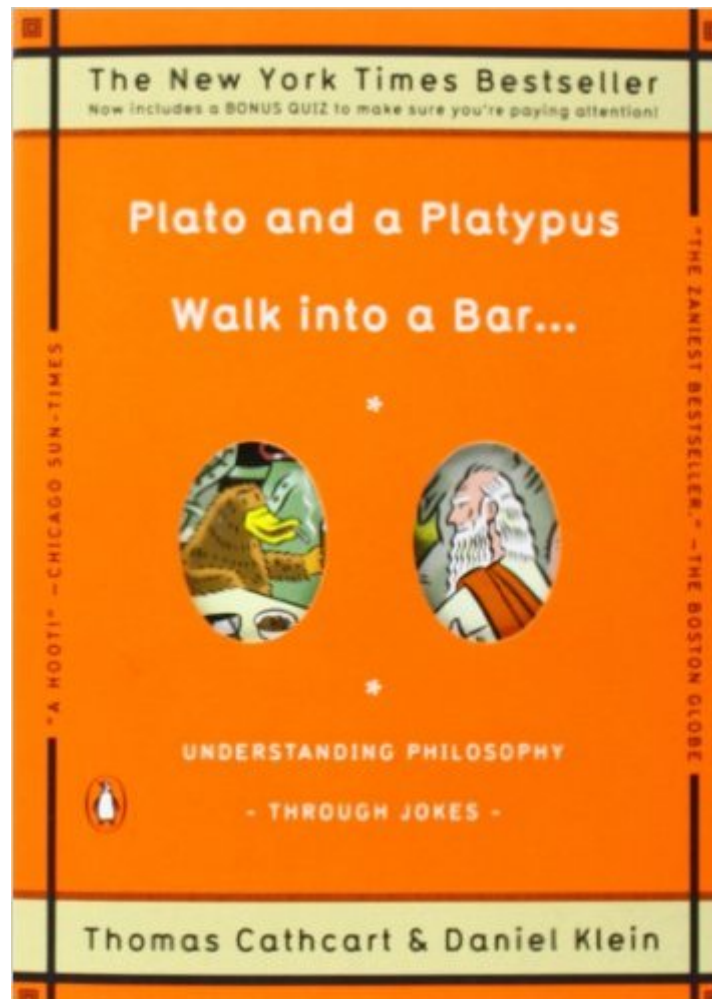


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# Plato And A Platypus Walk Into A Bar ...: Understanding Philosophy Through Jokes



## Synopsis

This New York Times bestseller is the hilarious philosophy course everyone wishes they'd had in school. Outrageously funny, *Plato and a Platypus Walk into a Bar...* has been a breakout bestseller ever since authors—and born vaudevillians—Thomas Cathcart and Daniel Klein did their schtick on NPR's Weekend Edition. Lively, original, and powerfully informative, *Plato and a Platypus Walk into a Bar...* is a not-so-reverent crash course through the great philosophical thinkers and traditions, from Existentialism (What do Hegel and Bette Midler have in common?) to Logic (Sherlock Holmes never deduced anything). Philosophy 101 for those who like to take the heavy stuff lightly, this is a joy to read—and finally, it all makes sense! And now, you can read Daniel Klein's further musings on life and philosophy in *Travels with Epicurus* and *Every Time I Find the Meaning of Life, They Change it*.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is such a profound and hilarious treasure of a little book that I have ordered several as gifts for family and friends. Because I am long removed from the formal study of philosophy in college, I am grateful to be so smoothly and delightfully reintroduced to philosophical concepts. I intended to read only a brief section (one concept) at a time--each takes no more than fifteen minutes-- but couldn't keep away for long, and finished the book in a day. Now I've lent my copy to a friend, but I can hardly wait to get it back and read it again. In an early 20th century Webster's, philosophy is defined as "Literally, the love of, inducing the search after, wisdom; in actual usage, the knowledge of phenomena as explained by, and resolved into, causes and reasons, powers and laws." *Plato and*

the Platypus describes the findings of the great philosophers throughout history who have conducted the search after wisdom and taught their explanations of phenomena. And then it illustrates the causes and reasons, the powers and laws, with jokes--good jokes, relevant jokes, jokes that made me laugh aloud even as they stimulated my own search. I don't think I have ever before had such a joyful read. Peggy Smith author, Mark My Words: Instruction and Practice in Proofreading

The Roman satirist Juvenal famously quipped "Difficile est saturam non scibere" -- it's difficult not to write satire. It was difficult nearly two millennia ago, and Thomas Cathcart and Daniel Klein prove it still is today. Satire provides a profound examination of an idea. Aristotle wrote "Humor is the only test of gravity, for a subject which will not bear raillery is suspicious, and a jest which will not bear serious examination is false wit." It's been said he identified a very compelling reason for using humor: it's a test of ideas. Humor is a challenge to the very core of an idea -- its gravity, its seriousness. If an idea can't withstand humor it will crumble under intellectual scrutiny. In a section on Aristotle contrasting between "essential" and "accidental" properties, Cathcart and Klein offer this illustrative joke:

No doubt about it, this is a fun little book to read. That said, if you hoped for a painless way to get an even superficial understanding of the basics of philosophy, you'll probably have to keep looking. Unfortunately, that was my hope. I didn't expect to finish the book with a Phd, or even a bachelor's degree worth of philosophical knowledge or understanding, but I did hope to get a loose mental framework upon which I could hang future philosophical learnings. That didn't happen, but I did get one or two really good jokes and 40 or 50 mediocre jokes. In the end, it just felt like Cathcart and Klein knew that to sell more copies they might be better off emphasizing the jokes more heavily and the philosophy less so. That's actually too bad, because their idea about jokes conveying a sense of philosophy really does seem true, and the humor really has the power to cement the philosophical ideas in your head where they might not otherwise stick so well. Overall, this isn't a bad book, but it seems like a missed opportunity to do something more special.

First of all, the book is very readable, and the idea of the book almost precious. The jokes are usually funny. I am not sorry I read it. However, it ultimately fails. The tiny book does not do justice to the philosophical concepts it covers, and anyone with more than a little knowledge in the discipline will know how limited the explanations are. In addition, as funny as they are, some of the jokes are

REALLY a stretch, made to fit sometimes as a negative example. If a reader wants a fun read, fine. If the reader really wants to know about philosophy, I would suggest going elsewhere.

The authors Cathcart and Klien have attempted to write a primer on philosophy with jokes as an illustration in understanding certain concepts, rules, etc. Well, they both fail and succeed. First, as a previous reviewer notes, the philosophy is shallow. I am assuming he means there is not even enough here to satisfy the requirements as a basic primer, of which I would whole heartily agree. Yes, they introduce basic ideas, but there is so little presented, not to mention sometimes they commit basic errors themselves. Further, the authors have certain pet-peeves to say the least and sometimes, but by no means too often, present a less than honest view (I don't mean here they are lying, for that assumes they completely understand the issues themselves, but that their bias does not see when an opposing side commits the same errors they deride about or that they have not really understood the debate). Now the jokes are the genius of the book. Yes, they are funny and yes, they are correlated to the rules of philosophy they are trying to communicate. Here, they did a splendid job! I was laughing like I was about to die. Five stars for the jokes and their placement with the material, 2 stars on the philosophy. 3 and half \*\*\*.

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