



PHILOSOPHY
History & Problems

Third Edition

Samuel Enoch Stumpf

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Vanderbilt University



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PREFACE



AS in the earlier editions of this introduction to philosophy, this volume presents two forms of philosophical literature: Book I is a narrative history of Western philosophy and Book II is a selection of readings dealing with the major problems of philosophy. While there is no substitute for reading the works of the leading philosophers in their original form, it is helpful to have at hand a treatment of the unfolding of philosophical ideas in the historical setting and sequence of their authors. Similarly, by reading only the history of philosophy one will lack the first-hand acquaintance with each author's literary style and the rigor of his systematic thought and argument. In this volume, then, the student will find both the original literature of philosophical authors and a historical treatment of the authors themselves and the development of their ideas.

This book is meant to have as much flexibility as the reader or instructor desires. He or she may, for example, wish to begin with one of the problems, say, Ethics, in Book II. The readings in the section on Ethics can be read in the order in which they are arranged. Or the reader can read selections in more than one



problem area in any sequence he or she chooses. At the same time, in preparation for reading a selection in Book II, say, for example, Aristotle or Kant on Ethics, the reader can turn in Book I to the chapters dealing with the life and times and thought of Aristotle and Kant.

I had originally published the historical material in Book I under the title *Socrates to Sartre*. To this I have added selected readings in response to requests from those who have used *Socrates to Sartre* in order to combine in one volume both history and readings.

While substantially the same as the previous edition, this present edition contains some new material, including, in Book I, the addition of a new chapter on Rousseau, a treatment of Marx's theory of the "alienation of labor," a section on Heidegger, and an expansion of the philosophy of Sartre. In Book II several new readings have been added, including Sartre's entire essay "Existentialism and Humanism" and selections from A. J. Ayer on the verification principle; B. F. Skinner's *Walden Two* concerning human freedom; Rousseau's *Social Contract*; Marx's "Alienated Labor"; John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*; Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State and Utopia*; John Dewey's *A Common Faith*; Plato, Hume, and Kierkegaard concerning immortality; Bertrand Russell's reflections on metaphysics; and A. N. Whitehead's *Science and the Modern World*.

Samuel Enoch Stumpf



CONTENTS



PREFACE

xiii

BOOK I A HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

PART ONE THE ANCIENT PERIOD: THE SHAPING OF THE PHILOSOPHIC MIND

1	Socrates' Predecessors: Philosophy and the Natural Order	3
2	Socrates and the Sophists: The Problems of Truth and Goodness	28
3	Plato	44
4	Aristotle	78
5	Classical Philosophy after Aristotle	105



**PART TWO THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD:
THE CONFLUENCE OF PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY**

6	St. Augustine's Christian Philosophy	129
7	Philosophy in the Dark Ages: Boethius, Pseudo-Dionysius, Erigena	147
8	Early Statements of Major Problems	154
9	The Apex of Medieval Philosophy: The Scholastic System of St. Thomas Aquinas	169

**PART THREE THE MODERN PERIOD:
PHILOSOPHY AND THE UNFOLDING WORLD
OF SCIENCE**

10	The Renaissance Interlude	197
11	Advocates of the Method of Science: Bacon and Hobbes	212
12	Rationalism on the Continent: Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz	226
13	Empiricism in Britain: Locke, Berkeley, and Hume	254
14	Rousseau: A Romantic in the Age of Reason	280
15	Kant: Critical Mediator between Dogmatism and Skepticism	289
16	Hegel: Absolute Idealism	310
17	Comte: The Rise of Positivism in France	326
18	Utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill	335

**PART FOUR THE CONTEMPORARY PERIOD:
THE RESHAPING OF THE PHILOSOPHIC MIND**

19	Nietzsche	355
20	Two Twentieth-Century Metaphysicians: Bergson and Whitehead	366
21	Pragmatism	381
22	Karl Marx: Dialectical Materialism	399
23	Analytic Philosophy	417
24	Existentialism	443

**BOOK II
PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS**

PART ONE ETHICS

1	Basing Ethics on Human Nature Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>	3
2	Stoic Doctrine of Acquiescence Epictetus, <i>Discourses</i>	13



3 The Categorical Imperative	16
Immanuel Kant, <i>The Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals</i>	
4 The Utilitarian Calculus of Pain and Pleasure	30
John Stuart Mill, <i>What Utilitarianism Is</i>	
5 Turning Values Upside Down	45
Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> , <i>The Twilight of Idols</i> , and <i>The Will to Power</i>	
6 Is the Will Free?	55
William James, <i>The Dilemma of Determinism</i>	
B. F. Skinner, <i>Walden Two</i>	
7 A Positivist Polemic	70
A. J. Ayer, <i>Language, Truth, and Logic</i>	
8 An Existential Ethic	78
Jean-Paul Sartre, <i>Existentialism and Humanism</i>	

PART TWO POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

9 The Natural Basis of Society	99
Aristotle, <i>Politics</i>	
10 The Moral Dimensions of Law	107
Saint Thomas Aquinas, <i>Treatise on Law</i>	
11 The Basis of Sovereign Authority	112
Thomas Hobbes, <i>De Cive</i>	
12 Natural Rights and Civil Society	123
John Locke, <i>Second Treatise on Civil Government</i>	
13 Forcing Men to Be Free	136
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, <i>The Social Contract</i>	
14 The Individual and the Limits of State Power	144
John Stuart Mill, <i>On Liberty</i>	
15 The Clash of Class Interests: Alienation	149
Karl Marx, <i>The Communist Manifesto</i>	
Karl Marx, <i>Alienated Labor</i>	
16 Justice as Fairness	164
John Rawls, <i>A Theory of Justice</i>	
17 Moral Constraints and the State	171
Robert Nozick, <i>Anarchy, State, and Utopia</i>	



PART THREE RELIGION

18	The Ontological Argument Saint Anselm, <i>Proslogium</i>	189
19	Proving God's Existence from Experience Saint Thomas Aquinas, <i>The Five Ways</i>	195
20	Evil and the Proof from Design David Hume, <i>Dialogues on Natural Religion</i>	198
21	Love of God as the Highest Good Saint Augustine, <i>Morals of the Catholic Church</i> and <i>The City of God</i>	204
22	Religion versus the Religious John Dewey, <i>A Common Faith</i>	213
23	The Seriousness of Making Choices Søren Kierkegaard, <i>Either/Or</i>	220
24	Concerning Life after Death Plato, <i>Phaedo</i> David Hume, <i>Of the Immortality of the Soul</i> Søren Kierkegaard, <i>Concluding Unscientific Postscript</i>	223

PART FOUR THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

25	The Ascent to True Knowledge Plato, <i>Republic</i> and <i>Meno</i>	237
26	Scepticism and the Postponement of Certainty Sextus Empiricus, <i>Outlines of Pyrrhonism</i>	249
27	Certainty and the Limits of Doubt René Descartes, <i>Meditations</i>	256
28	Empiricism and the Limits of Knowledge David Hume, <i>Inquiry Concerning Human Knowledge</i>	265
29	How Knowledge Is Possible Immanuel Kant, <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>	274
30	Pragmatism and the Enterprise of Knowing William James, <i>What Pragmatism Means</i>	285
31	Verification and Knowledge A. J. Ayer, <i>Language, Truth, and Logic</i>	292



PART FIVE METAPHYSICS

32 Matter and Space the Basis of All Things	301
Lucretius, <i>On the Nature of Things</i>	
33 Consciousness, Not Matter, the True Reality	312
George Berkeley, <i>Dialogues</i>	
34 Materialism and the Cause of Change	329
<i>Dialectical and Historical Materialism</i>	
35 Vital versus Static Realty	337
Henri Bergson, <i>An Introduction to Metaphysics</i>	
36 Understanding the Cosmos	347
Bertrand Russell, <i>My Present View of the World</i>	
37 Nature Beyond the Grasp of Science	355
Alfred North Whitehead, <i>Science and the Modern World</i>	

GLOSSARY	G1
A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	B1
INDEX FOR BOOK I	I1



ONE

THE ANCIENT PERIOD: THE SHAPING OF THE PHILOSOPHIC MIND





Socrates' Predecessors: Philosophy and the Natural Order

Philosophy began with man's sense of wonder and curiosity expressed in the questions "What are things really like?" and "How can we explain the process of change in things?" What prompted these questions was the gradual recognition that things are not exactly what they seem to be, that "appearance" often differs from "reality." The facts of birth, death, growth, and decay—coming into being and passing away—raised not only the questions about personal destiny but also the larger questions of how things and persons come into existence, can be different at different times, pass out of existence only to be followed by other things and persons. Many of the answers given to these questions by the earliest philosophers are not as important as the fact that they focused upon just these questions and that they approached them with a fresh and new frame of mind that was in contrast to that of the great poets.

The birthplace of philosophy was the seaport town of Miletus, located across the Aegean Sea from Athens, on the western shores of Ionia in Asia Minor, and for this reason the first philosophers are called either Milesians or Ionians. By



the time the Milesian philosophers began their systematic work, roughly around 585 B.C., Miletus had been a crossroads for both seaborne commerce and for cosmopolitan ideas. Its wealth made possible the leisure without which the life of art and philosophy could hardly develop, and the broad-mindedness and inquisitiveness of its people created a congenial atmosphere for the intellectual activity that was to become philosophy. Earlier, Ionia had produced the genius Homer, whose epic poetry projected upon the cosmic scene Mount Olympus, where the gods pursued lives not too different from their human counterparts on earth. This poetic view of the world also related the life of the gods to the life of humans, by describing various ways in which the gods intruded into or interfered with men's affairs. In particular, the Homeric gods would punish men for their lack of moderation and especially for their pride or insubordination, which the Greeks called *hubris*. It is not that Homer's gods are moral and require goodness; they are merely stronger than men and exact obedience. Moreover, when Homer suggests that there is a power that he calls "fate," a power to which even the gods are subject, he appears to be reaching for a way of describing a rigorous order in nature to which everyone and everything must be subordinate. But his poetic imagination is dominated so thoroughly by his thinking in human terms that his world is peopled everywhere with human types, and his conception of nature is that of capricious wills at work instead of the reign of physical natural laws. It was Hesiod, writing sometime in the eighth century B.C., who altered this concept of the gods and "fate" by removing from the gods all capriciousness, ascribing to them instead a moral consistency. Although Hesiod retains the notion that the gods control nature, he balances this personal element in the nature of things with an emphasis upon the impersonal operation of the moral law of the universe. The moral order, in Hesiod's view, is still the product of Zeus' commands, but these commands are neither capricious nor calculated, as Homer thought, to gratify the gods, but are rather fashioned for the good of man. For Hesiod the universe is a moral order, and from this idea it is a short step to say, without any reference to the gods, that there is an impersonal force controlling the structure of the universe and regulating its process of changes. It was this short step that the Milesians Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes took. Whereas Hesiod still thought in terms of traditional mythology with a peopled universe, philosophy among the Milesians began as an act of independent thought. To ask, as they did, "What are things really like?" and "How can we explain the process of change in things?" indicates a substantial departure from the poetry of Homer and Hesiod and a movement toward what we should call the temperament of science. Although the Milesians can rightly be called primitive scientists, it is a fact of the history of thought that science and philosophy were the same thing in the beginning and only later did various specific disciplines separate themselves from the field of philosophy, medicine being the first to do so. From the very beginning, however, Greek philosophy was an intellectual activity, for it was not a matter only of seeing or believing but of thinking, and philosophy meant thinking about basic questions in a mood of genuine and free inquiry.



WHAT IS PERMANENT IN EXISTENCE?

Thales We do not know as much as we should like about Thales of Miletus, and what we do know is rather anecdotal in nature. He left no writings. All that is available are fragmentary references to him made by later writers who recorded memorable incidents in his career. He was a contemporary of Solon and Croesus, and the years of his life are set between 624 and 546 B.C. During a military campaign against Persia, he apparently solved the difficult logistics problem of enabling the Lydian king's army to cross the wide Halys river by digging a channel that diverted part of the flow, thereby making two narrower rivers over which bridges could be built. While traveling in Egypt, Thales worked out a way of measuring the height of the pyramids, using the simple procedure of measuring a pyramid's shadow at that time of day when a man's shadow is equal to his height. It may have been during these Egyptian travels, too, that he became acquainted with the kinds of knowledge that enabled him to predict the eclipse of the sun on May 28, 585 B.C. In a practical vein, he constructed, while in Miletus, an instrument for measuring the distance of ships sighted at sea, and as an aid to navigation, he urged sailors to use the constellation Little Bear as the surest guide for determining the direction of the north.

It was probably inevitable that anecdotes should be attached to such an extraordinary man as Thales. Plato, in his *Theaetetus*, writes about "the jest which the clever witty Thracian handmaid is said to have made about Thales, when he fell into a well as he was looking up at the stars. She said that he was so eager to know what was going on in heaven that he could not see what was before his feet." Plato adds that "this is a jest which is equally applicable to all philosophers," apparently unaware of another incident in Thales' life that would seem to establish a very keen awareness of what was going on around him. In his *Politics*, Aristotle writes that "there is . . . the story which is told of Thales of Miletus. It is a story about a scheme for making money, which is fathered on Thales owing to his reputation for wisdom. . . . He was reproached for his poverty, which was supposed to show the uselessness of philosophy; but observing from his knowledge of meteorology (as the story goes) that there was likely to be a heavy crop of olives [during the next summer], and having a small sum at his command, he paid down earnest-money, early in the year, for the hire of all the olive-presses in Miletus and Chios; and he managed, in the absence of any higher offer, to secure them at a low rate. When the season came, and there was a sudden and simultaneous demand for a number of presses, he let out the stock he had collected at any rate he chose to fix; and making a considerable fortune, he succeeded in proving that it is easy for philosophers to become rich if they so desire, though it is not the business which they are really about." But Thales is famous not for his general wisdom or his practical shrewdness, but because he opened up a new area of thought for which he has rightly earned the title of the first philosopher.

Thales' novel inquiry concerned the nature of things. What is everything made of, or what kind of "stuff" goes into the composition of things? What



Thales was trying to get at with these questions was some way of accounting for the fact that there are many different kinds of things, such as earth, clouds, and oceans, and that some of these things change from time to time into something else and also that they resemble each other in certain ways. Thales' unique contribution to thought was his notion that in spite of the differences between various things there is, nevertheless, a basic similarity between them all, that *the many* are related to each other by *the One*. He assumed that some single element, some "stuff," a stuff which contained its own principle of action or change, lay at the foundation of all physical reality. To him this One, or this stuff, was *water*.

Although there is no record of how Thales came to the conclusion that water is the cause of all things, Aristotle writes that Thales might have derived it from observation of simple events, "perhaps from seeing that the nutriment of all things is moist, and that heat is generated from the moist and kept alive by it. . . . He got his notion from this fact and from the fact that the seeds of all things have a moist nature, and water is the origin of the nature of moist things." Other phenomena such as evaporation or freezing also suggest that water takes on different forms. But the accuracy of Thales' analysis of the composition of things is far less important than the fact that he raised the question concerning the nature of the world. His question had set the stage for a new kind of inquiry, one which could be debated on its merits and could either be confirmed or refuted by further analysis. In spite of his notion that "all things are full of gods," a notion that had apparently no theological significance for him and to which he turned in an attempt to explain the power in things, such as magnetic powers in stones, Thales shifted the basis of thought from a mythological base to one of scientific inquiry. And, again from his primitive starting point, others were to follow him with alternative solutions, but always with his problem before them.

Anaximander A younger contemporary and a pupil of Thales was Anaximander. He agreed with his teacher that there is some single basic stuff out of which everything comes. Unlike Thales, however, Anaximander said that this basic stuff is neither water nor any other specific or determinate element, arguing that water and all other definite things are only specific variations or offshoots of something which is more primary. It may very well be, he thought, that water or moisture is found in various forms everywhere, but water is only one specific thing among many other elements, and all these specific things require that there be some more elementary stuff to account for their origin. The primary substance out of which all these specific things come, said Anaximander, is an *indefinite* or *boundless* realm. Thus, Anaximander differentiates specific and determinate things from their origin by calling the primary substance the *indeterminate boundless*. Whereas actual things are specific, their source is indeterminate, and whereas things are finite, the original stuff is infinite or boundless.

Besides offering a new idea about the original substance of things, Anaximander advanced the enterprise of philosophy by attempting some explanation for his new idea. Thales had not dealt in any detail with the problem of explaining how the primary stuff became the many different things we see in the world,



but Anaximander addressed himself precisely to this question. Although his explanation may seem strange, it represents an advance in knowledge in the sense that it is an attempt to deal with known facts from which hypotheses can be formulated instead of explaining natural phenomena in mythical and nondebatable terms. Still, what Anaximander has to say about the origin of things has the flavor of bold speculation, for in describing the indeterminate boundless as the unoriginated and indestructible primary substance, he speaks of this as also having eternal motion. As a consequence of this motion, the various specific elements come into being as a “separating off” from the original substance, and thus “there was an eternal motion in which the heavens came to be.” But first *warm* and *cold* were separated off, and from these two came *moist*; then from these came *earth* and *air*. Anaximander then tried to account for the heavenly bodies and air currents around the earth in what appears to be a mechanical explanation of the orderly movement of the stars. He thought that the earth was cylindrical in shape in contrast to Thales, who thought it was flat as a disk and floated on the water. Coming to the origin of man, Anaximander said that all life, including man’s, comes from the sea and that in the course of time, living things came out of the sea to dry land. He suggested that man evolved from creatures of a different kind, using as his argument the fact that other creatures are quickly self-supporting, whereas man alone needs prolonged nursing and that, therefore, man would not have survived if this had been his original form. Commenting on Anaximander’s account of the origin of man, Plutarch writes that the Syrians “actually revere the fish as being of similar race and nurturing. In this they philosophize more suitably than Anaximander; for he declares, not that fishes and men came into being in the same parents, but that originally men came into being inside fishes, and that, having been nurtured there—like sharks—and having become adequate to look after themselves, they then came forth and took to the land.” Returning again to the vast cosmic scene, Anaximander thought that there were many worlds and many systems of universes existing all at the same time, all of them perishable, there being the constant alternation between their creation and destruction. This cyclical process was for him a rigorous “necessity” as the conflict of opposite forces in nature caused what he called poetically an “injustice” requiring their ultimate destruction. In the only sentence from his writings that has survived, Anaximander gathers up his chief thought by saying, again somewhat poetically, that “From what source things arise, to that they return of necessity when they are destroyed; for they suffer punishment and make reparation to one another for their injustice according to the order of time.”

Anaximenes The third and last of the Milesian philosophers was Anaximenes (about 585–528 B.C.), who was the young “associate” of Anaximander. As he considered Anaximander’s answer to the question concerning the composition of natural things, he was dissatisfied with the notion of the *boundless* as being the source of all things, since it was too vague and intangible. He could understand why Anaximander chose this solution over Thales’ notion that water is the cause