

THE HISTORY  
OF  
EUROPEAN PHILOSOPHY

AN INTRODUCTORY BOOK

BY  
WALTER T. MARVIN

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**THE HISTORY OF EUROPEAN PHILOSOPHY**



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**HOWARD CROSBY WARREN**

## PREFACE

The purpose I have had in mind to fulfill in writing this book has been solely pedagogical. I have not endeavored to add anything whatever to our knowledge of the history of philosophy, and if by chance I have anywhere offered new points of view, this has been quite subordinate to my main purpose. On the contrary, I have in several chapters deliberately depended upon one selected secondary source and in a few chapters I have ventured even to quote my secondary authority at length. (I have indicated this indebtedness wherever I have thought it of any importance to the reader to do so.)

Two pedagogical considerations have determined the character of the book. First, my experience is, that the traditional and conventional text-book on the history of philosophy, however excellent and scholarly, is not well adapted to the needs of undergraduate students. Such a book is an epitome of the doctrines of the great philosophical thinkers, and is both unintelligible to the beginner and too detailed to be learned and remembered by him. It attempts to make the student acquainted with the difficult and detailed doctrines and reasonings of the philosophers when only a long and careful study of their writings can really bring this about. Moreover, it fails by not relating the information it gives to the other historical information prerequisite to the study of the history of philosophy, and thus it forms, if learned, a sort of logic-tight compartment with no openings into the fields of psychology and anthropology, of general political, social and economic history, and of the history of literature,

art, and general culture. It ignores the fact that the philosophy of any period or age is the outcome of the total civilization and of the changing civilization of the time. Hence to avoid these errors, I have tried to confine my book to major philosophical movements and to approach the study of any philosophical movement from the general history of the era, and I have tried to indicate the relations between the philosophy of the age and the other great spiritual and social changes that were taking place. Second, a beginner's text-book on the history of philosophy, in my opinion, should include as few details as possible, should leave much to be taught directly by the instructor in charge of the course, and should presuppose that the student is to do a large amount of outside reading. To make this reading possible the text-book must be brief and concise, and must resemble in its character a syllabus. However, it may properly include more topics than the student will have time to study at length, so that the instructor may select from the list the topics most suitable to the needs and interests of the individual student.

The readings I have suggested are merely suggestions, though serious ones. They are not bibliographies.

WALTER T. MARVIN.

Rutgers College,  
March 24th, 1917.

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# THE HISTORY OF EUROPEAN PHILOSOPHY

## CHAPTER I

### THE RECENCY OF CIVILIZATION

1. **The relative recency of civilization.**—Man has not always been the man we now behold. Man sprang from a brute ancestry and took many tens of thousands of years to reach the level of civilization found at the beginning of what we usually call history, that is, the level attained four thousand years before Christ in the lands bordering upon the Mediterranean Sea. Even the beginnings of Egyptian, Sumerian and Babylonian civilization seem but of yesterday, if their recency is compared with the remoteness of the time when man first used the rudest stone tools. Moreover, from the dawn of history to our own day, during this period of less than ten thousand years, parts of the human race have developed not only relatively but also absolutely to a far greater extent than man developed during the preceding one hundred thousand years. The three familiar and wonderful examples of this rapidly developing civilization in the western world have been the three thousand years of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia preceding the Christian era, the twelve hundred years of Greco-Roman history from 800 B. C. to 400 A. D. and the seven hundred years of modern Europe from the beginning of the thirteenth century to the present time.

## 2 THE HISTORY OF EUROPEAN PHILOSOPHY

*For further study read:*

- Robinson, J. H., *The New History*, 1911, 236-266;  
Marett, R. R., *Anthropology* (Home University Library);  
Clodd, E., *The Story of Primitive Man*, 1910;  
Ratzel, *The History of Mankind*, 1896, Book I.

*For more extensive study read:*

- Osborn, H. F., *Men of the Old Stone Age*, 1915;  
Sollas, *Ancient Hunters and their Modern Representatives*, 1915;  
Buttel-Reepen, *Man and his Forerunners*, 1913;  
Keith, A., *Antiquity of Man*, 1915;  
Meyer, E., *Geschichte des Altertums*, 3te. Aufl., 1910, Bd. I, Erste Hälfte;  
MacCurdy, G. G., *Recent Discoveries Bearing on the Antiquity of Man*, 1910 (from *Smithsonian Report of 1909*);  
Haddon, A. C., *History of Anthropology*, 1910.

### **2. The causes of the rise and growth of civilization:**

(a) **The further evolution of man's brain.**—Psychology limits the possible causes at work in evolving civilization to two distinct types. First, man's inborn mental nature, the nervous system given him by heredity, may have been improving. Second, man's environment, that is, the sum total of the factors acting upon this inborn nature, may have become more and more favorable to further civilization. If the first cause has been present, man's progress can be explained in the same way as can man's superiority to the brute. That is to say, we can argue that precisely as the brain of prehistoric man had evolved to a higher type than that possessed by his prehuman ancestor; so man's brain has continued to evolve to a higher and higher type, with the result that the European has a better brain to-day than had the European six thousand years ago. To repeat, if such an evolution has indeed taken place, it would explain man's recent progress in civilization; for it would give the modern a superior intellect, or capacity

for civilization, to that of prehistoric man, precisely as the earlier neural evolution gave to prehistoric man an intellect superior to that of the beasts whom he hunted, not by his greater strength or speed, but by his manual dexterity, his weapons and his strategy. However, we may not accept this possible cause; for all the evidence that we as yet have from historian, anthropologist, and psychologist, indicates no important advance in the inborn structure of the human brain during the past six thousand years, and certainly no advance comparable to that which must have taken place in our race's evolution remote ages ago. Perhaps the most that can be maintained in favor of the belief that man's inborn nature has improved, is that natural selection may have tended to weed out the feebler intellects, may have favored the better intellects, and thereby may have raised slightly not the best but the average intellect.

(b) **The influence of the environment.**—Be this as it may, the second possible cause, namely, the environment, has been by far the more potent factor; for the evidence we have, indicates that environment has been not only an indispensable but also a sufficient cause of human progress. Expressed in briefest and baldest form, *the invention of tools and of arts has increased the food supply, this has increased the population, and the last has increased socialization and civilization.* Once in existence, a little civilization can by the same process beget further civilization and an increased civilization can beget a higher and higher civilization at a rate comparable to a geometrical progression. A stimulating and favorable climate, a good geographical habitat, natural wealth in food, in wood, and in minerals, more efficient instruments for tillage, for transportation, for building, and for the various industries, a denser population, an increased socialization, a more efficient language, a wider acquaintance with other lands,

their people, and their customs, a nobler architecture and nobler plastic arts, a richer industrial, biographical, social, and artistic tradition, and a written lore, have each and all been either contributing or indispensable causes for the continued growth of civilization. Many of them have been stimuli that excite curiosity, that suggest problems, and that arouse novel thoughts and other new ways of reacting. Moreover, such a growth in civilization provides more and more the indispensable tolerance and reward for inventiveness, for analytical thought, and for critical reflection. Soon it provides also as stimuli the deeds and thoughts of great men, stimuli which excite younger men to study, to imitate, and to criticise the arts, the customs, and the doctrines of their elders. Thus the very enterprise of progress becomes itself a tradition and a profession. Finally, from the very beginning, civilization tends to become an international possession and nations tend to contribute mutually to further progress; for in the early stages of civilization as well as in the later, beliefs and customs tend to spread, carried by the trader, the traveller, and the warrior.

However, a word of caution must be added to this story of the influence of environment upon civilization. Civilization does not always beget higher civilization. Civilization can remain stationary, it can decline back even into savagedom. Civilized environments are exceeding complex and are never alike in different times and in different places; and unfortunately some of the greatest or most rapid advances in civilization seem to have been dependent upon some quite exceptional combination of environmental factors, since often in man's history these most rapid advances have persisted for but relatively short periods.

(c) **The influence of the exceptional man.**—The presence of a subordinate psychological factor indispensable to the growth of civilization should be noted in addition



to the two ultimate factors, change in inborn nature and environment. This factor is the man of exceptionally high ability. Could we see the thousands and thousands of inventions and novel thoughts and deeds *actually in the making*, the thousands of individual acts that have been the most important events in history, whom should we see to have been their true authors? From what we know regarding some of these events which the historian has been able to examine in detail, and from what is psychologically most probable, we can infer that the true authors were in most instances men above the average ability of their horde, tribe, or nation. To guess what the history of Europe would have been, had this or that man of genius not been born, may be utterly idle; but it is not venturesome to assert that our civilization would never have arisen, had some superhuman agent destroyed in each generation all the children whose inborn mental nature ranked among the highest ten per cent in excellence. If this is true, then the following propositions are of great importance in the study of history. First, the denser the population the greater will be the absolute number of these exceptional children and the higher will be the probability that among them are some children of quite extraordinary ability. In other words, though the average inborn mental nature may not have improved in the course of the past six thousand years, the inborn nature can be said to have improved absolutely wherever population has greatly increased in number. And such an increase is typical of advancing civilization. Second, psychology shows that environment brings about far greater and far more desirable changes in the mental nature of the exceptionally capable child than in that of his mediocre companion. That is, he is more easily civilized. Third, the exceptionally capable men are as a type far more masterful and inventive than the mediocre, and therefore they are to a greater degree