that we live in a low-energy, cold universe, one in which forces and matters seem stable and disconnected. But the universe was not always as we observe it today. The cosmos has cooled down dramatically since the moment of its origin. As it cooled, the infant universe left a trail of clues that physicists have followed back to the beginning. There, at the instant of the Big Bang or shortly thereafter, most physicists believe, lies the key to the universe. In that instant, the four forces may have existed in the intense energy of the primordial cataclysm for a fraction of a second as a single interaction. This interaction is thought to be so basic that all subsequent forces descended from it.

Theoretical physicists using the latest mathematical reconstructions have developed a good idea of what happened within less than a billion trillionth of a second after the Big Bang. A remarkable achievement, but still it doesn't go far enough back in time for them to see, in their equations, the moment when all the forces and laws of nature were unified.

-John Boslough, *Stephen Hawking's Universe*

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Lesson V - Intent

Assignment - Chapter 3

Wherever we look in nature, we see evidence of evolutionary movement toward a higher level of consciousness. Is there an intent to the universe? What can we discover about it?

1. What does Geiger say is the nature of the "ether" (or "space")? Why this conclusion?
2. What relationship does Geiger see between Spirit, Force and Matter? How are these three factors reconciled with the concept of Unity?
3. Give the reasons for concluding that there is but one Intent in the universe for all matter, instead of separate "intentions" or "volitions" for all the different forms (manifestations) of matter.
4. How would we go about seeking to learn what is the Intent in Nature?

5. Taking a long-range view, what is the tendency of evolution? Toward what does it seem to be tending?

6. What are the reasons for concluding that thought, consciousness and reason are among the qualities or attributes of Unity?

Interesting reading: *The God Particle* by Leon Lederman

It is enough for me to contemplate the mystery of conscious life perpetuating itself through all eternity, to reflect upon the marvelous structure of the universe which we can dimly perceive, and to try humbly to comprehend even an infinitesimal part of the intelligence manifested in nature. - Albert Einstein

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Lesson VI - The Law of Achievement

Assignment - Chapter 4

All is unity, across the universe - but does Unity and Natural Law extend even to individual motivation? This-week we turn to a study of ourselves.

1. If everything, including ourselves, is part of Unity, why then need we master ourselves?
2. "If everything is determined by natural law, this must include our own thoughts, choices and actions. Therefore, we have no free will." How would you answer this?
3. Out of Geiger's presentation of the Law of Achievement, make up a concise formulation of this law.
4. How does the Law of Achievement apply in the evolution of animal life?

5. How does the Law of Achievement Apply in learning a new skill? Describe briefly how you learned a new skill.

6. Offer an example of some great achievement. Describe it briefly to illustrate the Law of Achievement.

On May 25th, 1961, President John F. Kennedy addressed the Congress concerning the future of the U.S. space program. He spoke in favor of the goal "...before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth." How do Kennedy's remarks correspond to Geiger's Law of Achievement?

"I believe we possess all the resources and talents necessary. But the facts of the matter are that we have never made the national decisions or marshaled the national resources required for such leadership. We have never specified long-range goals on an urgent time schedule, or managed our resources and our time so as to insure their fulfillment....

"I believe we should go to the moon. But I think every citizen of this country as well as the Members of Congress should consider the matter carefully in making their judgement, to which we have given attention over many weeks and months, because it is a heavy burden, and there is no sense in agreeing or desiring that the United States take an affirmative position in outer space, unless we are prepared to do the work and bear the burdens to make it successful."

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Lesson VII - A Worthy Goal

Assignment: Chapter 5

Geiger teaches us, "I am the master of my fate, the captain of my soul." If we ask, "What can I do, what should I do?" Nature answers, "What **will** you do?"

1. (a) Does the Law of Achievement work for goals that are “bad” as well as for those that are “good”?
- (b) What are the limits of this?
- (c) Can a natural law work for a purpose that is contrary to nature?
2. What is happiness?
3. What sort of goals must be sought in order to attain durable happiness? Why?

4. Using the Law of Achievement as a guide, how would you account for a failure even when the intention appears to be firm (E.G., in Maugham's *Of Human Bondage*, Philip Carey tried to become an artist and failed.)

5. In order to develop a personal character in tune with Unity, what are some of the qualities that need to be developed, and what are others that need to be overcome?

6. How did Oscar Geiger make out in applying the Law of Achievement in founding the Henry George School? Why did he have so many difficulties?

✂ The truth that I have tried to make clear will not find easy acceptance. If that could be, it would have been accepted long ago. If that could be, it never would have been obscured. But it will find friends - those who will toil for it; suffer for it; if need be, die for it. This is the power of Truth.

Will it at length prevail? Ultimately, yes. But in our own times, or in times of which any memory of us remains, who can say?

For the man who, seeing the want and misery, the ignorance and the brutishness caused by unjust social conditions, sets himself, in so far as he has strength, to right them, there is disappointment and bitterness. So it has been of old time. So it is even now. But the bitterest thought - and sometimes it comes to the best and bravest - is that of the hopelessness of the effort, the futility of the sacrifice. To how few of those who saw the seed is it given to see it grow, or even with certainty to know that it will grow. ✂

- Henry George, *PROGRESS AND POVERTY*

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Lesson VIII - The Soul of Man

Assignment - Chapter 6

This part of Geiger's philosophy is perhaps the most controversial. Many who go along with him on other phases balk at this. Understandably so, because the question of whether we survive after death is one that affects us all profoundly, and it is difficult to be objective about it. However, we should try to be philosophical about this as with the other subjects dealt with - if we want to merit the name "Philosopher."

1. How does Geiger deduce the immortality of man's soul from his philosophical concepts?
2. The question of survival after death has often been consigned by philosophers to the "unknowable". How does Geiger justify making it "knowable?"
3. What are the limits of man's knowledge on any subject, including the question of survival?
4. How would a belief in immortality (i.e., survival) be reconciled with the concept of Unity, as opposed to "supernaturalism" (or dualism)?

5. What movement of modern times did Geiger turn to for evidence of survival, and what is its current standing in the world of science?

6. Can you cite a case (in personal experience, or in reading or hearing about the experience of others) that might be seriously considered in weighing the evidence for survival?

Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and enquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at En-dor.

And Saul disguised himself, and put on other raiment, and he went, and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night: and he said, I pray thee, divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me him up, whom I shall name unto thee. And the woman said unto him, behold, thou knowest what Saul hath done, how he hath cut off those that have familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land: wherefore then layest thou a snare for my life, to cause me to die?

And Saul sware to her by the LORD, saying, as the LORD liveth, there shall no punishment happen to thee for this thing.

Then said the woman, whom shall I bring up to thee? And he said, bring me up Samuel.

And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice: and the woman spake to Saul, saying, why hast thou deceived me? For thou art Saul.

And the king said unto her, Be not afraid: for what sawest thou? And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods ascending out of the earth.

And he said unto her, what form is he of? And she said, an old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself.

And Samuel said to Saul, why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore

distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known to me what I shall do.

Then said Samuel, wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing that the LORD is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy?

And the LORD hath done to him, as he spake by me: for the LORD hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to thy neighbor, even to David: Because thou obeydst not the voice of the LORD, nor executedst his fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore has the LORD done this thing unto thee this day.

Moreover the LORD will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines: and to morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me: the LORD shall also deliver the host of Israel unto the Philistines. Then Saul fell straightway all along on the earth, and was sore afraid, because of the words of Samuel: and there was no strength in him; for he had eaten no bread all the day, nor all the night. And the woman came unto Saul, and saw that he was sore troubled, and said unto him, Behold, thine handmaid hath obeyed thy voice, and I have put my life in thy hand, and have hearkened unto thy words that thou spakest unto me.

Now therefore, I pray thee, hearken thou also unto the voice of thy handmaid, and let me set a morsel of bread before thee; and eat, that thou mayest have strength, when thou goest on thy way.

I Samuel, 28:7-22

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Lesson IX - Social Philosophy

Assignment - Chapters 7, 8 & 9

We have been studying man as an individual. He is also a social animal. Geiger's social philosophy is essentially that of Henry George; but he had his own approach to the subject which is worth noting.

1. "Am I my brother's keeper?" Oscar Geiger says yes; Louis F. Post says no. Discuss a reconciliation of the two viewpoints.
2. "He who would be served must serve." Geiger considers this to be a natural law of society. How would you build up a case for this?
3. Geiger calls land value a "subjective value." Explain.
4. Land value rises, and the price of labor products falls, as society grows - and vice versa as society disappears. Describe in more detail how this happens.

5- Land values and communal expenses both grow with the growth of the community. If it were said that this is merely a coincidence, how would you reply to support the natural-law relationship that Geiger sees in it?

6. It is quite a large statement to say that the fate of civilization depends on whether society collects land rent (as Geiger says). Show that this is basic enough to affect civilization.

We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.

- Aldo Leopold, Sand County Almanac.

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Lesson X - Summary and Evaluation

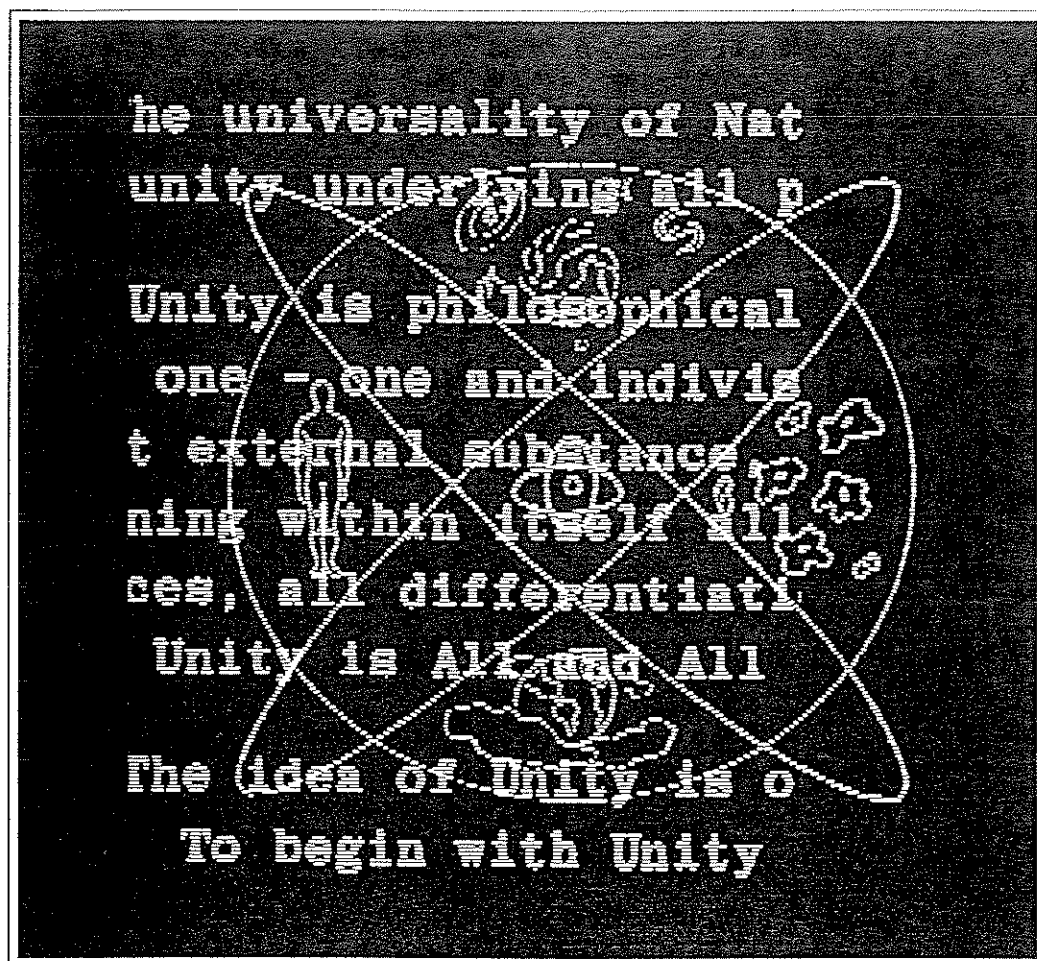
A. Summary

On this page, summarize what you consider to be the important points in Oscar Geiger's philosophy. Present your summary as a linked chain of thought.

B. Evaluation

On this page, write your own evaluation of Geiger's philosophy. If you disagree with any points, include your reasons. Comment freely according to your own thinking.

A good follow-up on the study of philosophy: *Readings in Philosophy* by Randall, Buchler & Shirk (Barnes & Noble).



*"There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio,
than are dreamt of in your philosophy...." The above
illustration was a computer accident. The scanner
mysteriously superimposed Robert Clancy's words
about 'Unity' on his drawing. We were delighted
with this little piece of serendipitously "found art,"
and thought it worth sharing.*

- Lindy Davies