

LOOKING AT PHILOSOPHY

The Unbearable Heaviness of Philosophy Made Lighter

英文大学人文经典教材

快乐学哲学

[美] 唐纳德·帕尔玛 (Donald Palmer) / 著

胡鹏 注释

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Donald Palmer

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Preface

Wittgenstein once said that a whole philosophy book could be written consisting of nothing but jokes. *This is not that book*, nor does this book treat the history of philosophy as a joke. This book takes philosophy seriously, but not gravely. As the subtitle indicates, the goal of the book is to lighten the load a bit. How to do this without simply throwing the cargo overboard? First, by presenting an overview of Western philosophy from the sixth century B.C.E. through most of the twentieth century in a way that introduces the central philosophical ideas of the West and their evolution in a concise, readable format without trivializing them, but at the same time, without pretending to have exhausted them nor to have plumbed their depths. Second, following a time-honored medieval tradition, by illuminating the margins of the text. Some of these illuminations, namely those that attempt to schematize difficult ideas, I hope will be literally illuminating. Most of them, however, are simply attempts in a lighter vein to interrupt the natural propensity of the philosophers to succumb to the pull of gravity. (Nietzsche said that only the grave lay in that direction.) But even these philosophical jokes, I hope, have a pedagogical function. They should serve to help the reader retain the ideas that are thereby gently mocked. Thirty years of teaching the subject, which I love—and which has provoked more than a few laughs on the part of my students—convinces me that this technique should work.

I do not claim to have achieved Nietzsche's "joyful wisdom," but I agree with him that there is such a thing and that we should strive for it.

Before turning you over to Thales and his metaphysical water (the first truly heavy water), I want to say a word about the women and their absence. Why are there so few women in a book of this nature? There are a number of possible explanations, including these:

1. Women really are deficient in the capacity for sublimation and hence are incapable of participating in higher culture (as Schopenhauer and Freud suggested).
2. Women have in fact contributed greatly to the history of philosophy, but their contributions have been denied or suppressed by the chauvinistic male writers of the histories of philosophy.
3. Women have been (intentionally or unintentionally) systematically eliminated from the history of philosophy by political, social, religious, and psychological manipulations of power by a deeply entrenched, jealous, and fearful patriarchy.

I am certain that the first thesis does not merit our serious attention. I think there is some truth to the second thesis, and I may be partially guilty of suppressing that truth. For example, the names of at least seventy women philosophers in the late classical period alone have been recorded, foremost of which are Aspasia, Diotima, Aretê, and Hypatia. (Hypatia has been belatedly honored by having a journal of feminist philosophy named after her.) Jumping over centuries to our own age, we find a number of well-known women contributing to the history of philosophy in the first half of the twentieth century, including Simone de Beauvoir, Susanne Langer, and L. Susan Stebbing.

However, no matter how original, deep, and thought-provoking were the ideas of these philosophers, I believe that, for a number of reasons (those reasons given in the second and third theses are probably most pertinent here), none of them has been as historically significant as the ideas of those philosophers who are discussed in this book. Fortunately, things have begun to change in the past few

years. An adequate account of contemporary philosophy could not in good faith ignore the major contributions to the analytic tradition of philosophers Iris Murdoch, Philippa Foot, G. E. M. Anscombe, and Judith Jarvis Thompson, nor those contributions to the Continental tradition made by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Monique Wittig, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva. Furthermore, a new wave of women philosophers is already beginning to have considerable impact on the content of contemporary philosophy and not merely on its style.

So, despite the risks, I defend the third thesis. I truly believe that if women had not been systematically excluded from major participation in the history of philosophy,¹ that history would be even richer, deeper, more compassionate, and more interesting (not to mention more joyful) than it already is. It is not for nothing that the book ends with a discussion of the work of a contemporary woman philosopher and with a question posed to philosophy herself, “Quo vadis?”—Whither goest thou?

The fourth edition proceeds with the refinement of presentation begun in the second edition and with the addition of new material initiated in the third edition. I have had some help with all five editions of this book. I'd like to thank the reviewers who made suggestions for the fifth edition. They include Fred Heifner, Cumberland University; the Rev. Robert Mode, Trocaire College; Jeff Delbel, Cayuga CC; Pamela Pumperton, Warner Pacific College; and Amber Katherine, Santa Monica CC. For suggestions with the earlier editions, I am grateful to Timothy R. Allan and Robert Caputi, Trocaire College; Dasiea Cavers-Huff, Riverside Community College; Job Clement, Daytona Beach Community College; Julianna Scott Fein, Mayfield Publishing Company; Will Griffiths, Maui Community College; Hans Hansen, Wayne State University; Fred E. Heifner Jr., Cumberland University; Joseph Huster, University of Utah; Janine Jones, University of North Carolina, Greensboro; Ken King, Mayfield Publishing Company; James Lemke, Coker College; Robin Mouat, Mayfield Publishing Company; Kirby Olson, SUNY Delhi; Don Porter, College of San Mateo; Brian Schroeder, Siena College; Matt Schulte, Montgomery College; Yukio Shirahama, San Antonio College;

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Note

1. See Mary Warnock, ed. *Women Philosophers* (London: J. M. Dent, 1996).

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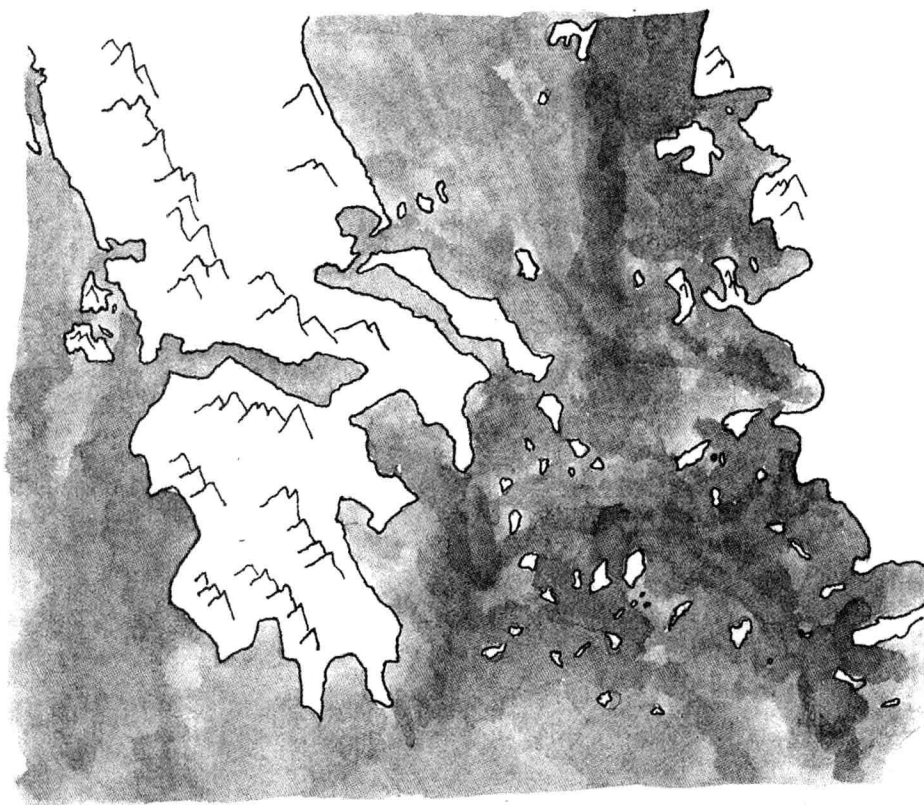
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Introduction

The story of Western philosophy begins in Greece.



designate:
表示

The Greek word “Logos” is the source of the English word “logic” as well as all the “logies” in terms like “biology,” “sociology,” and “psychology,” where “logos” means the theory, or study, or rationalization of something. “Logos” also means “word” in Greek, so it involves the act of speaking, or setting forth an idea in a clear manner. “Logos,” therefore, designates a certain kind of thinking about the world, a kind of logical analysis that places things in the context of reason and explains them with the pure force of thought. Such an intellectual exercise was supposed to lead to wisdom (Sophia), and those who dedicated themselves to Logos were thought of as lovers of wisdom (love = philo), hence as philosophers.

What was there before philosophy, before Logos? There was Mythos—a certain way of thinking that placed the world in the context of its supernatural origins. Mythos explained worldly things by tracing them to exceptional, sometimes sacred, events that caused the world to be as it is now. In the case of the Greeks, Mythos meant

tracing worldly things to the dramatic acts of the gods of

Mount Olympus. The narratives describing these

origins—myths—are not only explanatory but also

morally exemplary and ritualistically instruc-

tive; that is, they provide the rules that, if followed by all, would create the foundation of a genuine community of togetherness—

a “we” and an “us” instead of a mere conglomeration of individuals who could only say

exemplary:
典范的

ritualistically:
程序上地、仪式地

conglomeration:
集合



Explaining Ancient Greek Customs

"I" and "me." Hence, myths are often conservative in nature. They seek to maintain the status quo by replicating origins: "So behaved the sacred ancestors, so must we behave." Myths had the advantage of creating a whole social world in which all acts had meaning. They had the disadvantage of creating static societies, of resisting innovation, and, many would say, of being false. Then, suddenly, philosophy happened—Logos broke upon the scene, at least according to the traditional account. (There are other accounts, however, accounts that suggest that Western Logos—philosophy and science—is just our version of myth.) But let us suppose that something different *did* take place in Greece about 700 B.C.E.¹ Let's suppose that the "first" philosopher's explanation of the flooding of the Nile River during the summer (most rivers tend to dry up in the summer) as being caused by desert winds (*desert winds*, not battles or love affairs among gods) really *does* constitute novelty. Natural phenomena are explained by other natural phenomena, not by supernatural events in "dream time"—the time of the ancient gods. In that case, Greece truly is the cradle of Western philosophy.

cradle:
发源地

Once, many many years ago, there was a big bang. But great fathers Galileo and Newton were not dismayed. They conferred and said, "It is good."



A Modern Myth?

Why Greece, and not, for example, Egypt or Judea? Well, let's be honest here. Nobody knows. Still, a number of historical facts are relevant to the explanation we seek. For one, there was a very productive contact between ancient Greece and the cultures of the eastern Mediterranean region—Persia, Mesopotamia,

dismayed:
气馁

Phoenicia, Cyprus, southern Italy, and Egypt, among others. The Greeks were a well-traveled group and were extremely adept at borrowing ideas, conventions, and artistic forms from the cultures they encountered and applying these elements creatively to their own needs. There is also a controversial theory that Greek culture derives greatly from African sources.² It is at least certain, as one historian of Greek ideas has recently said, that “the cultural achievements of archaic and classical Greece are unthinkable without Near Eastern resources to draw upon,”³ and eastern North Africa fits into this map.

Also, unlike the case in some of the surrounding societies, there was no priestly class of censors in Greece. This observation does not mean that Greek thinkers had no restrictions on what they could say—we will see that several charges of impiety were brought against

priestly:
僧侣似的

censor:
监察官

impiety:
不恭敬



some of them in the period under study—but that they were able nevertheless to get away with quite a bit that went against prevailing religious opinion.



Dreaming in Detail

Another historical fact is that the Greek imagination had always been fertile in its concern with intimate detail. For example, Homer's description of Achilles' shield takes up four pages of the *Iliad*. In addition, the many generations of Greek children who grew up on the poems of Homer and Hesiod⁴—two of the main vehicles that transmitted Greek religion—recognized in them their argumentative, intellectually combative, and questioning nature. The polemical nature of Greek drama and poetry would find a new home in Greek philosophy.

A final component of the world into which philosophy was born is the socioeconomic structure that produced a whole leisured class of

fertile:
丰富的

intimate:
私人的

polemical:
好争辩的

leisured:
闲暇的

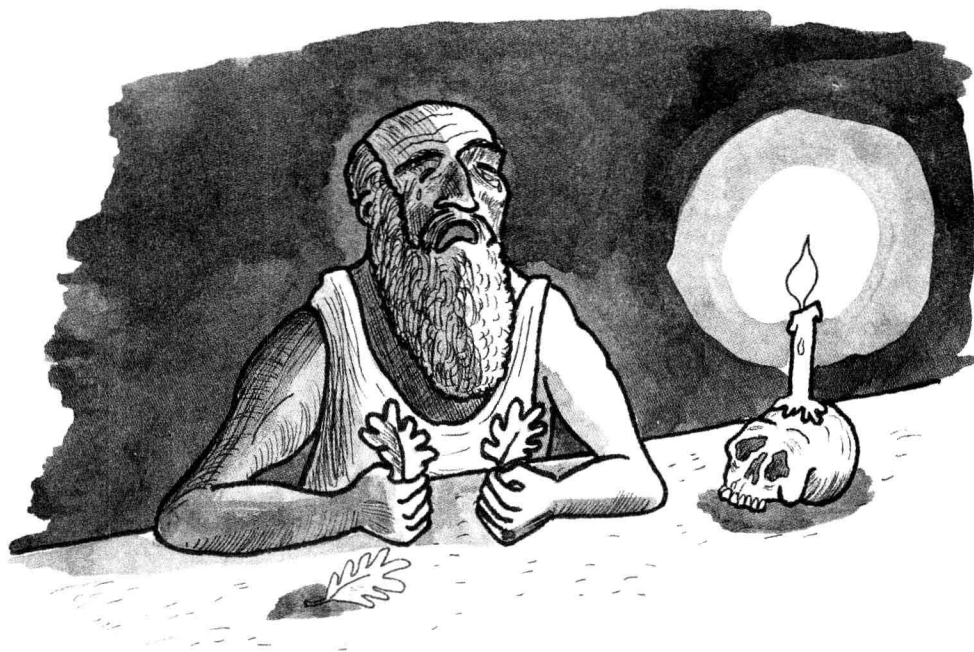
booty:
战利品

luster:
光辉

people—mostly *male* people—with time on their hands that they could spend meditating on philosophical issues. It is always jolting to remember that during much of Greece's history, a major part of the economic foundation of its society was slave labor and booty from military conquests. This fact takes some of the luster from “the Glory that was Greece.”

Still, for whatever reasons, the poetry and drama of the Greeks demonstrate an intense awareness of change, of the war of the opposites—summer to winter, hot to cold, light to dark, and that most dramatic change of all, life to death.





Indeed, this sensitivity to the transitory nature of all things sometimes led the Greeks to pessimism. The poets Homer, Mimnermus, and Simonides all expressed the idea “Generations of men fall like the leaves of the forest.”⁵

pessimism:
悲观主义

But this sensitivity also led the Greeks to demand an explanation—one that would be obtained and justified not by the authority of religious tradition but by the sheer power of human reason. Here we find an optimism behind the pessimism—the human mind operating on its own devices is able to discover ultimate truths about reality.

sheer:
十足的, 纯粹的

But let us not overemphasize the radicalness of the break made by the Greek philosophers with the earlier, mythical ways of thinking. It's not as if suddenly a bold new **atheism** emerged, rejecting all religious explanations or constraints. In fact, atheism as we understand it today was virtually unknown in the ancient world.⁶ Rather, these early Greek philosophers reframed the perennial puzzles about reality in such a way as to emphasize the workings of nature rather than the work of the gods. For instance, they tended

perennial:
长久的