100

最伟大的思想家

GREAT THINKERS A-Z

(英) Julian Baggini
(英) Jeremy Stangroom ·主编

周子平 ·注释

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1
是数的第一原则，万物之母，也是智慧；
2
是对立和否定的原则，是意见；
3
是万物的形体和形式；
4
是正义，是宇宙创造者的象征；
5
是奇数和偶数、雄性和雌性的结合，也是婚姻；
6
是神的生命，是灵魂；
7
是机会；
8
是和谐，也是爱情和友谊；
9
是理性和强大；
10
包容了一切数目，是完满和美好。

——毕达哥拉斯学派

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In memory of Lori Fells, whose kindness and good humour will be long remembered by her friends in the philosophical community.

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Editing a book like this can be trying. Working with 63 people, all of whom have a slightly different idea of what an intelligent non-specialist is able to understand, what a deadline means, and how strict one should be about word limits, is a recipe for frustration and irritation. But contributors can make this less of a hell by accepting guidance and revision gracefully, responding to requests at ridiculously short notice and making sure they do their work well. In this respect we have been fortunate and we'd like to thank all the contributors to this book for working with us to produce what we hope is a volume of enduring value both to interested general readers and students of philosophy.

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Introduction:
Great Thinkers A-Z : A User's Guide

The great thinkers profiled in this volume are one hundred of the people whose ideas have done the most to shape the western philosophical tradition. Only a fool, however, would claim that they are the *top* one hundred such thinkers. Probably around half of the people included here would find their way into any similar volume. Beyond that, everyone will have his or her own opinion about who should be in and who should be out. A common reaction to a glance down the index will surely be, 'How could they have left *x* out and put *y* in?!'

We would be happy with such a reaction, for our purpose in collecting together these snapshots of the great thinkers is to include all the celebrated names whose place in the canon demands their inclusion, along with an eclectic mix of other thinkers who represent the many styles and strands of philosophy. While all the thinkers in this latter group are undoubtedly important, we do not claim that they are greater than others who have been left out, merely that together they form a representative showcase for the movements of thought of which they are parts.

Although the ideas dealt with in this volume are often quite complex, we have endeavoured to make sure that no difficulties are the result of unnecessary obscurity or use of a technical vocabulary. Such difficult passages as remain should be negotiable with close and careful reading.

For ease of reference, the entries are arranged alphabetically. We have, however, provided a chronological index as well as nine thematic guides. The purpose of this introduction is to provide an overview to put these guides and the entries themselves into a variety of contexts.

2,500 years in as many words

Over two and a half millennia lie between the birth of the earliest philosopher in this book and its year of publication. To provide a

historical overview in the confines of this short introduction therefore requires devoting approximately one word for every year covered. The task may seem impossible. But philosophy is a slow moving subject and it is in fact possible to trace some of the most significant developments in thought to give a brief, if selective, potted history of the subject.

The earliest philosopher in this collection is Pythagoras, who was born around 550 BCE. Pythagoras is an excellent example of a thinker at the very dawn of philosophy, and indeed science. Pythagoras, like the Milesian philosophers of the sixth century BCE, was just beginning to realise how the world and its workings could be understood rationally, mechanistically and impersonally. Up until then, explanations for natural phenomena postulated mysterious, personalized, supernatural forces such as gods.

Pythagoras spotted mathematical regularities in nature, and found he could reason from these to provide accounts of geometry and musical pitch. The template for future philosophy was thus being laid down. Equipped only with the powers of reason and observation, Pythagoras was fumbling towards a rational method that was much more powerful than myth at explaining how the world is as it is.

But Pythagoras was still a man of his time, and alongside this new rationalism was a more old-fashioned mysticism. His theories of the reincarnation of the soul are much more speculative and do not have the same rational and experimental foundations as his mathematics. But even here, Pythagoras provides an early example of the philosophical impulse to give an account of being, even though his philosophical method was too immature to move much beyond speculation.

The other early Greek philosophers continued this process of grappling towards a philosophical mode of thinking about the world. Most histories of philosophy will run through the thought of a good few of them. But most of their ideas are of historic interest only, even when they find a later echo, such as with Democritus's atomic theory. Philosophy only really starts to warm up when we get to the big three ancient Greeks: Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.

It is with these three thinkers that philosophy really started to take up the shape it would hold to the present day. All three helped refine the methods of rational enquiry, in particular with the method of interrogation known as *elenchus* practised by Socrates and recorded by Plato;

and with Aristotle's development of formal logic. But perhaps even more importantly, here we first get a sense of the problem that would be central to philosophy: the problem of certainty.

In many ways, the history of philosophy can be seen as the quest to establish how we can know anything at all and the extent to which such knowledge can be certain. Plato and Socrates certainly seemed to think that knowledge required certainty; that beliefs which are uncertain just cannot be knowledge. Hence Socrates' claim that he knew nothing, for he did not think he could be certain of any of his beliefs. Against this, Aristotle seemed to have a more relaxed attitude, claiming we should only seek the degree of certainty each subject matter allowed. Hence we can have a firm proof in mathematics, but must content ourselves with balances of probability in political theory.

Jumping ahead for a moment, we find that this debate rages throughout the history of philosophy. The claims of certainty were made most optimistically by the seventeenth-century rationalists, notably Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz, who thought that all human knowledge could be established on firm foundations and demonstrated with the same precision as a mathematical proof. But this optimism soon faded, led by the criticisms of empiricists such as Locke and Hume. The story there onwards is one of declining faith in the possibility of certainty in human knowledge. In the nineteenth century, for example, the American pragmatists, such as Dewey, James and Peirce, were arguing that, crudely, what is true is what works, and that to demand any more from knowledge – such as certainty – is futile. Even attempts at establishing a delimited certainty, such as Russell and Whitehead's project of analysing the logical basis of mathematics, met with failure.

The debate is very much alive today. A wide array of thinkers, usually termed 'postmodernist' by critics but not by themselves, are pessimistic about the claims of reason. Foucault, for example, sees knowledge as being intimately connected with power and thus a tool of oppression as much as a means of understanding. Similarly, Lacan talks of language as the 'symbolic order' that constrains our thinking rather than enables it.

Yet even these philosophers are not simply dismissing rationality. After all, they themselves employ rational arguments to make their cases. Rather, they are trying to come to terms with what one might think of as the mature realization that rationality, though vital to human

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understanding, is constrained in ways which the early modern and ancient philosophers could not imagine. In trying to understand these constraints, contemporary philosophers are no less keen than their predecessors on harnessing the power of rational argument to develop human understanding.

American and British thinkers, often following in the empiricist and pragmatic traditions, are also generally more sanguine about the limitations of reason. They seem more impressed by what rationality can do than worried by what it can't and are happy to live with a lack of certainty without too much hand-wringing about where that leaves rational method. So it should certainly not be thought that contemporary philosophy is universally characterized by a struggle to come to terms with the death of certainty. After all, some might say David Hume taught us how to live with that loss three centuries ago.

Returning to philosophy after the Greeks, for several centuries religious thought intermeshed with philosophy as the power of the church in western society grew. For several centuries after the Roman, Seneca, it is hard to find a philosopher who wasn't as much a theologian. Arguably, this suppressed philosophy, for if rational method is used in the service of religious belief, and must therefore take religious tenets as its founding principles, it cannot be philosophy, since philosophy must start by sweeping away the assumptions which underlie normal habits of thought. So although there is much of interest in the writings of Plotinus, Augustine, Aquinas, Duns Scotus and, in the Islamic world, Avicenna, philosophy proper does not fully emerge again until the middle of the second millennium CE with the emergence of renaissance humanism, exemplified in the person of Erasmus.

From this point onwards, philosophy began its second and most productive phase. Montaigne revived the ancient Greek tradition of secular writing on living the good life; Bacon outlined the basis of scientific method; Machiavelli and Hobbes began modern political philosophy, examining the roles of leaders and the state; Descartes reinvigorated the quest for certainty, and along the way distinguished mind and body in terms which have framed the debate to the present day; Locke's 'way of ideas' introduced the notion that all we are directly aware of is the contents of our minds, thus opening the door to both the modern problem of scepticism and Berkeley's idealism. All the major

threads that continue to run in philosophy to this day were first picked up in the middle centuries of the last millennium.

However, western philosophy was not to remain a unified discipline. By the mid twentieth century, there would be distinctive 'continental' and 'Anglo-American' or 'analytic' schools in philosophy. The depth and nature of this division are much contested. Although the rift did not appear until much later, it is generally agreed that its origins can be traced back to Kant, perhaps the most important philosopher of the modern era.

Kant's philosophy is labyrinthine in its complexity, but at its heart is a strikingly simple idea, what he called his 'Copernican revolution in metaphysics'. This is the claim that philosophy up until his time had made the mistake of believing that it was the job of our concepts to conform to the nature of the world. The world provides the mould and we must cast our concepts to fit that mould as seamlessly as possible. Kant, however, claimed this was to get things precisely the wrong way around: it is the world that must conform to our concepts. It is the mind which is a kind of mould and the world only become intelligible to us to the extent that it can fit that mould.

This idea can seem bizarre, but it is not hard to make it sound more intuitively plausible. After all, our scientific understanding of the world has it made up of sub-atomic particles which are themselves perhaps best understood as energy. The world we actually see is simply the result of the fact that we are constituted to be sensitive to certain aspects of the world and to experience them in certain ways. So, for example, we hear some forms of radiation, see others and don't notice many others at all. The world 'as it is' is thus not what we perceive. Rather, we perceive a construction created by our own minds and bodies to which the world as it is makes a causal contribution.

Kant goes much further than this, however. His distinction is not between the world of appearances and the world revealed by science, but between the world as it appears to us, including as it appears through science, and the unknowable world as it is (the noumenal world). For example, he argued that time and space themselves are not part of the noumenal world but are aspects of our minds which frame experience and make it possible. Hence his Copernican revolution leaves the world in itself completely unknowable: even science is about the world as experience, not as it really is.

Kant died in 1804, at least a hundred years before the continental/analytic divide became a reality. But many believe that the divide is rooted in differing responses to Kant. In France and Germany in particular, the dominant school in twentieth-century philosophy was phenomenology. Phenomenology has its roots in Dilthey and Brentano, but its first great thinker was Husserl. If Kant was right and it is our minds which make the world and not vice versa, then shouldn't philosophy's primary subject be consciousness and the role it plays in world-making? This is the kind of thinking that motivated phenomenology. Philosophy should turn its attention inward to consciousness, not outward towards the world. This is the basic methodological premise that would guide the work of many of Germany's and France's great thinkers in the years to come, such as Heidegger, Sartre and Beauvoir. It is also implicit in the work of the many philosophers who have used psychoanalysis in their philosophizing, such as Lacan, Deleuze and Cixous.

This route was generally resisted in Britain and America. Like the continentals, and partly in response to Kant, they too tended to turn away from the idea that the world in itself should be the object of philosophy. But the nature of conscious experience seemed to provide too opaque a basis for rigorous philosophical thinking, and instead attention turned to the two main structures of abstract thought: language and logic. This seemed to be a way of heeding Kant's warnings about the futility of probing into the world in itself without robbing philosophy of a clear, systematizable subject matter.

Versions of this story are still in circulation. To recap: the claim is that the continental/analytic divide is rooted in different responses to Kant, which, at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, led to a logical-linguistic turn in Anglo-American philosophy and a phenomenological turn in continental Europe. These responses to Kant fostered different styles of philosophizing: logical analysis in Britain and America and a more literary, impressionistic attempt to capture the nature of lived experience in continental Europe.

The story, however, doesn't stand up to close scrutiny. It is rooted in truth, but it grossly overstates the importance of logical analysis in Anglo-American philosophy and understates it in continental Europe. But perhaps most importantly it fails to account for the fact that in recent western philosophy as a whole there has been a common

concern with language. If one looks at the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century thinkers in this volume who have dealt with the nature of language and meaning, the names straddle the Atlantic and the English Channel: Frege, Saussure, Russell, Wittgenstein, Lacan, Quine, Ayer, Davidson, Deleuze, Derrida, Searle, Cixous, Kripke.

This common concern with language has certainly not led to much of a dialogue between philosophers who, on the one hand, mainly read French and German authors and, on the other, mainly read works of Britons and Americans. But the idea that the sociological divide is wider than any philosophical one is gaining ground. Michael Dummett, for example, a leading 'hard-nosed' analytic philosopher of language, draws on Husserl as readily as he does Russell. Jacques Derrida, a paradigmatically 'continental' thinker, has drawn on the works of the quintessentially Oxford philosopher J. L. Austin. One of the contributors to this volume, Christopher Norris, is as happy discussing Saussure as he is Quine. Another, Jaroslav Peregin, has written a book outlining the similarities between French structuralism and American linguistic holism.

This is not to claim there are no real divisions in philosophy that correspond roughly to certain geographical borders. Psychoanalysis is a bona fide philosophical tool in much of continental Europe. For analytic philosophers, Freud and his heirs are *persona non grata*. Political philosophy is a branch of analytic philosophy, whereas in continental Europe it is more accurate to say the philosophical is political. Analytic philosophy of mind is as marginal in 'continental' philosophy as phenomenology is in analytic departments. Readers of this volume will almost certainly detect differences in approach between analytic and continental philosophers. But it is perhaps not too optimistic to still see these differences as eddies and tides within the one discipline – philosophy – and not as two different oceans. That this volume includes continental and analytic philosophers, and yet still has some coherence, is testimony to that hope.

Theory of knowledge

In addition to a chronological index in Appendix A, we also provide nine thematic guides in Appendix B. These suggest recommended routes through selected entries for those wishing to gain an overview of each theme and how it has developed through the history of philosophy. It

should be stressed that this is a tool designed for the specific content of this volume and in no way should the guides be taken as authoritative lists of the top thinkers in each topic area.

The first such theme is the theory of knowledge (epistemology). This is arguably about the most fundamental philosophical question of all: what is knowledge and can we ever have it? As we saw in the historical overview, the Ancient Greeks were already divided between those who thought knowledge required certainty and that it was attainable (such as Socrates and Plato) and those who took a more pragmatic view (such as Aristotle).

One division which has run though this debate is between those thinkers who have argued that reason acting independently could be a source of knowledge (rationalists) and those who thought all knowledge had to be derived from experience (empiricists). Modern empiricism began with Bacon and was developed though the writings of Locke and Hume. The great rationalist hero was Descartes, who was followed by Spinoza and Leibniz.

Kant occupies a more difficult to locate middle ground. He followed the rationalists in insisting that the mind itself gives form to experience and thus it is by studying the operations of the intellect that we understand the basic forms of experience, such as time and space, which make knowledge possible. But he also follows the empiricists by arguing that the only world we can know is the one given to us by experience. The world in itself is beyond our comprehension.

Just as philosophers have envied the precision of mathematics and sought to model philosophy on its methods, so more recently have many in the empiricist tradition come to see science as providing the proper model for knowledge. In this spirit Comte introduced positivism to modern philosophy: the view that the only statements that can be held to be true are those which can be verified by experience. Comte was followed by the Vienna Circle of logical positivists, which included Carnap, and it was a young A. J. Ayer who introduced the doctrines of the Circle to Britain and, ultimately, America.

A further important movement in epistemology is American pragmatism, as championed by Peirce, Dewey and James. Pragmatism circumvents the question of whether knowledge is of the world or not by insisting that to say 'I know *x*' is really to say that believing *x* allows

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one to be successful in predicting or manipulating the world. For the pragmatists, it is futile to worry about whether or not knowledge can be certain or whether what we claim to know accurately represents the world as it is. We should simply content ourselves with what works. Pragmatism has been a strong influence in American philosophy ever since and can be seen in the work of Quine, Putnam and Rorty.

Metaphysics

The second big field in philosophy is metaphysics, which is no less grand than the study of the fundamental nature of being. Some of the most important metaphysical questions concern the nature of time, matter, causation and identity.

Pythagoras's early attempts at metaphysics look a little crude now and seem to be based more on speculation than sound reasoning. Aristotle's metaphysics too has aged, although his distinctions between the different types of causation are still useful when disentangling confusions that arise from claims that one thing caused another.

Perhaps the most ambitious metaphysician of all time was Spinoza. His masterwork, *Ethics*, proceeded in the manner of a geometric proof and provided a complete account of the nature of mind, matter, God and much else along the way. Although few now accept his overall system, much of his argument that mind and matter are really two aspects of the one substance continues to be of interest today.

Metaphysics is where you'll find some of philosophy's more exotic creations, among them idealism, first developed in detail by Bishop George Berkeley. Berkeley argued that the universe is essentially mental in nature and that there was no such thing as matter, if we took that to mean some non-mental substance that sustained being. Berkeley's view sounds like nonsense, but he argued it was common sense and there is still something invigorating about examining his careful arguments and considering their profound implications.

What some find so beguiling about metaphysics is also what makes some people so dismissive of it. Each of the great metaphysicians in this book – including Hegel, Schopenhauer, Bergson, Santayana – offers a complete system, a way of understanding the whole of being. This vast reach strikes many as being intellectually extravagant. Is it really possible for philosophical reasoning to justify a belief such as in the real existence

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