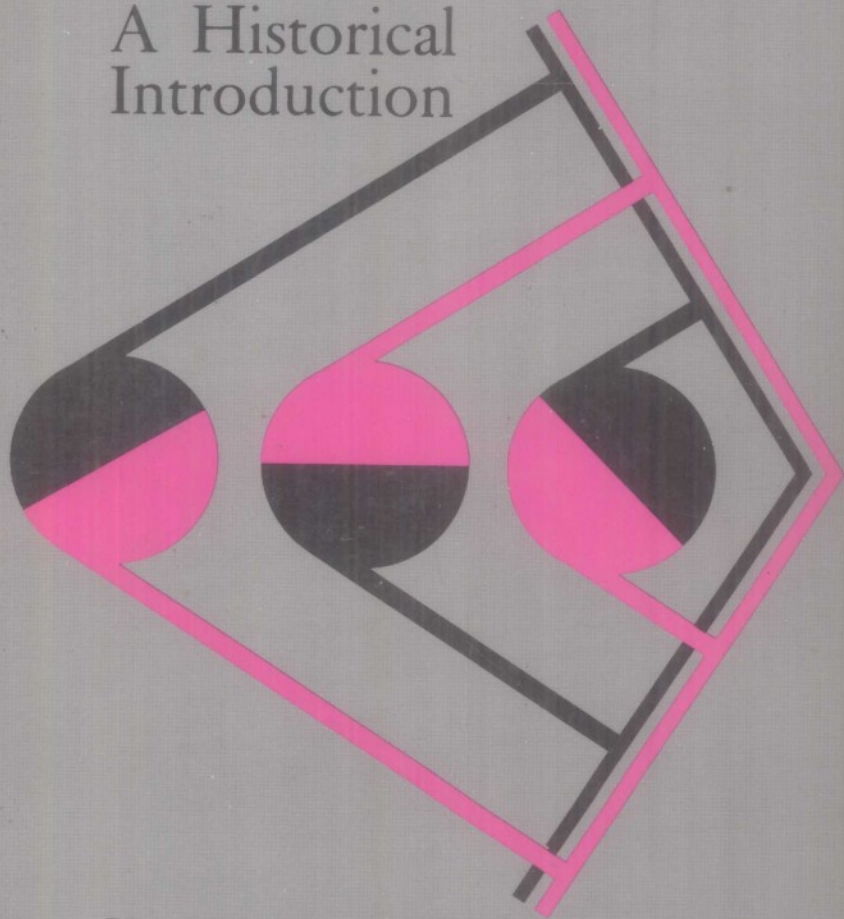


# PHILOSOPHY'S JOURNEY:

A Historical  
Introduction



Konstantin Kolenda

PHILOSOPHY'S  
JOURNEY:  
A HISTORICAL  
INTRODUCTION

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**Cover:** The three revolving spheres represent each of the three historical periods covered in *Philosophy's Journey*: ancient, modern, and contemporary. The double line of the arrow shows that the moving front of philosophy gathers into itself contributions from all three periods. (*Designed by the author*).

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*To Radoslav and Corrinne Tsanoff,  
two great-souled people*

## PREFACE

Most philosophers agree that studying philosophy is *doing* philosophy. Philosophy is an *activity*; it requires judging for oneself, objecting, hesitating, trying to find a flaw in an argument or to think of a better one. It calls for paying attention to initial premises and intermediary steps and not being surprised when many of them turn out to be doubtful, insufficient, or inconclusive. It involves the capacity and the patience to accept some of the premises or conclusions only provisionally or with reservations. At all times it must include consultation with one's own experience and knowledge.

The important question for the teacher is where to begin. He needs to choose topics in which a student can take a serious interest. Without such an interest, the "study" of philosophy degenerates into parrotlike repetition of slogans and fruitless memorizing of "positions," which is quite contrary to the whole spirit of the subject. Aristotle observed that philosophy begins in wonder; John Dewey claimed that thinking starts when one encounters a difficulty; and Ludwig Wittgenstein thought of philosophical problems as deep disquietudes.

In a time like ours, when the new generation is questioning the present social order, it is especially tempting to concentrate on topics and issues that appear to dominate contemporary consciousness. The appeal of the "new" and "up-to-date" may result in a greater popularity of philosophy courses and may bring into them a greater number of concerned students. And yet, there may be a danger in this—both for philosophy and for the students. The danger for philosophy is that it may be lost in the rhetoric of journalists, novelists, moralists, and social critics. Not that these debates are unimportant; the question is whether they should become the staple fare of philosophy courses. It may well be that at a time when the cry for relevance is loudest, philosophy should insist on the primacy of clear understanding. And clear understanding will not necessarily be attained by joining forces with those embroiled in partisan debates. Understanding and the ability to cope more effectively with problems may, in the long run, best come from stepping back from the dominant intellectual scene, with its ingrained conceptual predilections and styles of argument, and by looking around a larger conceptual

territory, of which the contemporary debate may be just a limited, and limiting, fragment.

What I am saying is that it is a mistake for philosophy to abandon its own cultivated vineyard and to move out into intellectual wilderness. In the course of its development, philosophy has managed to uncover, to formulate, and to examine critically a great many concepts that have proved themselves applicable to human experience. Whether, when, and to what extent they are relevant, are questions that can be answered only if one is aware of these contributions. To deprive the new generation of students of the opportunity to gain this awareness is a disservice both to them and to philosophy. Only if we think that contemporary problems can be analyzed properly with myopic, short-range tools, can we be willing to ignore a body of critical reflection contained among the treasures of our philosophical heritage. It is both utopian and obscurantist to think that the really deep and serious human problems can be dealt with properly when approached in the open, vacant frame of mind.

There is not only room but also need for examining our repository of basic concepts, themes, and arguments while trying to develop a philosophic frame of mind. This venture should not be seen as a trip into the musty, antiquated past. Nor is it a search for a "rational authority" of some great thinkers. The importance of the thinkers who have gone before us does not lie in their "discovery" of some new ideas or arguments. They have become a part of the history of the subject because they have expressed and formulated thoughts which can and often do occur to anyone who gives some thought to the matter. This is why Whitehead could say that all of the history of philosophy is but a footnote to Plato. To understand an important philosopher is to discover at a certain stage of dealing with his thought that one can follow and understand it, that some of his conclusions appear compelling, even though some others may seem absurd.

It is of interest to note that the contemporary analytic-linguistic movement in philosophy, after the initial turning away from the history of philosophy, is rediscovering the importance of such writers as Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Kant. Even the long-neglected and ridiculed Hegel is again receiving attention. This revival of interest in historical figures is not a regression but a realization that the issues of philosophical interest today are connected with those which occupied our philosophical predecessors. The growing interest in the thought of classical philosophers, as manifested in the increasing publication of books on historical figures, is a sign that present philosophizing is continuous with significant philosophizing of the past.

There is no better way of enlarging one's understanding and of illuminating one's present concerns than by acquiring some grasp of the thoughts which other human beings found important, illuminating, convincing, or useful. The history of philosophy provides a panorama of such thoughts. This is why this introduction is using the history of philosophy as its base. Historical material, however, is not the sole content nor the main object of interest in this text. Some concepts and arguments in the history of philosophy stand out because they are still of interest today. This text concentrates on such central topics.

The headings of each section call attention to a key thought of a philosopher or a movement. But it is necessary to mention the important links and logical connections which fill out the basic outline of a philosopher's thought. Similarly, since the text is divided into three main periods—the ancient, the modern, and the contemporary—it is appropriate to link them by background discussions, in which some mention is made of other important figures and movements not included in the body of the text. This fill-in material is also intended to indicate the continuity of philosophical thought.

Some continuities and transitions are of special interest to a student of philosophy, since they also demonstrate the very nature of the subject. To a large extent, philosophy is a prolonged discussion. Once an important idea or an angle of vision has been introduced, it is likely to receive the attention of others, who may develop, criticize, or modify it. Philosophers may engage in building, unbuilding, and rebuilding a connected conceptual structure. The development from Socrates to Aristotle is one such typical example; another is that from Descartes to Leibniz; and still another, that from Locke to Hume. Tracing the paths of intellectual developments or hearing echoes of older views repeated in much later and different historical surroundings is one of the pleasures of studying philosophy. It has its own life and drama, where the old characters reappear, sometimes unexpectedly, and where familiar *leitmotifs* are suddenly discernible in a new variation.

The questions at the end of each chapter will help the student to focus on the main issues and arguments. As the material accumulates, it may be useful and stimulating to establish some comparisons and contrasts. Other questions intend to elicit the reader's own reaction, and the teacher may want to add questions of his own, thus initiating further probing and discussion. The lists of suggested reading do not include works mentioned in the main body of the book, since most of these works are available in many editions. Instead, they direct the reader to the material which can deepen and expand philosophical explorations initiated by this text.

The text may be used either in an introductory course or in a course in

the history of philosophy. In either context the teacher may want to use additional reading material, relying on this text to provide scope and balance. In a history of philosophy course, where original sources are used, this book may serve as a commentary and provide a basis for discussion. One of its special features is an extensive treatment of contemporary philosophical developments, including those on the American scene. The advantage of including these discussions lies in the opportunity to see what issues dominated recent philosophical thought. That thought, in turn, throws light on some of the traditional questions and topics. For example, Wittgenstein's discussion of the notion of sameness and of "family resemblances" puts the Platonic notion of forms or universals in an entirely new perspective.

Another feature of this book is that it discusses in some detail representative ethical theories corresponding to each period. Although moral philosophy has been increasingly asserting its independence of philosophy in general, positions in ethics often reflect a particular intellectual climate and should be explored against the background of general philosophical doctrines current in their time. In this area, also, our interest in the historical material is conditioned by contemporary consciousness. It seems worthwhile to explore what Socrates or Kant had to say about morality, because what they had to say is pertinent to the situations in which we find ourselves today. Few discussions of the issue of civil disobedience are more discerning than the one contained in Plato's *Crito*. As in all philosophical thinking, ethical reflection has a cumulative effect, and we can understand contemporary views better if we look at them in the light of preceding analyses of moral experience.

There is one further advantage in combining philosophical inquiry with historical exploration. Philosophy as a subject eminently illustrates the basic unity of human intelligence. It points to the fact that the exploration of human consciousness can be undertaken in cooperation with minds long since disembodied. To think Spinoza's thoughts after him and to fit them into one's own historical context is to find an instance of a common intellectual and spiritual bond uniting all mankind. This reminder seems especially timely today, when there is a tendency to draw arbitrary boundaries between the presently living generations, between adolescents and adults, or between the scientific and humanistic "cultures." Philosophy is one area of study in which a human being can feel at one with his fellows. Although separated by ages and living in different historical contexts, we still can share in an enterprise which tries to articulate and to understand our common human world.

I wish to express my gratitude to my former teachers and present colleagues, J. S. Fulton and R. A. Tsanoff, who have read the entire typescript,



eliminating many inaccuracies and offering suggestions for improvements. A similarly helpful attention to the sections on contemporary philosophers was given by my younger colleagues, Professors Lyle Angene and Robert W. Burch. I also wish to thank Professor Walter Kaufmann for suggesting some changes in my discussion of Nietzsche, and Professor Gilbert Ryle for his encouraging comments on my treatment of his *Concept of Mind*.

*Houston, Texas*

K. K.

Fig. 15.1



Courtesy, Museum  
of Fine Arts, Boston  
(William Avery  
Gardner Fund)

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# PART I: THE ANCIENT PERIOD

Once expressed, no matter how tentatively, an idea may contain a germ of further thought which may grow into a fuller, more illuminating point of view.



1  
EARLY  
PHILOSOPHICAL  
VENTURES



## 1. THE WHAT AND THE HOW

Historians agree that Western philosophy as an independent, autonomous inquiry came into existence in Greece in the sixth century, B.C. Before the advent of some Greek thinkers who now are referred to as Presocratics (since they preceded Socrates), all ultimate explanations of natural and human phenomena were given in religious terms. The Greek religion was anthropomorphic. Gods were like human beings, except that they wielded superhuman powers. Mount Olympus, high above the clouds, was the place where the gods were believed to dwell and from there to direct the affairs of the world. There was, of course, a division of their spheres of influence: some gods controlled the sky, others the waters, and still others the bowels of the earth. The Greeks had a god of war and a goddess of love, a god of trade, and one of the arts. What happened on earth and in human history was ascribed to the action or the interference of gods. A change in the weather, especially if it was violent and unpredictable, was the work of Zeus; a storm at sea expressed Poseidon's wrath; a bountiful harvest of grapes showed forth the good will of Dionysus. Everything that happened was understood as a result of some divine agency. Ultimate questions had the form: who, or which god, is responsible for X? Religious myths were invoked to explain not only particular events, but also the origin and the general course of the world.

What is now referred to as the genius of the early Greek philosophers manifested itself in their ability to start asking a brand new kind of questions. Somehow they managed to set aside the customary explanations in terms of divine, supernatural agencies. Not that they necessarily ceased to believe the religious stories and myths; it is unlikely that they could shake off altogether their own age-long, ingrained traditions and modes of thinking. Most of the new thinkers probably asked and explored new questions while holding some of the old beliefs. But it is also true that many of them began to show much greater interest in their inquiries than in the traditional mythical explanations.

The new explanations differed from the old ones in that they moved away from personalized toward impersonal accounts. The "who" was replaced by "what" or "how." Somehow it dawned on the bolder thinkers of the age that behind all the observed things and processes one might discover "the nature of things." Possibly, the Greeks were peculiarly prone to ask this question. The Greek religion, in spite of its anthropomorphic character, nevertheless recognized something called *nemesis*, *moira*, translated as fate or destiny, an inexorable force to which even gods were subject. Perhaps this conception facilitated a transition to an impersonal order of things, to the idea of "laws of nature."