Cengage Advantage Books

THE VOYAGE OF Discovery

A HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

FOURTH EDITION

WILLIAM F. LAWHEAD

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF PHILOSOPHERS

THE ANCIENT PERIOD

Thales	c.	624–545 B.C.E.
Anaximander	c.	610–545 B.C.E.
Anaximenes	c.	580–500 B.C.E.
Pythagoras	c.	570–495 B.C.E.
Xenophanes	c.	570–478 B.C.E.
Heraclitus	c.	540–480 B.C.E.
Parmenides	c.	515–450 B.C.E.
Anaxagoras		500–428 B.C.E.
Empedocles	c.	495–435 B.C.E.
Zeno the Eleatic	c.	490–430 B.C.E.
Protagoras	c.	490–420 B.C.E.
Gorgias	c.	483–375 B.C.E.
Socrates	c.	470–399 B.C.E.
Democritus	c.	460–360 B.C.E.
Plato	c.	428–348 B.C.E.
Aristotle		384–322 B.C.E.
Pyrrho	c.	360–270 B.C.E.
Epicurus		341–270 B.C.E.
Zeno the Stoic	c.	336–264 B.C.E.
Epictetus	c.	50–138
Plotinus		205–270

THE MIDDLE AGES

Augustine, Saint		354–430
Hypatia	c.	370–415
Boethius	c.	480–524
Erigena, John Scotus	c.	810–877
Avicenna		980–1037
Anselm, Saint		1033–1109
Al-Ghazali		1058–1111
Abelard, Peter		1079–1142
Hildegard of Bingen		1098–1179
Averroës		1126–1198
Maimonides, Moses		1135–1204
Aquinas, Saint Thomas		1225–1274
Eckhart, Meister	c.	1260–1327
Scotus, John Duns	c.	1266–1308
Ockham, William of	c.	1280–1349

THE MODERN PERIOD

Erasmus, Desiderius	1466–1536
Copernicus, Nicholas	1473–1543
Luther, Martin	1483–1546
Bacon, Francis	1561–1626
Galileo	1564–1642
Hobbes, Thomas	1588–1679
Descartes, René	1596–1650
Pascal, Blaise	1623–1662
Spinoza, Benedict (Baruch)	1632–1677
Locke, John	1632–1704
Newton, Sir Isaac	1642–1727
Leibniz, Gottfried	1646–1716
Berkeley, George	1685–1753
Voltaire	1694–1778
Hume, David	1711–1776
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques	1712–1778
Kant, Immanuel	1724–1804
Bentham, Jeremy	1748–1832
Wollstonecraft, Mary	1759–1797
Hegel, Georg W. F.	1770–1831
Schopenhauer, Arthur	1788–1860
Comte, Auguste	1798–1857
Mill, John Stuart	1806–1873
Darwin, Charles	1809–1882
Kierkegaard, Søren	1813–1855
Marx, Karl	1818–1883
Engels, Friedrich	1820–1895
Dostoevsky, Fyodor	1821–1881
Nietzsche, Friedrich	1844–1900

THE CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

Peirce, Charles S.	1839–1914
James, William	1842–1910
Freud, Sigmund	1856–1939
Husserl, Edmund	1859–1938
Bergson, Henri	1859–1941
Dewey, John	1859–1952
Whitehead, Alfred North	1861–1947
Russell, Bertrand	1872–1970
Einstein, Albert	1879–1955
Wittgenstein, Ludwig	1889–1951
Heidegger, Martin	1889–1976
Carnap, Rudolph	1891–1970
Ryle, Gilbert	1900–1976
Sartre, Jean-Paul	1905–1980
Beauvoir, Simone de	1908–1986
Quine, Willard V. O.	1908–2000
Ayer, A. J.	1910–1989
Austin, John	1911–1960
Kuhn, Thomas	1922–1996
Foucault, Michel	1926–1984
Derrida, Jacques	1930–2004
Rorty, Richard	1931–2007
Nussbaum, Martha	1947–present

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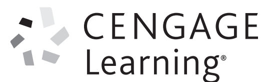
A HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

FOURTH EDITION

William F. Lawhead
The University of Mississippi



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To my wife Pam,
whose passion and caring for others
have been an inspiration.

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Preface

This book has grown out of many decades of teaching the history of Western philosophy. I love to teach this subject. I have found that the history of philosophy develops students' critical-thinking skills. After journeying with the course for a while and following the point and counterpoint movements of the great historical debates, students begin to show a flare for detecting the assumptions, strengths, problems, and implications of a thinker's position. Furthermore, the history of philosophy provides students with an arsenal of essential terms, distinctions, categories, and critical questions for making sense out of the barrage of ideas they encounter in history, literature, psychology, politics, and even on television.

One reward of teaching philosophy is seeing students develop new confidence in themselves after finding a kindred spirit in one or more of the great minds of history, who agrees with their own assessment of what is fallacious or sound. By exposing students to unfamiliar viewpoints that are outrageous, fascinating, perplexing, hopeful, dangerous, gripping, troubling, and exhilarating, the history of philosophy helps them gain a renewed sense of childlike wonder, teaching them to look at the world with new eyes. Finally, throughout the history of philosophy, students often find ideas that are liberating and challenging, leading them down exciting paths that were not even on their conceptual maps when they started the course. I hope that this book will be an effective navigator's guide to such intellectual journeys.

GOALS THAT GUIDED THE WRITING OF THIS BOOK

After many years of teaching a course, a professor begins to get a sense of the "ideal" textbook. For me, an effective history-of-philosophy text should achieve the following goals:

1. Make the ideas of the philosophers as clear and accessible as possible to the average person. A student-friendly philosophy text should not read like an encyclopedia article, which contains dense but terse summaries of factual information.
2. Provide strategies for sorting out the overwhelming mass of contradictory ideas encountered in the history of philosophy.
3. Find the correct balance between (a) technical accuracy versus accessibility and (b) breadth of scope versus depth of exposition.
4. Communicate the fact that philosophy is more than simply a collection of opinions on basic issues. Understanding a philosopher's arguments is just as important as knowing the philosopher's conclusions.
5. Encourage the reader to evaluate the ideas discussed. The history of philosophy should be more than the intellectual equivalent of a wine-tasting party, where various philosophers are "sampled" simply to enjoy their distinct flavors. Although that is certainly one of the delights of studying philosophy, and should be encouraged, assessing the strengths and weaknesses of a philosopher's ideas is equally important.
6. Make clear the continuity of the centuries-long philosophical conversation. A course in the history of philosophy should not be like a display of different philosophical exhibits in glass cases. For me, the guiding image is philosophy as a big party where new conversations are continually starting up, while the themes of previous conversations are picked up and carried in different directions as new participants join the dialogue.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THIS TEXT

- *The Introduction provides tools for studying philosophy.* It (1) motivates the study of philosophy's

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history, (2) provides criteria for evaluating philosophical claims, (3) discusses procedures for analyzing arguments, and (4) surveys the main types of philosophical questions. In addition, an important section on "A Strategy for Reading Philosophy" presents a four-step approach that takes the student from the acquisition of facts about a philosopher's position, then into exploratory and critical inquiries, and finally to a personal engagement with that position.

- *A consistent structure is used.* For consistency and ease of comparison, the majority of chapters follow the same basic pattern:
  1. The life and times of the philosopher
  2. The major philosophical task that the philosopher tried to accomplish
  3. Theory of knowledge
  4. Metaphysics
  5. Moral and political philosophy (when relevant)
  6. Philosophy of religion (when relevant)
  7. Evaluation and significance
- *Analysis of philosophical arguments is provided.* To emphasize that philosophy is a process and not just a set of results, I discuss the intellectual problems that motivated a philosopher's position and the reasons provided in its support. The book analyzes twenty-three explicitly outlined arguments of various philosophers, providing models of philosophical argumentation and analysis. For example, in Chapter 15 I set out and analyze Descartes's causal argument for God and his version of the ontological argument. In Chapter 21, I set out and analyze Hume's argument that all causal reasoning is fallacious. In addition to these twenty-three formal arguments, I informally discuss numerous other arguments throughout the book.
- *The evaluation of ideas is stressed.* Most of the chapters end with a short evaluation of the philosophy discussed. These evaluations, however, are not presented as decisive "refutations" of the philosopher, which would relieve the reader of any need to think further. Instead, the evaluations have been posed in terms of problems needing to be addressed and questions requiring an answer. Whenever possible, I have made this section a part of the historical dialogue by expressing the appraisals given by the philosopher's contemporaries and successors. For example, in Chapter 27 I ask the reader to consider whether Nietzsche is correct in assuming that it is necessarily the case that a belief cannot correspond to objective reality if it appeals to our subjective needs.
- *The significance of the ideas is emphasized.* The conclusion of each chapter also indicates the immediate and long-term significance of the philosopher's ideas and prepares the reader for the next turn in the historical dialogue. It makes clear the ways in which philosophical ideas can lead robust lives that continue far beyond their authors' times. For example, in summing up Aristotle's significance in Chapter 5, I discuss his influence on later literary figures and Christian philosophers.
- *The philosophers are related to their cultural contexts.* Each major historical period (Greek, early Christian to medieval, Renaissance and Reformation, Enlightenment, the nineteenth century, and the twentieth century) is introduced with a brief chapter discussing the intellectual–social milieu that provides the setting for the philosophies of that era. The questions addressed are: What were the dominant concerns and assumptions that animated each period in history? How did the different philosophers respond to their eras' main currents of thought? How did they influence their culture?
- *Diagrams.* Fifteen diagrams and two tables provide visual representations of the elements of various philosophers' ideas. For example, in Chapter 20 I visually represent the difference between Descartes's and Locke's view of perception on the one hand, and Berkeley's view on the other.
- *Think About It boxes.* Thinking exercises have been interspersed throughout the text to challenge the reader to interact with the ideas that were just presented. These are not review questions but

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are an encouragement to engage reflectively with the material. For example, following the discussion of Augustine's treatment of the problem of evil in Chapter 8, I ask the reader to think of a time when something caused him or her suffering but turned out to serve a good purpose in the long run. In Chapter 22, in discussing Kant's ethics, I ask the reader to evaluate Kant's claim that the consequences of an action play no role in making a moral judgment.

- *Contemporary Connections boxes.* At the end of each chapter, there is a discussion of the contemporary relevance of each particular philosopher or historical era. This is an attempt to illustrate William Faulkner's claim that "The past is not dead. In fact, it's not even past." For example, at the end of Chapter 5, I discuss Aristotle's influence on literary criticism, contemporary virtue theory, and the debate over whether human nature is fixed or completely changeable. At the end of Chapter 19, I discuss the contemporary debate among cognitive scientists as to whether Locke was correct in dismissing innate knowledge or whether the rationalists were right in claiming there are innate structures to the mind.
- *Glossary*. A glossary is provided in which key terms used throughout the book are clearly and thoroughly defined. Words appearing in boldface in the text may be found in the glossary.
- *Questions for understanding and reflection.* At the end of each chapter are two lists of questions. The questions for understanding are more factual and enable the readers to review their understanding of the important ideas and terms. The questions for reflection require the readers to engage in philosophy by making their own evaluations of the philosopher's ideas, as well as working out their implications.
- *Instructor's Manual.* In addition to the usual sections containing test questions and essay questions, this manual provides suggested topics for research papers, tips for introducing and motivating interest in each philosopher, chapter-by-chapter topics for discussion, and contemporary implications of each philosopher's ideas. Instructors can find the instructor's manual by visiting www.cengage.com and searching for the book in Cengage's catalogue. A link to the site where the instructor's manual can be downloaded is provided on the book's page. Instructor's access will be needed to download the manual; ask your sales representative if you don't already have access.
- *Two formats.* This book is available in two formats. There is the one-volume edition, which covers philosophy from the early Greeks to the contemporary period. An alternative format divides the book into four paperback volumes, corresponding to the four historical periods that structure the one-volume edition. This format makes it much more economical for instructors who wish to use only selected parts of the book for courses that emphasize particular time periods. Contact your sales representative for more information about this custom publishing option.

SUGGESTED WAYS TO USE THIS BOOK

This book may be used with students who are already familiar with the leading issues and positions in philosophy and who now need to place these ideas in their historical context. However, since it does not assume any previous acquaintance with the subject, it may also be used to introduce students to philosophy for the first time, through the story of its history. I have tried to make clear that philosophy is an ongoing conversation, in which philosophers respond to the insights and shortcomings of their predecessors. Nevertheless, the chapters are self-contained enough that the instructor may put together a course that uses selected chapters. For example, the chapter on Aquinas could be used as representative of medieval philosophy and Descartes used to represent the modern rationalists (skipping Spinoza and Leibniz). In the case of chapters that discuss a number of philosophers, only certain sections could be assigned. For example, to get a quick but partial glimpse of the wide range covered by analytic philosophy, the students could read only the sections on the early and

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later Wittgenstein. Although skipping over key thinkers is not ideal, teaching is a continual battle between time constraints and the desire to cover as much material in as much depth as possible.

The *Instructor's Manual* contains objective and essay questions that may be used in making up tests. In addition, Part 1 contains more reflective questions for discussion and essay assignments. I would encourage the instructor to make use of these questions in class in order to emphasize that philosophy is not just a list of "who said what," but that it also involves the evaluation and application of great ideas. Furthermore, because the students will have some of these topics and others posed as questions for reflection at the end of each chapter, they can be asked to think about their responses to these questions prior to class discussion.

NEW FEATURES IN THE FOURTH EDITION

- In this edition, I have added several brief primary source readings with study questions to guide the reader into the text. These new readings are as follows:
  - Chapter 3: "Skepticism and the Keys to Success" contains Socrates's argument with Thrasymacus concerning the nature of justice, from Plato's *Republic*.
  - Chapter 4: "Plato: The Search for Ultimate Truth and Reality" contains Plato's Allegory of the Cave from the *Republic*.
  - Chapter 11: "St. Thomas Aquinas: Aristotle's Philosophy and Christian Thought" now includes his five arguments for God from the *Summa Theologica*.
  - Chapter 15: "René Descartes: Founder of Modern Philosophy" supplements the discussion of his struggle with skepticism by adding material from *Meditations 1 and 2*.
  - Chapter 21: "David Hume: The Scottish Skeptic" makes the discussion of his skeptical arguments concerning causal reasoning more concrete by including the relevant passages from *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.
- I have also added five "Women in Philosophy" features, historical profiles that supplement the standard history of philosophy where male philosophers dominate, for historical and sociological reasons. These thinkers have been chosen from each of the four historical periods, with a discussion of two twentieth-century female philosophers. These new features are as follows:
  - In the Introduction, I briefly discuss the absence of female philosophers in the historical accounts of philosophy.
  - Chapter 6: "Classical Philosophy After Aristotle" contains a historical profile of Hypatia of Alexandria.
  - Chapter 10: "Philosophy and Theology in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries" now includes a historical profile of Hildegard of Bingen.
  - Chapter 19: "John Locke: The Rise of Modern Empiricism" has been enriched with a historical profile of Mary Wollstonecraft. Although Locke and Wollstonecraft were not contemporaries, Locke's influence on Wollstonecraft's work makes this the best place to discuss her life and philosophy.
  - Chapter 32: "Phenomenology and Existentialism" now includes a historical profile of Simone de Beauvoir.
  - Chapter 33: "Recent Issues in Philosophy" contains a historical profile of Martha Nussbaum.

I hope that everyone who uses this book will find it both profitable and interesting. I encourage both professors and students to share with me their experience with the book as well as suggestions for improvement. Write to me at: Department of Philosophy, University of Mississippi, University, MS, 38677-1848. You may also e-mail me at: wlawhead@ole miss.edu.

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From the initial, tentative outline of this book to the final chapter revisions, the manuscript has been extensively reviewed both by instructors who

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measured its suitability for the classroom and by scholars who reviewed its historical accuracy. Their comments have made it a much better book than the original manuscript. I take full responsibility, of course, for any remaining shortcomings.

I would like to thank the reviewers of this fourth edition:

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The fourth edition of this book is dedicated to my wife Pam. Throughout my career and the writing of my books she has been my companion, my intellectual inspiration, and my biggest fan.

William F. Lawhead

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Introduction: A Brief Tour Guide to Philosophy

Philosophy Is Not an Optional Experience in Your Life!

PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS IN UNLIKELY PLACES

A number of strange ideas about philosophy float around our culture. Many people think of philosophy as an optional enterprise—just a detached, erudite hobby for the intellectually elite or the socially disabled. For example, someone once defined the philosopher as "a person who describes the impossible and proves the obvious." With equal disdain, some view the history of philosophy as a dusty museum, filled with the outdated relics of bygone eras. However, the history of philosophy is more of a living presence than we may realize. If you listen carefully, you will find philosophical assumptions, questions, and themes hidden within everyday conversations. See if you can find the philosophical issues that are latent within the following scenarios:

1. Two six-year-olds, Margie and Natasha, are arguing over a sand castle at the beach. Natasha says, "You can't play with my sand castle. I worked hard to build it, so it is mine!" Margie replies, "The sand belongs to everyone. You can't own it. Besides, we aren't at school so there are no rules. I can do anything I want. If you don't let me play with this sand castle, I'll bop you on the head." Natasha retorts, "You do that and my big sister will rearrange your nose."
2. Professor Linda Perry, a behavioral psychologist, has been studying hardened criminals to see what events in their childhood caused them to develop anti-social personalities. On her way to church, she begins to wonder if her own religious, moral, and career choices are also the inevitable result of previous causes and the built-in features of her personality.
3. Dr. Gregory Clark, an astronomer, calculates that if the expansion rate of the universe had been one-billionth of a percent larger or smaller, the universe would not have been able to sustain life. This leads him to wonder if such a finely tuned and delicately balanced system might not be the result of an intelligent design. Then again, he thinks, maybe it is just a lucky break produced out of the blind interaction of random, physical events.
4. B. F. Skinner, an experimental psychologist, claims that all our behavior, including the acquisition of language, is the product of experience. According to his theory, a baby learns language as a result of receiving approval for reproducing the sounds of her parents' speech. However, Noam Chomsky, a noted linguist, argues that a child could not learn language unless the mind was already equipped at birth with an inner structure that is capable of organizing the data of the baby's linguistic experience.
5. Carlos Williams says to his twelve-year-old son, "You shouldn't have broken your promise to help with the school fundraiser. What if everyone broke their promises whenever they pleased? No one would ever trust another's promises."
6. Andrew says, "Professor Doreen Thompson doesn't seem to care about whether we learn or not. I hope I never get another teacher like her." Susan replies, "You call her a teacher! She's not a *real* teacher. A real teacher would be concerned about her students and would work hard to help them understand the lesson."
7. Senator Dale Malone argues, "There is too much sex and violence on TV. We don't allow factories to poison the air we breathe. But people's minds are just as important as their bodies. We must

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protect the public from this moral pollution." Senator Julie Freeman replies, "I agree, there is a lot of trash on TV. However, in a free society, we cannot censor any form of expression for this would restrict the free flow of ideas. In the end, the truth could become a victim of this suppression."

THINK ABOUT IT

Introduction 1 What is it about these seven scenarios that makes the issues being discussed philosophical ones?

In each of these cases, philosophical issues lurk in everyday events. More important, each speaker, whether he or she realizes it or not, is expressing the position of one or more of the philosophers discussed in this book. Let's go back over each scenario and identify the philosopher whose ideas were present:

1. Natasha holds to John Locke's theory of property. Locke would partially agree with Margie that the sand on a public beach belongs to everyone, but only when it is in its natural state. However, he would support Natasha's right to the sand castle. When a person mixes her labor with nature, he said, the product she creates is her property. In contrast, Margie sides with Thomas Hobbes. He said that without a governing authority, there are no rules. In the absence of civil laws, everyone has a right to everything and there can be no private property. For this reason, we need to make social agreements, Hobbes said. Otherwise (as Natasha and Margie are about to demonstrate), we will be in a continual state of war and life will be "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." (See Chapters 14 and 19.)
2. Professor Perry is wrestling with the question of whether our choices are free or are determined by causes acting on us. Thomas Hobbes, among others, would say that our behavior is the inevitable result of causes in our environment. Gottfried Leibniz believed that all our actions necessarily follow from our given character. In contrast, René Descartes and Jean-Paul Sartre would say that our choices are genuinely free because the human will is an island of freedom within the surrounding world of causally determined natural events. (See Chapters 14, 15, 17, and 33.)
3. If Dr. Clark decides that there is design in the world that requires an explanation, then he is agreeing with one of Thomas Aquinas's arguments for the existence of God. If he decides that the evidence of design is inconclusive, then he is adopting the skeptical position of David Hume. (See Chapters 11 and 21.)
4. This scenario summarizes a real-life debate between two actual scientists concerning cognition and the acquisition of language. Skinner's position is a version of empiricism (the claim that all our knowledge comes from experience). He stands in a long philosophical tradition that begins in the modern period with John Locke and David Hume. Chomsky's position is an example of rationalism. This is the claim that prior to experience, the mind contains a certain innate, rational content such as the principles of logic. Chomsky's ideas have affinities with those of historical rationalists such as Plato, René Descartes, and Gottfried Leibniz. (See Chapters 4, 15, 17, 19, and 21.)
5. In chastising his son for breaking a promise, Mr. Williams was presenting one of Immanuel Kant's arguments concerning our moral duties. Kant said that we must always ask if we could make the rule we are acting on one that we could consistently wish everybody to follow. (See Chapter 22.)
6. In suggesting that Professor Thompson is not "really" a teacher, despite her title, Susan is echoing Plato's view. Plato believed that ultimate reality consists of perfect ideals of each kind of thing and that particular individuals, such as Professor Thompson, participate in those perfect forms to greater or lesser degrees. (See Chapter 4.)

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7. Senator Malone agrees with Plato that the good society is one that makes its citizens as good as possible. If artistic productions can ennoble us, they can also degrade us. So, the legislator must protect society from art, literature, and music that would make people worse human beings. Senator Freeman is supporting the position of John Stuart Mill that individual liberty and freedom of expression are essential to a good society. (See Chapters 4 and 28.)

Once you learn about the history of philosophy and keep your ears tuned, you can hear the voices of these great philosophical figures in everyday conversations, in newspaper editorials, in advertising, and wherever people express their opinions, their hopes, fears, ideals, and values. There are two reasons why the ideas of past philosophers pop up in contemporary contexts. First, these philosophers dealt with issues that are so fundamental to human experience that everyone must face them. Hence, since we are all asking many of the same questions, it is not surprising that the average person's thought would trace the same paths that others have explored. Second, there is often a direct connection between the way people think today and the thoughts of the great philosophers of history. Although Plato, for example, has been dead for over two thousand years, his ideas are still alive. That is because they have seeped deeply into our Western tradition and have shaped people's way of thinking down through the centuries. Whether or not you have ever read Plato or have even heard of him, some of his ideas are alive and active in structuring the way in which you think about the world. I hope that it will begin to be clear why philosophy is not an optional experience in your life. We are continually engaged with philosophical ideas and assumptions, whether we know it or not. We can work at doing philosophy well, or we can do philosophy in a sloppy, haphazard manner, but we cannot opt out of doing philosophy altogether.

Why Ideas are Like Colds. The fact that a philosopher's ideas can influence us without our knowing it raises an important issue. We acquire most of our beliefs, concepts, values, and attitudes unconsciously. In other words, we "catch" our beliefs and values the way that we catch a cold. When you wake up coughing with a stuffy head and congestion, you know you have a cold. However, you usually do not know when or how you caught the cold (unless, of course, a very close friend had it the week before). What happened is that the cold virus was floating around in your environment, and you simply breathed it in and now it is part of your internal system. Similarly, ideas and values are floating around in your culture. You simply absorb them, without thinking about them, but now they are *your* beliefs and *your* values. By studying philosophy historically, you will be able to (1) get a clearer picture of your own beliefs, (2) understand their origins, and (3) see what strengths and weaknesses others have discovered in them. In this way you will be in a better position to decide whether you want to consciously hold these beliefs or not. Hence, studying the history of philosophy is like reading a consumer's magazine to find out about other people's experiences with a product you are thinking of buying.

Another way to look at it is to say that studying philosophy is a way to develop intellectual muscles. You cannot become strong and physically fit by squeezing marshmallows or lifting blocks of Styrofoam. We develop our muscles by pitting them against something that offers resistance. Similarly, as long as we surround ourselves with people and books whose ideas are comfortable and like our own, we remain intellectually flabby. The philosophers discussed in this book present ideas that are challenging, unfamiliar, and, perhaps, zany and outrageous at times. Nevertheless, they also provide arguments why you should adopt their conclusions. By engaging your intellectual muscles with their arguments, you will develop the skills of critically analyzing others' ideas as well as articulating and defending your own. These skills can be generalized and applied to other courses and careers.

Although I have stressed the practical benefits of studying philosophy, it is important to add that the study of ideas can be rewarding in itself. When a reporter asked mountain climber George Mallory why he risked his life and went to such great expense to be the first person to climb Mount Everest, his

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terse reply was, "Because it's there." The best reason for working through a significant thinker's philosophy is not that it will train your mind for law school (although it will do that), but because "it's there." Like mountains, philosophical ideas contain challenges, beauty, mysteries, majesty, and drama that we can appreciate for their own sake, beyond any practical utility they may have.

THINK ABOUT IT

Introduction 2 Examine your own beliefs and values to find examples of when you acquired some of them unconsciously the way one "catches a cold." If you come to realize that you have acquired some beliefs or values in this way, in what ways does it or doesn't it change your attitude toward them?

WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY, ANYWAY?

Commonplace Notions of Philosophy. People often think of philosophy as simply one's general outlook on life. For example, a football coach once said that his philosophy was "It's not whether you win or lose but how you play the game." However, another coach said that "Winning is not the most important thing—it's the *only* thing." Companies sometimes express their philosophy in advertisements: "Our corporate philosophy is 'Providing reliable products with good service.' " Certainly, a number of philosophical issues are contained in these statements. What is the role of sports and competition in human life? Does the end justify the means? What does "*good* service" mean? Who decides whether it is good or not? However, the notion of "philosophy" latent in these pronouncements falls short of how the term is properly understood. Each of these people stated their beliefs, but offered no justification for them. Besides being a general outlook or policy, philosophy is the attempt to provide arguments or good reasons for our conclusions. As stated in the first section, we all have philosophical beliefs that we acquired from our cultural environment. However, we have not yet begun to do philosophy until we begin the task of clarifying, evaluating, and justifying our beliefs as well as examining them in the light of opposing viewpoints.

Philosophers and Lovers. Perhaps it is time to give a more straightforward presentation of philosophy. We could define philosophy as:

> The human attempt to systematically study the most fundamental structures of our entire experience in order to arrive at beliefs that are as conceptually clear, experientially confirmed, and rationally coherent as possible.[1]

Each term in this definition is significant. However, it is particularly important that we understand what it means to say that philosophy is a "human *attempt*" to take on a task we never can complete. What this means is that we are never finished with philosophy, and it is never finished with us, and our most dearly held and fundamental ideas are never without the need for modification and improvement. This is difficult to accept, because we like closure, finality, and quick solutions. We live in a world of thirty-minute television dramas, lightning-speed computers, instant coffee, and microwave meals. However, it is helpful to compare the search for philosophical understanding to cultivating a meaningful relationship. The minute two people decide that they have figured out their relationship and do not need to work at it anymore, the relationship has grown stale. In both relationships and philosophy, there are always new problems to face and old problems to address in new ways. Appropriately, the term *philosopher* literally means "a *lover* of wisdom."* The qualities that make one a successful lover or philosopher are similar. Successful lovers never tire of exploring the facets of one another's personality. Likewise, the successful philosopher endlessly desires to explore new ideas and undiscovered dimensions of old ideas. Hence, the search to understand our friend or to philosophically comprehend

*The English word *philosophy* is derived from the Greek words *philia* ("love") and *sophia* ("wisdom"). As far as we can tell, Pythagoras, the well-known philosopher and mathematician, was actually the first person to call himself a *philosopher*. It was Socrates and Plato who popularized the word.

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our experience is a quest that is always ongoing and never completed. However, this does not mean that we cannot make progress along the way.

Philosophical Criteria. I have said that philosophy, in the fullest sense of the word, is the activity of evaluating and justifying our beliefs and those of other people. How do we go about doing this? The definition just given contains three criteria for evaluating our own and others' ideas. Stated in abbreviated form to make them easy to remember, they were clarity, confirmation, and coherence. There may be others, but certainly these three are the most basic. We can use these criteria to evaluate the individual claims made by a philosopher as well as to assess a philosophy as a whole package. In a later section, we will apply these criteria to the evaluation of arguments.

Conceptual clarity is the first criterion that we should apply to a philosophy. Concepts and words are the vehicles of ideas. But if our vehicles are not well tuned, we won't make much progress. Here are two controversial claims and the sorts of questions we need to ask to make the claims clear.

1. "Computers have now attained the status of being genuine thinking machines." What is the criterion for "thinking" that is being assumed here? Is following an input with the correct output all that there is to thinking? Can there be thinking without consciousness?
2. "The only thing in life that people value is pleasure." What does the speaker mean by "pleasure"? Do intellectual enjoyments count as pleasure, or only physical sensations? In what way does it make sense to say that a political martyr or a person who makes sacrifices for others is pursuing pleasure?

Experiential confirmation is the second test that a philosophy must pass. Since the purpose of philosophy is to clarify our experience, a philosophy will not be adequate unless it "fits" experience. This means that the philosophy must not conflict with any well-established facts and that it will be supported by experience as well as make our experience more intelligible. However, a large-scale philosophical theory usually cannot be supported or refuted by a single experience, as can the simple claim "this lump of sugar is soluble in water." Instead, this experiential criterion asks us to decide how adequately a philosophy interprets the broad range of human experience. We also measure scientific theories against experience. There is a difference between scientific and philosophical theories in how this test is applied, however. Typically, scientific theories let us generate testable consequences. If an experiment turns out as the scientific theory predicted, then the theory has received some degree of experiential support. In contrast, philosophical theories are too general to be tested experimentally in this way. Their purpose is to provide the best interpretation of the experiences common to humanity rather than to predict specific, new physical events.

We can use one of Socrates's doctrines to illustrate the application of this test. Socrates argued that if we *know* what is good, we will naturally *do* what is good. From this he concluded that if someone does what is wrong, it must be because that person is ignorant of what is truly good. However, many would agree with Aristotle that "this view plainly contradicts the observed facts." Our common, human experience suggests that we often know what is good but fail to do it because of a weak will.*

Rational coherence is the third criterion. Minimally, this criterion requires that a philosophy not contain a contradiction or that it not conflict with itself. Even if a philosophy does not contain an explicit contradiction in terms of what the philosopher directly says, it may fall to the charge of incoherence, nonetheless. We may find a contradiction in an unstated assumption that the philosopher makes or in a conclusion that logically follows from his or her central claims. For example, skeptics make the claim that "there is no absolute truth and if there were, we could not know it." However, Socrates and Augustine battled the skeptics in their own times by pointing out that skepticism contradicts

*Defenders of Socrates point out that he evades this objection once we understand the special way he uses the terms "*knowing* what is good."

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itself. The skeptics assert, "we cannot know what is true," but in making this claim we must assume they believe that "the skeptical philosophy is true." For this reason, their critics claim the skeptics' position undermines itself. A more subtle application of the coherence criterion recognizes that a philosophy may be free of outright logical contradictions and still its claims might not "hang together" very well. For example, the theist maintains that God is loving and all powerful at the same time that innocent people in our world suffer. Likewise, some philosophers claim that all our behavior and choices are determined by psychological causes not under our control while maintaining that we are morally responsible for our actions. To avoid the charge of incoherence, both the theist and the determinist have some hard work to do. They must show that the apparent conflicts can be resolved and the disparate ideas in their systems can be successfully woven together into a harmonious whole.

We have given examples of how these three criteria have been used to critique common philosophical positions. One should not assume from these brief discussions, however, that these positions have been decisively refuted and are now sitting on the trash heap of philosophical history. Later in this book, we will see the ways in which proponents of each position have sought to evade the charges against them.

Assessing Arguments. Although these three criteria will take us a long way in assessing a philosophy as a whole, we need to pay special attention to evaluating arguments. In setting forth a philosophical position, philosophers usually employ a number of arguments to establish the main pillars of their philosophy. However, an author may fail to clearly lay out his or her arguments. In this case it may take some rooting around and restating of the main points to extract a precisely formulated argument. Nevertheless, there are probably arguments to be found. Even philosophers who have a reputation for being "irrationalists" usually try to show that they have plausible grounds for rejecting reason.

An argument consists of one or more statements called the "premises," which are used as evidence, grounds, or reasons for asserting another statement, called the "conclusion." There is a temptation to fall victim to what has been called the "bottom line" syndrome. This involves simply responding positively or negatively to the author's conclusion without analyzing whether or not the philosopher has provided good reasons for believing the conclusion. But this defeats a major goal of philosophy—to see whether our beliefs or those of others are justified. For example, St. Anselm provided an argument, called the "ontological argument," that had the conclusion "God exists." However, although Gaunilo, a contemporary of Anselm and a fellow Christian, agreed with the conclusion of the argument, he criticized the reasoning that Anselm used to reach this conclusion. It is important to realize that in demonstrating that an argument is flawed, we have not proven that the author's conclusion is false. We have merely shown that the reasons the author has given us supporting that conclusion do not guarantee its truth. Nevertheless, if the only arguments that can be found to support a conclusion are bad arguments, there is no reason to suppose the conclusion is true.

It would take a whole book on logic to discuss all the techniques for analyzing arguments, so a few words on the topic will have to suffice. There are two basic questions to ask about an argument:

1. Are the premises acceptable?
   a. Are they clear?
   b. Are they plausible?
2. Do the premises provide adequate support for the conclusion?

The first question examines the clarity and plausibility of the premises. The second question asks about the acceptability of the form of reasoning. An argument provides good reasons for believing its conclusion only if the answer to both questions is yes.

Answering question 1 requires two steps: (a) Apply the criterion of clarity to each premise to make sure they each make a meaningful claim. (b) Decide if it is likely that each premise is true, according to objective standards. If not, then explain what problems it contains. To do this you must consider why the author believes each premise to be true. There are

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several possibilities. The author may be claiming that the premise is (1) a logical truth, (2) a definition, (3) based on experience, or (4) established by a previous argument. The truth of a premise must be evaluated on the basis of the type of claim that is being made.

If an argument has one or more false premises, then it cannot provide grounds for believing the conclusion. However, even if all the premises are true, this alone does not make an argument a good one. Consider this argument:

All U.S. Presidents are famous.

George Washington is famous.

Therefore, George Washington is a U.S. President.

Even though both the premises and the conclusion of this argument are true, it is not a convincing argument. Many people are famous but are not Presidents. So, it does not follow, from the fact that Washington is famous, that he is a U.S. President. Hence, in addition to question 1 concerning the premises, we have to ask question 2 and examine the form of reasoning employed.

Logicians have developed many specialized techniques for answering question 2. However, a simple way to approach the question is to ask yourself, "How easy would it be to imagine that all the premises were true at the same time the conclusion was false?" This will indicate how strongly the premises support the conclusion. In terms of the form of the reasoning, two kinds of arguments are acceptable. First, if it is absolutely impossible for the premises of an argument to be true and the conclusion false, then we say the argument is **deductively valid** or call it a **valid argument** (or simply "valid"). A valid argument with true premises is called a **sound argument**. The second type of acceptable reasoning is an argument in which the premises make the conclusion highly probable. We say this sort of argument is **inductively strong** (or simply "strong"). A strong argument with true premises is a **cogent argument**. A cogent argument does not absolutely guarantee the conclusion (as does a sound argument), but it does give us good reasons for believing the conclusion. In contrast, the more possibilities there are of the premises being true and the conclusion false, the weaker the argument.

We can illustrate these techniques for evaluating arguments by applying them to a concrete example. Consider the following argument:

(A) The majority of people throughout human history have believed in God.

(B) Therefore, God must exist.

Question 1 for evaluating arguments asks if the premises are acceptable. Step 1a, with respect to this first question, asks if the premises are clear. What does the author mean by "God" in premise (A)? If a culture believes that the trees contain spirits, does this constitute "belief in God"? Many of the world's great religions (versions of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, for example), believe in an *impersonal* spiritual dimension they call the "Undefinable One." Does this qualify as "belief in God"? There are a wide variety of conflicting religious conceptions throughout the world. Hence, the fact that there is no singular definition of "God" that people in all societies and ages would agree on makes it doubtful that premise (A), as stated, expresses a meaningful or unambiguous claim. If a premise is not clear, it is impossible to go on to step 1b to decide if the premise is true or not.

Question 2 asks if the premises adequately support the conclusion. In the present argument, the premises do not support the conclusion. Simply reporting what people believe to be the case, even a very large number of people, is not sufficient evidence to support a conclusion about the nature of reality. Even if the whole human population believed there was a God, everyone could still be mistaken. In analogous cases, large numbers of people throughout history have held mistaken beliefs about astronomy, the causes of disease, or the nature of reproduction.

Adding this second premise to the argument,

(A′) If the majority of people believe there is a God, then God must exist.

would make the argument valid. However, although the two premises logically imply the conclusion, there

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is no reason to believe that the second premise (A′) is true. So the argument fails on step 1b of our evaluation process.

Although any theistic philosopher would obviously accept the conclusion that "God exists," and many would say that this conclusion can be demonstrated, even most theists would agree that this particular argument does not support the conclusion. Again, philosophy is concerned not only with our beliefs but also with the rational support we can provide for these beliefs.

BECOMING AN ACTIVE READER: TACTICS AND STRATEGIES

Philosophy, Bike Riding, and Baseball Cards. Beginning to study philosophy is closer to learning how to ride a bike than to memorizing facts out of an encyclopedia. Apart from the detailed analogies that could be made between beginning philosophers and bike riders in terms of wobbling, falling off, and getting back on again, the main similarity is that they are both engaged in an activity. The physics formula for keeping one's balance on a bike is as follows: turn the bicycle into a curve which is proportional to the ratio of the imbalance divided by the square of the speed. Obviously, sitting in your armchair and learning that formula will not teach you how to ride a bike. Similarly, philosophy is something we do, not something we learn. It is a skill we can develop of thinking about things in a rational way. This book can help you develop that skill by making it possible for you to observe and learn from those who have practiced it throughout the centuries. To switch metaphors, reading the history of philosophy is different from collecting baseball cards, where we simply sort the different figures into categories and read the facts about them on the back of the card. As the next paragraph will make clear, learning facts about philosophers is only the threshold of philosophy itself.

A Strategy for Reading Philosophy. To be an engaged reader, a systematic strategy is helpful. To help you *focus* on the philosophers and movements you study, keep in mind the five letters of the word ***FOCUS***. They stand for **F**acts, **O**utlook, **C**ritique, and **U**ndergoing **S**elf-examination. These activities alternate between objective and subjective approaches to a particular philosophy. We will explain each in turn.

Facts. As you are beginning to get acquainted with each philosopher, you will first want to know the answers to basic questions about that thinker such as where, what, why, and who. Using Plato as an example, you will want to find out

1. *Where* was Plato located within the cultural, intellectual movements of his time?
2. *What* problems was Plato trying to solve? *What* methods did Plato use to attack the problems? *What* solutions did he offer?
3. *Why* did Plato think his solutions were good ones? (What were his arguments?)
4. *Who* influenced Plato, and *whom* did he influence in turn?

These sorts of questions involve an *objective* consideration of Plato's philosophy.

Outlook. Try to sympathetically enter into Plato's outlook on the world. How does the world look when we see it through the lenses of Plato's philosophy? How would your outlook on life be different if you adopted Plato's viewpoint? What would Plato say about the news media today? What would be his opinion on current controversies in the world, in our nation, and on your campus? What questions would you ask Plato if you could call him up on the phone? This approach requires a *subjective* identification with the philosopher.

Critique the Philosopher's Ideas and Arguments. This is one of the most important and most difficult stages of reading philosophy. It's easy to get dazzled by the multiplicity of perspectives and see the history of philosophy as simply a kaleidoscope of changing, competing positions. The word *critique* does not mean to simply criticize. It comes from a Greek word that means "to separate" or "sift." Critiquing a philosopher means probing his or her ideas to find out where they are solid and where they cannot support the weight they are supposed to bear. Here the three criteria mentioned earlier (clarity, experiential

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confirmation, and rational coherence) come into play. In addition, keep the following considerations in mind. Look for the strong points in the philosophy. How does the philosophy illuminate important features of human experience? What questions does it answer better than any other approach? Which of the philosopher's arguments seem impregnable? Also, look for the weak points. What data does the philosophy ignore or contradict? (This includes scientific data as well as the broad data of ordinary human experience.) What problems does the philosophy create that it cannot solve? How does it stand up to alternative approaches? Does the philosopher answer possible criticisms? What are the questionable assumptions in the philosopher's premises? What are the weak points in the philosopher's reasoning? Critically evaluating a philosophy is another kind of *objective* approach to it.

Undergo Self-Examination. Thus far, you have examined the philosopher's ideas; now let his or her ideas examine yours. The poet W. H. Auden once said that an important book is one that reads us, not the reverse. Likewise, the twentieth-century philosopher Martin Heidegger said that instead of asking what we can do with philosophy, we should ask what philosophy can do with us. Socrates said that "the unexamined life is not worth living." Søren Kierkegaard, one of the nineteenth-century founders of the movement of existentialism, once wrote in his diary, "There are many people who reach their conclusions about life like schoolboys: they cheat their master by copying the answer out of a book without having worked the sum out for themselves." This last stage of reading philosophy is a matter of "working out the sum for yourself." Having understood and evaluated a philosophy, what are you going to do with it? What challenges does it pose for your current beliefs? How would you answer the questions that the philosopher has posed? Does this philosophy offer any insights that you need to incorporate into your own view of the world? Has this philosophy changed you in any way? Why or why not? These questions, of course, involve a *subjective* engagement with the philosopher's ideas.

THINK ABOUT IT

Introduction 3 Ask friends who have not taken a philosophy course what the term *philosophy* means. How do these uses compare with the way *philosophy* is used in this chapter? Which one of your friends' answers do you think is best? Do you think the term is misused in any of these cases?

A GENERAL MAP OF THE TERRAIN

Philosophy is like a tennis match where thought bounces back and forth between perplexing questions and the various philosophers' attempts to provide well-grounded answers to those questions. These questions fall into several categories. It is important that you become familiar with these divisions of philosophy and their names so that you can keep track of what sorts of questions a particular philosopher is trying to answer. Take note that these are not the labels for specific philosophical positions, but they represent the main issues that philosophers argue about and problems that specific philosophies try to solve. The following headings represent the three main areas of philosophy. Under each heading is a representative, but not exhaustive, list of questions that fall within that area.

Epistemology (the theory of knowledge)

- What is truth?
- What is knowledge?
- Does reason tell us about the world?
- What are the limits of reason?
- How reliable is sensory experience as a source of knowledge?
- Are there ways of arriving at the truth apart from the intellect (for example, faith or intuition)?

Metaphysics (the theory of reality)

- What is ultimately real?
- Are there other kinds of reality besides the physical world?

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- How many different kinds of reality are there?
- What is the mind?
- How is the mind related to the body?
- Are we free or determined?

Ethics

- What makes an action right or wrong?
- Are there any absolute or objective moral principles?
- Are moral judgments based on knowledge, feelings, or intuition?
- Does morality depend on religion?

Most philosophical questions fall within one of the above topics. However, in addition to these three main areas, several, more specialized topics are frequently discussed throughout this book.

Logic (the study of the principles of reasoning)

Social and Political Philosophy

- What is the ideal political state?
- What is the purpose of the state?
- What makes a government legitimate?
- What are the proper limits of a government's power?
- Is civil disobedience ever justified? Under what conditions is it justified?

Philosophy of Religion

- Is there a God?
- Can the existence of God be proven? How?
- What is the nature of God?
- What is the relationship between faith and reason?
- Is there life after death?

Finally, in addition to these topics, other areas in philosophy raise philosophical questions about specific disciplines. These topics are discussed in this book only if they are central to a particular philosopher's thought. These additional areas of philosophy include philosophy of art (aesthetics), philosophy of education, philosophy of history, philosophy of language, philosophy of mathematics, philosophy of law, philosophy of psychology, philosophy of science, and so on.

WHERE ARE ALL THE WOMEN PHILOSOPHERS?

A glance at the table of contents of this book makes it apparent that very few woman philosophers are mentioned. The discipline of philosophy, like most disciplines, and like the history of the world in general, tends to represent a gender bias in favor of men. Those thinkers who get the most attention in any sort of history are those who have been the most influential or made the most impact in history. However, the names of philosophers who meet these criteria will not always be perfectly correlated with the list of philosophers who were insightful and made important contributions. For sociological and historical reasons, woman thinkers throughout the centuries did not have the same opportunities as men to pursue their intellectual careers and when women thinkers did develop their own philosophical thought, it was not easy for them to get a hearing within the intellectual institutions of their day. There are a number of books in recent years that have helped to correct this situation.

Even though women philosophers are still underrepresented in the profession, especially as compared with most other disciplines in the humanities, the situation has improved over recent decades. Women students are pursuing graduate degrees in philosophy at an increasing rate and women faculty members are achieving recognition for their contributions to the field and are more visible in the profession. The contemporary women thinkers within the philosophical movement of feminist philosophy (discussed in Chapter 33) have raised thought-provoking questions about some of the assumptions found in traditional philosophy and they have provided alternative models of the enterprise of philosophy itself.

While I can't rewrite the history of philosophy, in this edition I have provided a new feature called "Women in Philosophy." There are five of these new sections throughout the book. There are profiles of a

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representative female philosopher in each of the first three historical periods in Chapters 6, 10, and 19 and profiles of two contemporary female philosophers in Chapters 32 and 33. These five profiles are in addition to the discussion of feminist epistemology and ethics in Chapter 33 that have always been a part of this book.

CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS: INTRODUCTION

See if you can figure out for yourself a contemporary application of a traditional philosophical question. Choose one of the philosophical questions listed at the end of this chapter. Consider the ways in which this philosophical issue arises in or is relevant to disciplines other than philosophy. For example, in what ways is the question "Are we free or determined?" relevant to psychology or criminal trials? As another example, in what ways do ethical questions arise in the fields of business, law, or medicine?

Questions for Understanding

1. In what way do we acquire our ideas the way we catch a cold? Why is this bad? How might a study of the history of philosophy remedy this?
2. How is philosophy like a relationship?
3. What is the literal meaning of the term *philosopher*?
4. What are the three criteria for evaluating a philosophy?
5. What are the two questions to ask about an argument?
6. What is meant by the following terms: *deductively valid, sound argument, inductively strong, cogent argument?*
7. What are the four strategies for reading philosophy symbolized by the letters FOCUS?
8. What are the three main areas of philosophy? What are some of the questions that fall under each heading?

Questions for Reflection

1. Find examples in real life similar to the seven scenarios at the beginning of this chapter where people are discussing philosophical issues without really realizing it. By the way, what makes something a "philosophical issue"?
2. State some philosophical claim that you believe. Provide a really weak argument for believing this claim. Now, provide what you think is a good argument for the same claim. What is it about the arguments that makes one weak and the other strong?

Note

1. I am indebted to a former colleague of mine, David Schlafer, for most of the wording of this definition as well as for portions of its exposition in the following paragraph.

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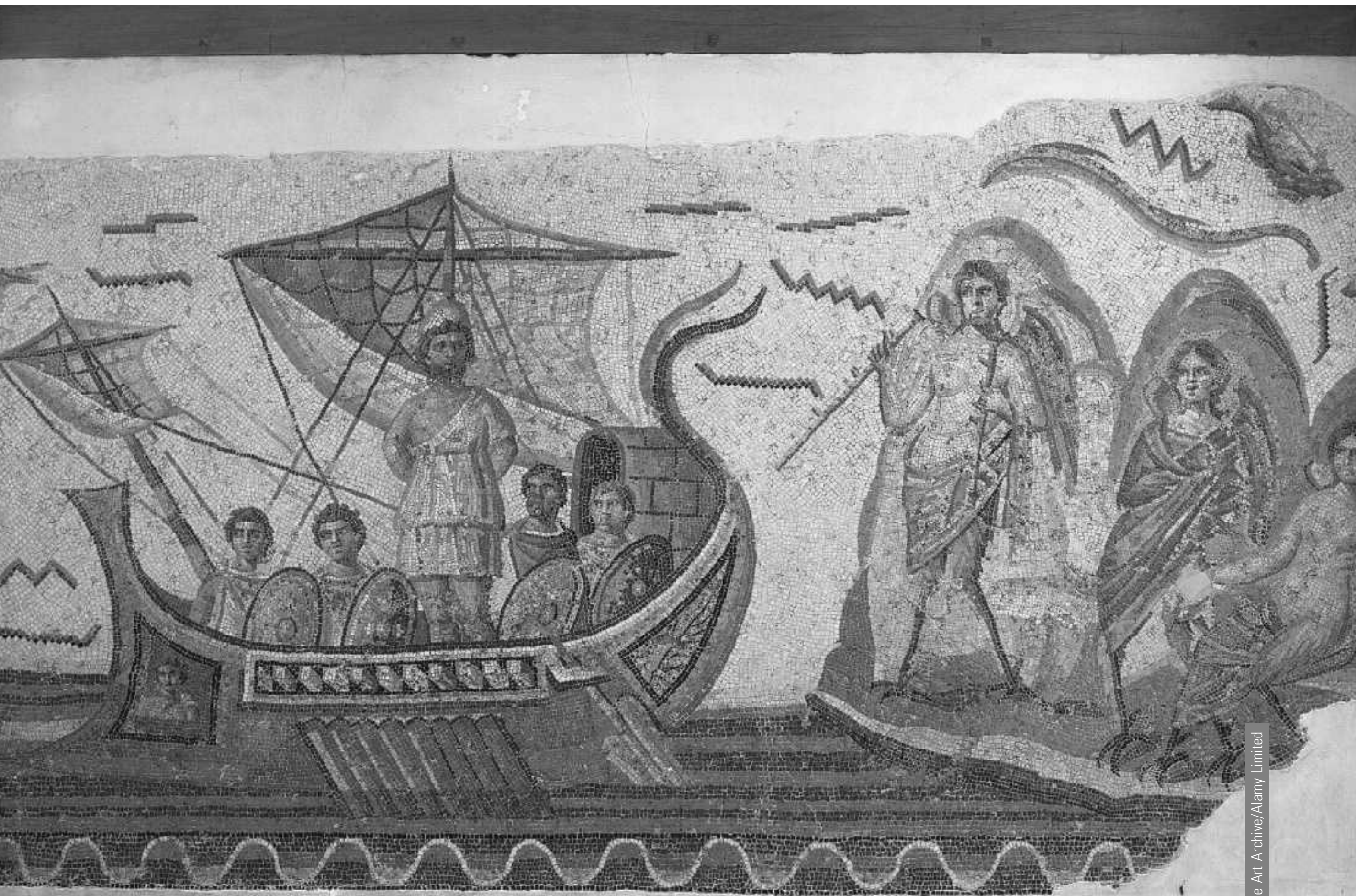
PART

I

The Ancient Period



Ulysses and the Sirens, mosaic, third century C.E. Roman, from Dougga, Tunisia, North Africa.

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Philosophy in the Ancient World. This map identifies cities and regions of the ancient world where some of the philosophers discussed in the text lived and taught.

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CHAPTER 1

The Greek Cultural Context: From Poetry to Philosophy

It was May 28, 585 B.C.E., and the sun beat down unmercifully as the six-year battle between the Medes and the Lydians raged on fiercely on the west coast of Asia Minor. Suddenly, a shroud of darkness began to cover the battlefield. Puzzled, the warriors on both sides lowered their weapons and looked up to the sky, where they discovered a black void where the sun had once stood. Was this a sign from the gods? Would worse calamities follow? Not wanting to know the answers to these questions, the soldiers of both armies threw down their arms and fled. Prudence, not military might, won the battle that day. However, in this same region a middle-aged merchant and engineer, who would later become known as a sage, was also looking upward. In contrast to the warriors, his face was not contorted with fear but showed only a knowing smile as he nodded approval at the cosmic event. Who was this wise man, and why was he the only one to welcome the darkness of the sun?

The sage in question was named Thales. Many ancient sources consider Thales the first philosopher in Western history. One of the most notable achievements attributed to Thales is his prediction of a solar eclipse. Scientists calculate that an eclipse did occur on May 28, 585 B.C.E., and we can assume this was the one that gave Thales his fame. He surely did not predict the exact date of the eclipse, but possibly he knew enough astronomy to pick the correct month. Given all this, does Thales belong in a book on the history of astronomy? What possible connection could there be between his prediction and the birth of Western philosophy? To understand the significance of his prediction, we must back up to see what preceded it.

The Role of the Poets

The story of philosophy begins with poetry. The poets held a central position in Greek culture. They were not only tellers of interesting tales in flowery language (it is questionable whether any good poetry is only that). Instead, the poets developed, preserved, and conveyed the historical, scientific, and religious truths of the time. They were concerned with history, because their tales gave an account of the past and how various traditions, races, and cultures came to be. Furthermore, they attempted to answer cosmological questions by speaking about the origins, structure, and workings of the universe. They explained the causes that lay behind thunderstorms, abundant crops, drought, health, and sickness. They also served an important religious function. The poets told the stories of the gods, and their accounts were taken to be authoritative. The Greeks thought that the poets were inspired by the Muses—the goddesses of literature and the arts. *Inspired* means "breathed into." Hence, for the Greeks, the poets were inspired or

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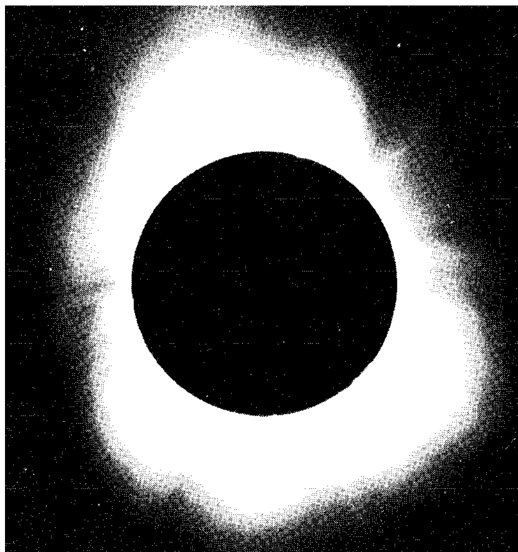
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When the philosopher Thales predicted a solar-eclipse in 585 B.C.E., he demonstrated that the world exhibits a consistent, natural order that our minds can understand.

filled with a divine spirit—no less so than biblical writers are seen as divinely inspired in the Christian tradition. Finally, the stories of the poets served an ethical function. By explaining how great heroes triumphed or fell, how the universe worked, and how human destiny was controlled by the gods and fate, the poets helped make clear what course people should take in life and what actions were appropriate or improper, advantageous or ruinous.

The poets explained the world through myths. Many people think of myths as simply fanciful and false stories. They are more than this, however. They represent the attempt to explain the unfamiliar and mysterious in terms of what is familiar and observable. They are symbolic expressions of how the deepest concerns of human life fit into a large-scale picture of the cosmos. The primary model of explanation available to pre-scientific people was that of human motives and actions. Hence, the gods of the ancient Greeks were very human. They acted according to familiar purposes and aims. However, they were also anthropomorphic in the sense that they were driven by passion, lust, and petty jealousies; they were easily offended, vengeful, deceitful, and played favorites. In short, their enormous power was equaled only by their raging immaturity. The Greek gods had a division of labor: there was a separate god for each area of life—war, love, trade, hunting, agriculture, and so on. Both the favorable and the unfortunate events in life were attributed to the anger or the goodwill of this or that god. In short, even though they seem like extravagant fantasies to us, the myths of the poets tried to provide a comprehensive view of the world and the individual's place in it.

THE NATURAL ORDER ACCORDING TO HOMER

To set the stage for philosophy, it is worth looking at the most important Greek poet, Homer.* His authority within Greek culture is underscored by the fact that later philosophers found it important either to defend or to criticize his views. One of the earliest Greek philosophers, Xenophanes (about 570–478 B.C.E.), explains that he criticizes Homer because "All at first have learnt according to Homer."[1] Homer's poems suggest several broad conceptions about the nature of the universe. First, what order we find in nature (the pattern of the seasons, for example) is the product of the steady purposes and aims of the gods. However, nature is sometimes unpredictable, because the gods are fickle and impulsive. A devastating earthquake or a sudden storm, for example, is caused by the sea god Poseidon, but does not fit into any long-term, rational purpose of his that would make his initiation of such events intelligible.

Second, the Homeric gods are a far cry from the omnipotent deity of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Not only can they be thwarted by other gods, including their own family members, but they are subject to such forces as fate or necessity. Although the fates are sometimes presented as several personal beings, their actions are usually so unintelligible and unpredictable

*The Homeric poems the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were originally songs that were passed on orally from generation to generation. We believe they were put in written form sometime in the eighth century B.C.E. Because of tradition, we attribute them to a blind bard known as Homer. But scholars suspect that they are actually the products of more than one poet.

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that the human mind cannot penetrate their mysteries. Thus, from our standpoint, the collection of forces the Greeks called *fate* is more a principle of randomness than it is a law of nature.

THE MORAL IDEAL ACCORDING TO HOMER

The Homeric notion of virtue is quite a bit different from that found in later moral traditions. Homer's virtues were the virtues of the warrior-hero and can be summarized under the heading of *excellence*. Excellence was defined in terms of success, honor, power, wealth, moderation, and security, as well as courage, loyalty, and patriotism. Homer's heroes may be called on to look after the welfare of others and to take risks to meet the demands of loyalty. However, these moral duties are always for the sake of preserving one's honor and status, not typically because of the outcome for others.

Homer's conception of the gods was consistent with this picture. The gods' interests revolved around their own honor and status. They sat up on Mount Olympus, looking down on the spectacle of human affairs like spectators at the chariot races. Although the gods were able to suffer frustration, no one doubted that their lives were basically happy. Thus, when a mortal aspired to be godlike, this had more to do with enhancing his or her own status than it did with concern for others. When it came to their interaction with mortals, the gods did not reward virtue and punish evil as much as they expressed favoritism and reacted negatively when annoyed. Flattery, bribery, cajoling, and coaxing were as likely to win the gods' favor as moral goodness was. Service to the gods was motivated not by their goodness but by their power. Consequently, all interactions between mortals and the gods were, for both sides, a matter of calculating self-interest.

Homer's account of Zeus, however, provides some exceptions to this general picture. Zeus was the supreme god among Homer's collection of deities. Although he was stronger than all the rest and they looked to him for advice and approval, he still was limited both by external forces and his own personality flaws. Nevertheless, we sometimes get glimpses of his concern to see justice prevail within human affairs. He becomes angry at the moral wrongs that mortals inflict on one another.[2] Homer's near contemporary, the eighth-century (B.C.E.) poet Hesiod, develops this line of thought even further. According to Hesiod, Zeus directs the other gods to measure humans' actions against a universal law of justice. As Hesiod states in his *Works and Days*,

> The deathless gods are never far away;
> They mark the crooked judges who grind down
> Their fellow-men and do not fear the gods.[3]

In these sorts of passages, the will of the gods takes on the character of a uniform, moral order operating in the world. This picture provided fertile soil for developing the notion of an impersonal natural order, independent of the gods' will.

CONFLICTS WITHIN HOMER'S PICTURE

To simplify and summarize, Homer and the other poets established four notions of world order: (1) Some events in the world are caused by purposeful, though frequently capricious, human or divine agents. (2) There is an element of randomness in the world such that some events are as purposeless as the throw of a pair of dice. (3) The fates represent an unyielding, amoral order in the world to which both mortals and the gods, including Zeus, are subject. (4) In some passages, the gods respond to a moral order and judge mortals by a standard of objective justice. Unfortunately, Homer does not make clear what happens when two or more of these forces conflict.

Despite the crudeness of Homer's picture of the universe, it provided a starting point for Greek scientific and philosophical thought.[4] It did this in two ways. First, the conflicts between his principles cry out for a more coherent view of the world. An inconsistent answer is no answer at all. Second, his last two principles (fate and justice) suggest a new sense of order that would lead beyond the Homeric myths. The notion of fate as an inescapable causal order is, in spite of its superstitious colorings, the predecessor of the notion of impersonal, natural laws. Also, the idea that Zeus sometimes lays aside petty, personal interests and is concerned with justice points toward the development of objective ethical principles.

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Nevertheless, what we find in Homer are at best the seeds of theoretical thought. Only when these seeds break through the soil of myth and rise above the medium in which they took root will the fruits of philosophy begin to appear.

The Birth of Western Philosophy

Traditionally, the birth of Western philosophy has been located in the sixth century B.C.E., with the emergence of Thales and other early figures. The problem is, to say, *when* Western philosophy began requires an understanding of *what* philosophy is. However, to ask, “What is philosophy?” is to raise a philosophically controversial question. Hence, when and where one locates the birth of philosophy within a culture will depend on how narrowly or broadly one defines *philosophy*. There are strains of philosophy in the poetry of Homer and Hesiod, and there are remnants of traditional, mythical thought throughout Greek philosophy. However, everyone agrees that Western philosophy did not leap into being from out of nowhere. Transitions in the history of thought are rarely that abrupt and great ideas do not arise from a vacuum. Historically, philosophy emerged within Western civilization the same way it emerges within our personal lives. Becoming philosophical is a gradual process in which cultures and individuals learn to look at the world in a new way by becoming self-conscious and critical. Although we cannot pinpoint the birth of Western philosophy the way we can a solar eclipse, we can point to significant landmarks on the continuum from mythological tales to fully aware, self-critical philosophical thought.

To return to the solar eclipse, Thales’s prediction was a significant event in the story of philosophy because it represented a new concept of order. If Thales was able to predict this natural phenomenon, it meant that he realized (unlike many of his contemporaries) that events in the world were neither the result of the irrational and unpredictable will of the gods, blind chance, nor the work of a largely inscrutable fate. Instead, Thales realized that such events were the product of a consistent, impersonal, natural order that can be studied and made the basis of generalizations and predictions. This raised questions about what this order must be like, if it is open to rational inspection and understanding.

As with any philosopher, Thales owed an intellectual debt to many sources. In his time, the Greeks benefited both economically and intellectually from their trade with other cultures. Because of the thriving commercial life of their coastal cities, they were in touch with the leading centers of civilization: Egypt and Phoenicia; Lydia, Persia, and Babylon. Thales, no doubt, acquired much of his knowledge about mathematics from the Egyptians and his knowledge of astronomy from the Babylonians. It is quite possible that his philosophical speculations about the universe were nourished by the traditions of the different cultures around him. Furthermore, the suggestions in Homer’s and Hesiod’s myths that Zeus applies a consistent rule of justice to the world may have inspired Thales to search for an impersonal order in nature.

Although Thales applied and continued some of the ideas of his predecessors, he brought to these materials the spark of a new way of thinking. This new style of thought was that of original, theoretical inquiry. Rather than appealing to tradition or the stories of the gods to support his conclusions, he sent his opinions out into the world to stand or fall on their own merits. Thales’s contemporaries and successors produced a whirl of questions, arguments, theories, and critical dialogue, making clear that a new way of answering questions and resolving disputes was emerging in Western history. From the womb of this spirit of inquiry and argument, both science and philosophy were given birth.

CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS 1: THE PHILOSOPHICAL TURN

Western philosophy began with the new sort of inquiry initiated by Thales. What are the risks of questioning the taken-for-granted answers of one’s culture and tradition? What is to be gained by doing so? When did this attitude of critical inquiry begin in your life? When did you begin to question the answers of your parents or your society? When you were a little child, what sorts of philosophical questions came to your mind? What sorts of answers

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seemed to make the most sense at this time? In what ways were your initial attempts to understand the world similar to humanity's initial attempts to make sense of things?

Outline of Classical Philosophy

From its early beginnings with Thales to its end in the Middle Ages, classical philosophy went through a number of distinct phases. This development is briefly summarized in the following outline:

1. ***Cosmological Period*** (585 B.C.E. to the middle of the fifth century B.C.E.)—Chapter 2
   - Concerned with external nature
   - Wanted to know what is fundamentally real
2. ***Anthropological Period***—Chapter 3
   - Concerned with human-centered issues
   - Asked questions about knowledge and conduct
     (a) Sophists (fifth century B.C.E.)—skeptical and practical
     (b) Socrates (470–399 B.C.E.)—concerned to find objective knowledge and values
3. ***Systematic Period***—Chapters 4 and 5
   - Concerned to develop a comprehensive, philosophical system
   - The first to raise all the basic questions of philosophy
     (a) Plato (427–347 B.C.E.)
     (b) Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.)
4. ***Post-Aristotelian or Hellenistic-Roman Philosophy*** (320 B.C.E.–C.E.529)—Chapter 6
   - Concerned with individualistic, practical issues
   - Metaphysical concerns subordinated to ethical concerns
   - Cynicism, Epicureanism, Stoicism, Skepticism, Neoplatonism

Questions for Understanding

1. Why were the poets so important in ancient Greek culture?
2. What was Homer's view of the order of the world?
3. What was Homer's view of the moral order?
4. How did Thales's approach to understanding the world differ from that of Homer?
5. What were the four main stages in ancient Greek philosophy? What were the primary concerns of each stage?

Questions for Reflection

1. Homer provides accounts of the nature of the world, morality, and the meaning of human life. Based on the account of philosophy in this book's Introduction, in what sense were Homer's views philosophical and in what sense were they not?
2. Are most people in our contemporary society more like the ancient poets or are they more like Thales? In other words, do people tend to base their beliefs more on tradition and popular opinions or on critical thinking? Why is this? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each approach?
3. In this chapter we have examined philosophical thinking in its infancy. In an analogous sense, what sorts of philosophical questions came to your mind when you were a child? When in your life did you, like Thales, first begin to critically examine some of the traditional beliefs you had taken for granted up until then?

Notes

1. Quoted in John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 4th ed. (New York: Meridian Books, 1930), 118.
2. See Homer, *Iliad* Book 16, lines 384–393.
3. Hesiod, Works and Days in *Hesiod and Theognis*, trans. Dorthea Wender (New York: Penguin Classics, 1973), 66.
4. For the points made in this section, I am indebted to Terence Irwin's discussion in Chapter 2 of his *Classical Thought, Vol. 1: A History of Western Philosophy* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1989).

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CHAPTER 2

Greek Philosophy Before Socrates

THE MILESIAN PHILOSOPHERS

Thales

We have already encountered Thales in Chapter 1. He was the Greek philosopher who predicted the solar eclipse. He is also considered by many ancient authorities to be the first Western philosopher. The dates of his life are only approximate, but most scholars place him somewhere between the years 624 and 545 B.C.E. His native city of Miletus was a thriving Greek seaport in Ionia, on the western coast of Asia Minor. Because of their geographical location, Thales and his two successors are called the Milesian philosophers (and sometimes the Ionians). Miletus was a city noted for its commerce, wealth, and cosmopolitan ideas. Because the trading industry put them in contact with other countries, many Milesians were receptive to new ideas and the city was the perfect breeding ground for fresh perspectives.

Thales had a very practical mind. Besides predicting the eclipse, stories abound that he solved a number of engineering problems for the military and invented navigational instruments and techniques. However, it was not his technological achievements that earned him his place in history. He is important for understanding the Western intellectual heritage because he set in motion an ongoing debate about the ultimate nature of things. Many theories of these early thinkers may seem as much an example of early science as they are of philosophy. This is not surprising, for the disciplines were not clearly distinguished, as they are today. What we call *science* was considered to be "natural philosophy" for most of human history. Even today, a student receiving the highest degree in chemistry will get a Ph.D., which is a "doctor of philosophy" degree. This period represents both the birth of science and of philosophy because these early thinkers embarked on the quest for universal principles and rationally defensible theories rather than simply making observations and collecting data.

THALES'S QUESTION

Thales's concern was to find the unity that underlies all the multiplicity of things in our experience. This is sometimes called the problem of "the one and the many." We encounter many things in the world: fish, sand, trees, stars, grapes, storms, rocks, and plants. But what unifies it all? Why do we consider this a *uni*verse,

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not a *multi*verse? What basic principle accounts for all this? What fundamental "stuff" underlies everything we find in the world? This is the primary issue that occupies all the Pre-Socratic philosophers.

THALES'S ANSWER

The answer Thales gave, Aristotle tells us, is that water is the source of all things.* At first this answer may seem naive and improbable. However, before we criticize any of these early philosophers, we must remember that we stand on top of some twenty-five hundred years of philosophical speculation and scientific discoveries. Hence, these early attempts to answer these questions are remarkable in their originality and cleverness. Aristotle speculates that Thales reasoned from the fact that water is essential to life and the seeds of all things are moist to the conclusion that water is the fundamental element. Additional reasons may have occurred to Thales to support his conclusion that everything is transformed water. For example, liquid water can be transformed into a gas (steam), and it also can be changed into a solid (ice). Furthermore, water comes from the air in the form of rain and returns back to the air as mist. When water evaporates from a dish, it leaves a sediment (apparently turning into earth), while digging down into the earth will lead us to water. Finally, living in Miletus and being surrounded by water may have made it seem probable to Thales that everything comes from water. Although we don't know what Thales's real arguments were, the fact that his immediate successors offered rational support for their theories makes it likely that Thales did too.

THE PROBLEM OF CHANGE

Some further issues are involved in Thales's speculation. If water is the one permanent and basic substance, what causes the changes in water's appearance that transforms it into all the other things in our experience? This is the question of "permanence and change" or "being and becoming." A possible answer can be found in Thales's claim that all things are "full of gods." Contrary to appearances, it is likely that he was not reverting to a naive theological explanation here. He noticed, for example, that magnetic stones have the power to move iron. He considered this power to be an animate, causal agent in a seemingly inert stone. Thus, he seemed to believe that the principle of animation and change resides in things themselves. However, the only vocabulary he had for expressing this was to say that things are alive and divinely animated in some fashion.

THALES'S SIGNIFICANCE

We can summarize Thales's impact and contribution in terms of several key points. First, Thales's position was an early example of metaphysical monism. **Monism** is the name for any position that claims there is only one principle of explanation. His is a metaphysical monism because he is claiming that reality can be explained by one principle (water). Thales's immediate successors adopted this assumption without questioning it. They continued to look for the one principle that explains everything, and only differed with Thales on the details of what this is. Second, Thales assumed that this one principle is a material substance. This is called **material monism**. Again, this assumption went unquestioned for quite a while. Third, Thales made a contribution in the questions he asked. The turning points in the development of human thought are to be found in original questions as much as in insightful answers. Thales asked some practical questions, such as "What will the olive harvest be like?" However, when he asked, "What is the ultimate substance underlying all the appearances?" this question had no immediate, practical payoff. It represented a search for theoretical understanding for its own sake. Such a quest opens doors that the more practical questions never will.

Finally, Thales is a key figure in the history of thought because of the nature of his answers. The important point here is not his claim that water is the ultimate substance. After all, his contemporaries discarded this answer. What is important is that he did not appeal to tradition or authority for his answer, nor did he simply spew forth opinions. He put forth a theory that others could examine and debate, and he provided rational grounds for his speculations. Thales made the first serve in the history of philosophical

*Aristotle could be considered the first systematic historian of philosophy. He was born close to 250 years after Thales and is discussed in Chapter 5.

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