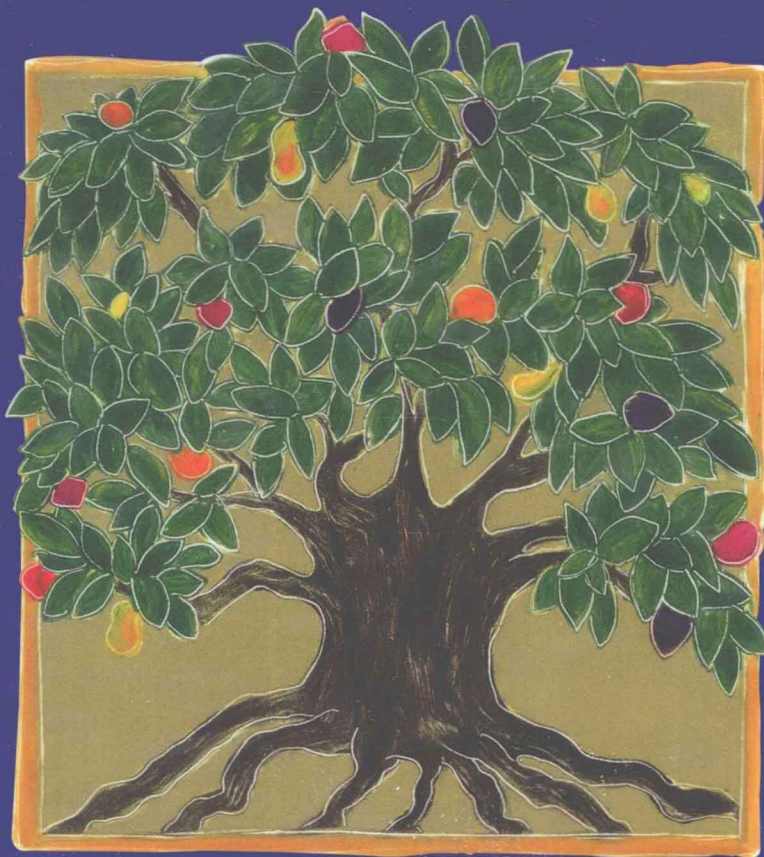


ROOTS OF WISDOM

SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE OF PHILOSOPHY



HELEN BUSS MITCHELL

A COMPANION
STUDY GUIDE
IS AVAILABLE FOR
THIS BOOK

ROOTS OF WISDOM

SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE OF PHILOSOPHY

HELEN BUSS MITCHELL

Howard Community College



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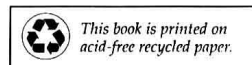
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DEDICATION

*For Ruth and Joe, who believed in me from the beginning.
For Joe and Jason, who supported me to the end.*

Foreword

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Professor of Philosophy

California State University, Bakersfield

How do you write a textbook that effectively introduces students to the art of philosophizing? Given the number of different textbooks on the market, there appears to be no unanimity about the answer to this question. Some argue for the problems approach. Focus on a few major philosophical problems like the issues of mind and body or freedom and determinism to show students what kinds of problems philosophers deal with and how they go about solving them. Too often students cannot understand the “solutions” because they cannot understand the problem. They just can’t relate.

Others prefer the historical approach. Surf the centuries, picking up the major waves here and there. Sometimes this approach can amount to the proverbial six-day tour of twenty-one countries. Were we in Athens yesterday listening to Socrates or was it Paris and Descartes? Of course being introduced to some of the great thinkers of the past can provide students with models of good philosophical thinking in action. This approach once prompted one of my students to ask, “Are all philosophers dead?” (The insight that may be behind that question is not one I wish to contemplate.)

This diversity of strategies for effectively introducing students to philosophy exists, in part, because of the diversity of students; no one approach works best with all students. The kind of book that can best help instructors meet the challenge of teaching the introductory course is one whose approach grows out of a wide and rich experience with a diverse student population, experimentation with different strategies,

and careful reflection on that experience and experimentation from a pedagogical point of view. Helen Buss Mitchell's *Roots of Wisdom: Speaking the Language of Philosophy* reflects such experience, experimentation, and thought.

Introductory texts to philosophy often fail in two ways: first, they purport to introduce students to philosophy when in fact they introduce students to Western Anglo-American and European philosophy; and second, they are written at a level that many students cannot understand and in a way that bores them. Happily neither of these faults characterizes Mitchell's *Roots of Wisdom*. This book is global in its perspective, including Eastern and Western philosophy along with African-American and feminist perspectives. It covers the standard philosophical issues in metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology, and discusses exciting new questions in environmental ethics and the philosophy of mind. Written at a level students can understand, this text uses excellent examples from films, literature, and other areas of contemporary culture. It constantly seeks to excite and to stimulate that natural curiosity and wonder that students possess. And it incorporates the historical perspective that permits students to see the unfolding of philosophical reflection and debate over time and in a cultural context.

Baruch Spinoza said he could not teach philosophy without becoming a "disturber of the peace." *Roots of Wisdom* disturbs the peace in just the right way.

Preface

In our first class in philosophy all of us learn that this ancient discipline is about wisdom—specifically the love of wisdom. We learn, too, that philosophy’s concerns are the perennial concerns of people everywhere—who we are, how we know, how we should live. With such subject matter, few disciplines should speak to more people, or draw their material from more diverse sources, than philosophy. It is in this spirit that I have written *Roots of Wisdom*.

To paraphrase Aristotle, all people desire to know. Yet for nearly all students, philosophy is a foreign language, in terms of both its specialized vocabulary and its approach to knowledge. Students have to master the methods and tools of a subject they have not previously studied; this tends to be both frightening and exhilarating. Those of us who teach it try to convey the magic that makes us love philosophy while honoring the rigor the subject matter demands and leading our students through the wisdom of the Western tradition.

Most of us are also challenged personally and professionally to present a multicultural curriculum to an increasingly diverse student body. There is so much to do that deciding what to include and what to omit is always a wrenching decision. A good text captures the students’ imaginations, engages them intellectually, and honors the search for wisdom that is at the heart of the philosophic enterprise. Ideally, it covers the traditional topics in philosophy while providing a historical framework that encourages students to see ideas emerging from other ideas and from a historical and cultural context. Ideally, it integrates women philosophers and non-Western philosophies with more traditional material.

These are the goals that animate *Roots of Wisdom*. To engage students in the quest for wisdom, this book raises issues confronting people at the end of the twentieth century and uncovers the perennial questions underlying these issues. Its ten chapters are framed with

thought-provoking issues representing major topics in philosophy, beginning with metaphysics (reality, human nature, philosophy and God), moving to epistemology (knowledge sources, truth tests, aesthetic experience), and concluding with axiology (political philosophy, social philosophy, ethics). Although they are topically organized, the chapters also move forward in time, following the canon of Western philosophy and including women and both Asian and African thinkers as they speak to the questions raised by the Western discourse.

All the great sages have used popular culture to explain their ideas—Socrates, Lao-tzu, Buddha, Jesus. The challenge for a chronicler of great ideas at the end of the twentieth century is to make those ideas live in the particular cultural forms of the present without appearing (or being) gimmicky or frivolous. Throughout the book I use contemporary examples, from *Star Trek* to virtual reality, to illustrate philosophical issues. In addition, I have liberally used cartoons and occasionally the lyrics of rock songs. Students are usually surprised as well as pleased to realize they have been reading and listening to philosophy without knowing it.

Some texts are written at such a difficult level that one of the instructor's tasks becomes explaining the text to the students. *Roots of Wisdom* takes a different approach. I have spared none of the rigor and retained all the essential vocabulary, yet the style is conversational, the examples plentiful, and the illustrations lavish. This is a book students can read on their own, freeing you to offer your own emphasis and add additional material if you choose. Your students have the basics provided for them. This book makes difficult concepts simple without making them simplistic.

SPECIAL CONTENT FEATURES

Because formal philosophy is indeed a foreign language for beginning students, I have offered many options for organizing and learning difficult new material. I have also provided the historical, cultural, and biographical context your students need to appreciate the roots of philosophical wisdom. The following features support these goals.

Philosophy in Context: "Historical Interlude" Sections

There are five historical interludes; they begin and end the text as well as link the major sections and topics. The first provides a worldwide context for the beginning of Western philosophy; the second describes the blending of Greek rationalist thought and Hebrew religious thought in the exportation of Christianity to the gentile world; the third and

fourth provide transitions from the medieval to the modern world and from the modern to the post-modern world respectively; the last considers the implications for philosophy of discoveries in brain neuroscience. Together these historical interludes provide transitions among the three parts of the text—metaphysics, epistemology, axiology—and include information on key events without interrupting the flow of a chapter.

Logic: “How Philosophy Works” Boxes

A minicourse in logic appears throughout the text with arguments drawn from the chapters’ content. Each chapter contains a “How Philosophy Works” box that you can use to teach reasoning while you cover content. Because the methods of reasoning are connected with the arguments of philosophers within the chapters, logic appears as the natural and indispensable tool of philosophers rather than something to be learned in isolation from content. Argument forms range from Aristotle’s formulation of the categorical syllogism to the new science of fuzzy logic that makes our air conditioners run efficiently by affirming the range of points at which something is neither A nor non-A.

Biography: “The Making of a Philosopher” Boxes

“The Making of a Philosopher” boxes provide biographical material and present thinkers as real people with human motivations and problems as well as great ideas. Because women as well as men are discussed in these boxes and because some of the philosophers are Asian and African American, the multicultural focus of the text is maintained.

Applications: “Philosophy in Action” Boxes

Chapters One, Three, Five, Eight, and Ten have “Philosophy in Action” boxes. Topics range from the early “sophistry” of one of O. J. Simpson’s defense attorneys to the classic Prisoner’s Dilemma. These boxes intentionally highlight a wide range of applications for philosophy, including an African woman’s story about “knowing” how to cure malaria, Simone Weil’s decision to starve herself to death in solidarity with her compatriots in France, and the social contract as written into the U.S. Declaration of Independence.

VISUAL FEATURES

*M*any of your students will be visual learners. Words alone may be inadequate to convey concepts. Even for those who respond best to words, illustrations provide valuable reinforcement.

Time Lines

The time lines on the inside covers embrace the entire scope of the book, highlighting the flow of ideas throughout human history and revealing the multicultural nature of the search for wisdom. They offer “the course at a glance” and give you and your students a ready reference for people and events.

Maps

Because the roots of wisdom are deep in many cultures around the world, it seems wise to indicate where these cultures are geographically. You can use the maps that accompany each of the historical interludes to combat our national cultural illiteracy. By freezing a moment in history, each of these maps highlights a time period and illuminates it with significant dates, events, and historical figures. The last interlude contains a “map” of the brain to conclude our exploration of interesting (and somewhat uncharted) territory.

Cartoons, Photographs, and Illustrations

Cartoons are used liberally throughout the text. In each case I have written a caption with a statement or question that ties it to the text and raises a specific philosophical issue or query. Because they come from a wide variety of sources (Doonesbury, Calvin and Hobbes, Mother Goose and Grimm, Bloom County, Bizarro, and the work of several talented, independent individuals) and represent a wide range of subjects, these cartoons offer students memory devices for anchoring course content.

Photographs, like cartoons, appear in every chapter and have captions that do the same thing. Specific philosophical concepts are examined through the medium of world art. In each case the culture that produced the art is identified and the caption ties the photograph to the content. Although some of the art may be familiar, some of it may appear exotic. One of the best ways to know a culture is by studying its art forms, and this book uses art as a source of important information about how philosophy is done around the world.

Illustrations represent difficult or challenging text material visually. As with the cartoons and photography, my captions tie the visual and verbal components together. Some of the African concepts are particularly well communicated through visual images. The illustrations commissioned for this book include sketches of philosophers. These portraits humanize the thinkers represented and encourage students to think of them as fellow human beings, facing the same challenges and opportunities as the rest of us as they speak to the “big questions” of philosophy. Some are shown together because they worked as a team, sought similar ends, or were linked romantically.

IN-TEXT LEARNING AIDS

In addition to the special sections described earlier, each chapter includes the following elements to guide and reinforce students' learning.

"The Issue Defined"

"The Issue Defined" sections are attention-getting openings, designed to draw students in and answer the unspoken "so what?" question. Artificial intelligence, national information databases, test tube babies, virtual reality—these are a few of the topics.

Key Terms and Glossary

Key terms are printed in boldface in the text, described etymologically, and defined in the margins as well as in the complete glossary in the back. By learning these key terms, your students can create a philosophical skeleton on which to hang more complex ideas.

Follow Up

Each chapter ends with "Suggestions for Further Thought" and "Suggestions for Further Exploration." The former lead students to apply and integrate chapter material with other text matter and with their own experiences; the latter are books (fiction and nonfiction) and films related to the chapter topic. "Suggestions for Further Thought" are thought-provoking questions designed to deepen student understanding, pull specifics together into concepts, and link philosophy with life. "Suggestions for Further Exploration" offer you and your students ways to go further with the material covered in the chapter. Debates, informal writing and formal papers, group work, and individual presentations can all have their genesis in these books, short stories, and films.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Two supplementary aids are available to complement the specific goals of the text. I have written them from the perspective of my own classroom experience over the last ten years, the experiences of my colleagues, and the honesty of my students.

Instructor's Manual

I have tried to make the Instructor's manual for this book the aid I wished for (but couldn't find) the first time I taught Introduction to Philosophy with less than two weeks' notice. Even if you are not facing this rigorous a challenge, you may benefit from some teaching suggestions because of the new material included in the book. The Instructor's

Manual is titled *Teaching the Language of Philosophy*. Each chapter begins with that heading and helps you guide your students through the material and the method of the chapter. Vocabulary words are grouped into families, their etymologies and other interesting features explained, and ways to present them explored. The section on Method helps you relate the chapter's mini-lesson on logic to the chapter content. Next is a Discussion Starter for use during the class session when you begin each chapter; this is followed by Background to help you design a lecture or answer questions the text may raise for your students. Each chapter in the guide concludes with Questions—25 multiple-choice, 15 true-false, and 5 essay. You will find 25 multiple-choice questions plus extra questions for each chapter on our Wadsworth, Inc., Testing System available for Mac and IBM. The final section offers you one or two Resources unique to the chapter to get your students thinking or to reinforce learning that has already occurred.

Study Guide

The study guide for students, titled *Learning the Language of Philosophy*, takes a similar approach to Vocabulary and Method. Treating philosophy as a foreign language, the guide lists new words (as foreign language texts typically do) at the beginning of each chapter and relates them to the overall “culture” of philosophy as well as to the specific instructional content of a given chapter. The method section helps them think of logic as a useful tool for life as well as philosophy class and uses real life illustrations as examples. Study Suggestions are intended to deepen students' understanding by nudging them beyond rote learning to a real application of the course content. Objective Practice Questions include 25 multiple-choice, 15 matching (statements/works to philosophers), and 10 true/false; there are also 5 essay practice questions. All the questions are unique. In some cases, student questions are reworked from the Instructor's Manual, asking for the same information in a different form.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When Valerie Costantini sent two Wadsworth representatives to my office in December 1992, she probably had no idea she was launching me on a new adventure. I thank Winston Beauchamp for helping me see that I had a text I wanted to write, Ken King for signing me, Tammy Goldfeld for encouraging me through the writing of the manuscript, John Bergez and Alan Titcher for helping me streamline and tighten the manuscript, and John for also overseeing the ambitious art program. I also thank Bob Kauser for laughing with me over the cartoons, Christy Butterfield for creating the design and supervising the illustrations, and

Ruth Cottrell for overseeing the production phase so diligently and so kindly. Kristina Pappas and Kelly Zavislak were consistently helpful, efficient, and excited about the project.

Jason Mitchell and Jeannie Jeffrey read every chapter, making helpful suggestions and reminding me of what matters to twenty-some-things. Jason took my words and turned them into computer graphics (in addition to supplying a stunning photograph); Jeannie took my ideas and turned them into visually striking concept sketches. Joe Mitchell read manuscript pages and galleys, took wonderful photographs on short notice, created the index, and helped me remember the real world outside my office. Lisa McQuilkin and Mary Young read the manuscript and helped me keep the tone light and the pace lively. Jean Moon, Mary Margaret Kameron, Barbara Whorton, Marie Siracusa, Donna Canfield, JoAnn Hawkins, Diana Marinich, and Judy Thomas helped me remember how important the voices of women are—in philosophy textbooks and in life. To all of you, and to my other friends and family who provided support and encouragement when I needed it most, I offer my deep and heartfelt thanks.

The Rouse Scholars: Angela, Casey, Maureen, Trinh, Kim, Charinna, Danika, Rachel, Lisa, Amy L, Amy R., Michelle, and Jen were my guinea pigs, using the text in manuscript form during fall 1994, and gently pointing out where I hit the mark and where I missed. All the students over the last ten years who wondered aloud *why* we didn't read any women philosophers planted an idea that wouldn't go away. Without all of you, the idea for this book would never have germinated.

Doris Ligon opened the treasures of the Maryland Museum of African Art to me and Dianne Connolly, Julia Measures, and Mary Ellen Zorbaugh shared their knowledge of Chinese medicine and health. Rich Walter taught me about Zen, the brain, and life. Phil Reitzel and Phillis Knill made special arrangements for me to photograph Civil War artifacts in the Howard County Historical Society. Yifei Gan painted "Early Spring" especially for this book and allowed me to use a photo of "Boy with Tree Apple." Hou Rong generously gave permission for two of his statues to be photographed and reprinted. Mark Gregorik of Blue Moon Licensing arranged for the Magic Eye drawing that introduces Part Two and Elaine Siegel provided the photo of the KanKouran West African Dancers. Jean Soto and Sharon Frey of the Howard County Library and several librarians of the Howard County and Enoch Pratt libraries helped me find citations and references. Jean Moon and Lara Lansprey allowed me to look through the photo morgue at Patuxent Publishing Company. Lt. Jay Zumbrun obtained a police warrant for Chapter Six. I appreciate the generosity with which you have shared your time and your resources to help me craft this book.

I am deeply indebted to the reviewers who provided uniformly constructive and sometimes brilliant suggestions. From the beginning, their thoughtful comments shaped the manuscript. My thanks to Tim Davis, Essex Community College, whose suggestions for the chapter on aesthetic experience were especially helpful; Roger P. Ebertz, Dubuque University, whose page-by-page and sometimes line-by-line reactions made me think more deeply; Erick R. Egerston, Midland Lutheran College; Garth Gilan, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale; and Anita Silva, San Francisco State University.

To my Readers . . .

Please send your responses to *Roots of Wisdom* to me in care of Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., Ten Davis Drive, Belmont, CA 94002 or to my Internet address: hmitchel@ccm.howardcc.edu. I am especially interested in what works for you and what doesn't as well as your suggestions for augmenting and improving the text.

Helen Buss Mitchell

EPIGRAPH

Whatever one does, one always rebuilds the monument in his own way. But it is already something gained to have used only the original stones.

*Marguerite Yourcenar
Memoirs of Hadrian*

A Student's Guide to Using This Book

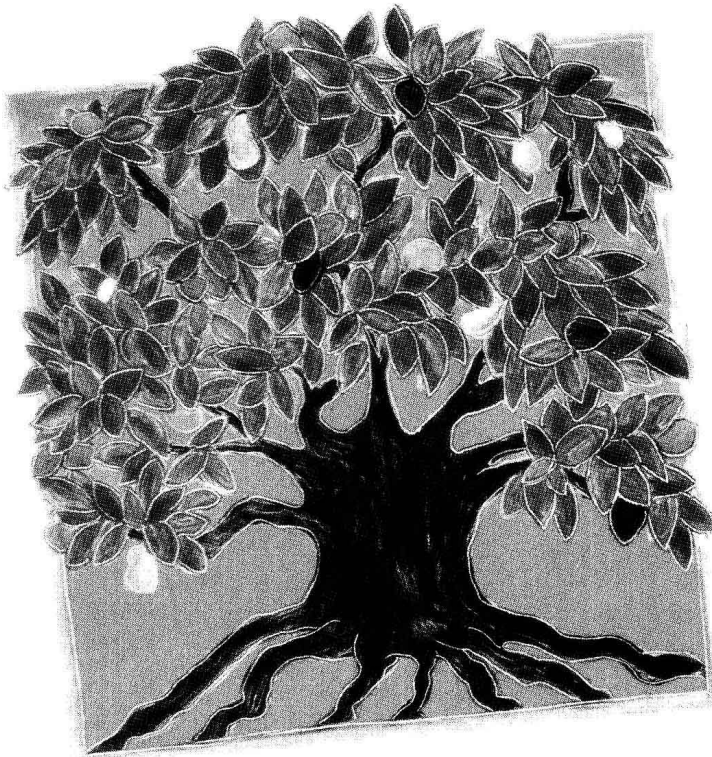
PHILOSOPHY IS ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT ISSUES THAT CONCERN US ALL

HERE'S A LITTLE SECRET. You already know philosophy. You just may not be conscious of it. Everyday you experience philosophy in many different ways: through the music you listen to; the movies you watch; the conversations you have with friends; and the questions you might ask yourself about God, life, and reality. Philosophy is a way of understanding what it means to be human.

ROOTS OF WISDOM is only introducing you to a new level of philosophical consciousness. By reading its chapters and studying its lessons, you will begin to appreciate philosophy at a more sophisticated level.

KEEP IN MIND that there is more to philosophy than reading—you can *do* philosophy, as well! But first you need to learn its language. Every chapter of this book contains a “How Philosophy Works” section, that is essentially a mini-lesson in the language of philosophy. You will find these lessons not only useful to your study of philosophy, but they will serve you outside your philosophy class, too.

FINALLY, while reading this text, remember that there are many other learning aids here to help you. The next few pages describe some of them briefly. Please take a moment, before starting chapter assignments, to acquaint yourself with them.



PHILOSOPHY is about great individuals. Throughout this book you will find biographies and sketches of the great men and women of philosophy. These “Making of a Philosopher” sections describe who these individuals are, and why they are important to the study of philosophy.

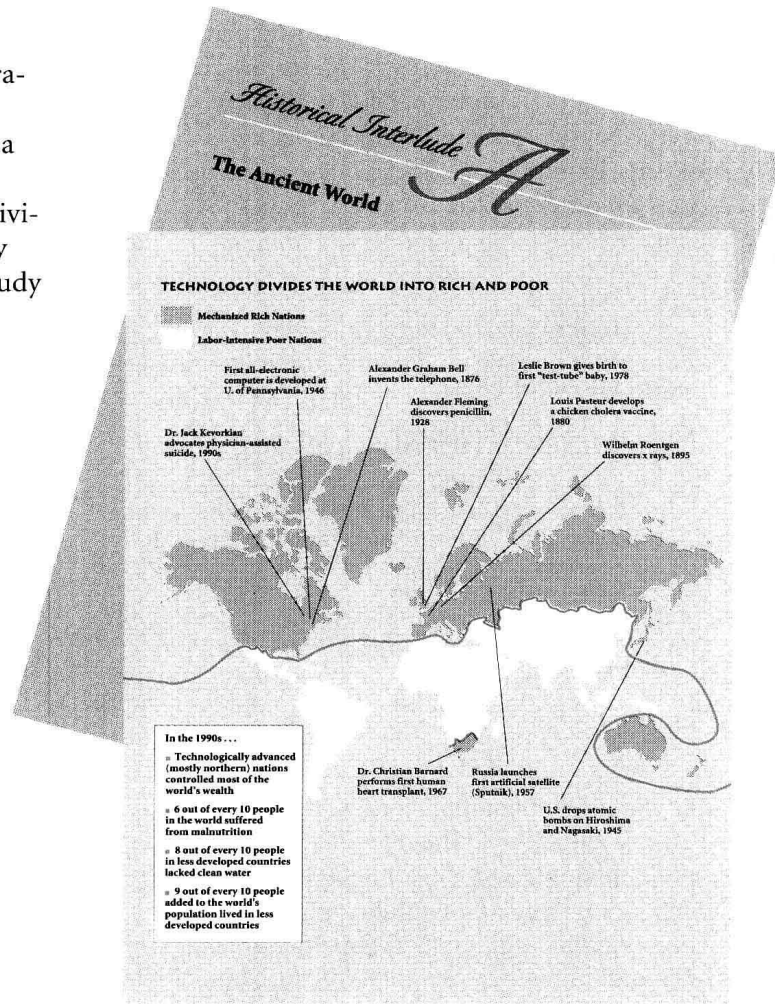


THE MAKING OF A PHILOSOPHER

CATHERINE OF SIENA

(about 1347–1380)

Catarina Benincasa, born in Siena, had her first vision at a young age. When she joined a religious order, she chose not to live in a convent. Instead, she lived as a recluse in her parents' home. She was illiterate at the time she took her vows, but later, according to documents prepared for her canonization as a saint, she miraculously learned to read. Her writings show a familiarity with the Bible and with the theology of Augustine. She gave sermons urging repentance, and Pope Gregory XI took the unusual step of authorizing three male priests to absolve those who came to Catherine wanting to confess their sins. She did traditional things like nursing the sick during the plague years of 1374–1375 and nontraditional things like trying (unsuccessfully) to promote the idea of a crusade to the Holy Land. She was questioned by three popes who suspected her of deceit, but after talking with her



HISTORY is an important tool for learning philosophy. This book has five “Historical Interludes” that provide interpretive transitions among the three major parts of the text. These “Historical Interludes” give you the necessary background to understand the origins of many philosophies, without interrupting the topical flow of chapters.