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Introduction

If we were to look up the term *lazy* in a dictionary, we might expect to find some unflattering connotations. Let's skip over such definitions as "adverse or resistant to work," "slothful," and "sluggish," and adopt a more positive, charitable perspective. If instead we consider lazy as "economical" or "avoiding waste," we get a much better picture of the idea behind *The Very Lazy Intellectual* series.

This series of books is a set of short, economical references full of the fundamental knowledge you need to know to sound as if you *really* know something about a particular academic subject. *The Very Lazy Intellectual: Philosophy* lays out the indispensable facts, crucial high points, and fascinating elements of the main tenets of Western philosophical thought to build your knowledge foundation.

Whether you want to refresh your memory of a long-since forgotten course, or merely wish to be able to say something intelligent or philosophical without having to put in a great deal of study, this book will help. Enjoy the low-effort scholarship of *The Very Lazy Intellectual: Philosophy*.

If you'd like to learn more about philosophy and more, check out *The Lazy Intellectual*, available in print (978-1-4405-0456-3) and eBook (978-1-4405-0888-2) formats.

Early Greek Philosophy

The Pre-Socratics

Philosophy in the Western world began in ancient Greece with Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes.

Thales (ca. 625–c. 545 B.C.) was a man of broad interests in science and mathematics and likely traveled to Egypt to learn practical skills. He eschewed supernatural or mystical explanations for the world around him and tried to give rational explanations for natural phenomena. Thales believed that water was the source of all things and also subscribed to the doctrine of hylozoism, the theory that all matter possesses life or can feel sensations.

Anaximander (610–545 B.C.) was a student of Thales and is known for inventing the sundial and providing the first map of the Greek world. Anaximander disagreed with his teacher and contended that the original substance of the universe was not matter like water, but rather must have been something more immaterial. He thought the fundamental, ultimate stuff of the universe must be the infinite.

Anaximenes (580–475 B.C.) said that cosmic air, or mist, extended everywhere, pervading all things in the universe, and was the primordial element.

These three philosophers differed from earlier approaches by explaining the world with natural rather than divine causes.

Pythagoreans

Members of the Pythagorean School, a secret religious society founded by Pythagoras, believed in following strict moral, ascetic, and dietary rules to enable their souls to reach a higher level and be liberated from the “wheel of birth.” They also believed that numbers were the essence of all things. These

early Greeks tried to understand the world in a rational manner and did not think that natural events were determined by the wills of gods. They laid the groundwork for later philosophers by questioning where things came from.

Heraclitus (540–480 B.C.) changed the focus of early Greek philosophy from emphasis on the ultimate constituents of the world to the problem of change. His main contribution to philosophy is his thought that unity exists in diversity, that reality is one and many at the same time. Contrary to Heraclitus, **Parmenides** (ca. 515–450 B.C.) thought that all change is an illusion of the senses. The same is true of diversity and motion: they are unreal appearances. Like Parmenides, **Zeno** (490–430 B.C.) took the view that common sense led to absurd conclusions.

Person of Importance: Pythagoras

Pythagoras (ca. 580–500 B.C.), one of the most celebrated and controversial of the ancient Greek philosophers and mathematicians, founded a brotherhood of disciples known for its belief in the purification of the soul. He believed in reincarnation, that all living things must be interrelated, and that mathematical principles could explain all of reality. Pythagoras is traditionally credited with the first use of the term “philosophy.”

Socrates: The First Moralist

Without writing a single word, **Socrates** (ca. 470–399 B.C.) is arguably the most important philosopher in the history of Western thought. What we know of him comes from the dialogues of his student Plato, as well as from the accounts of Xenophon, Aristophanes, and Aristotle. His philosophical mission began with an oracle, or divinely appointed authority, who had declared him the wisest living person. He set out to disprove the oracle and went about Athens questioning others, concluding that: “Real wisdom is the property of God.”

Socrates thought that philosophy ought to be concerned with practical questions about how to live and the nature of the good life. Because of these concerns about values, he essentially invented the field of philosophy known as “ethics.” Socrates deserves a distinctive title in the history of thought as the first moralist. According to Socrates, if a person fully understands what the good is in any given situation, then he will do that good; goodness and knowledge is the same thing. Vice or evil is therefore the absence of knowledge. Socrates’s second ethical doctrine is that wrongdoing harms the doer more than it harms the recipient of the action.

Repeatable Quotable

I know you won’t believe me, but the highest form of Human Excellence is to question oneself and others –*Socrates*

Socrates sought definitions of terms like *justice* and *virtue*, *love* and *piety*. He thought that one couldn’t know what love and virtue were unless one could define these terms. He used inductive reasoning, starting with particular statements like “This generous action is virtuous,” hoping to establish more important generalizations like “All generous actions are virtuous.”

Fast Fact

One of Socrates's lasting contributions to philosophy is his skillful method of cross-examination. What is now known as the "Socratic Method," a form of debate that has two opposing parties ask and answer questions, was his manner of attaining knowledge. The method was designed to force one to examine one's beliefs and the validity of such beliefs.

Plato

Born in Athens, **Plato** (ca. 428–348 B.C.) was twenty-nine years old when his teacher Socrates died. In the course of his lengthy life, Plato used dialogues, an inherently dramatic form, to pour forth a complete system of philosophy, and made contributions to every branch of philosophy, leaving behind a system of thought that is breathtaking in its breadth and depth.

In 387 B.C., Plato founded the Academy in Athens for the study of philosophy, mathematics, logic, the sciences, and legislative, political and ethical ideas. The Academy lasted for several centuries after his death and is regarded by many to have been the first university.

Plato believed that engaging with ideas he called forms, chief among these being justice, beauty, and equality, would lead to the understanding necessary for a good life. These forms were the most important components of reality, underlying what we know of the world and insuring order. Plato attempted to show the rational relationship between the soul, the state, and the universe, and built a systematic, rational treatment of the forms and their interrelations, starting with the supreme idea of Good. He believed that people could, through constant questioning, achieve understanding.

Plato's Dialogues

The first group of Plato's dialogues includes those early writings where the subject matter under consideration is moral excellence. These ideas were also held by Socrates, and included pursuing definitions of courage, piety, friendship, and self-control. The middle group of dialogues includes Plato's theory of forms and accompanying theory of knowledge, his account of the human soul, his political ideas, and his ideas about art. Most notable among the middle dialogues is the incomparable *Republic*, his treatise on the nature of justice. The third and

final group of writings is what now might be called *meta-philosophical*. These dialogues are highly technical, showing a concern for logical and linguistic issues.

Aristotle

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) was a student of Plato's and a member of his Academy. In 335 he founded the Lyceum, a school in Athens that he also directed for twelve years, which was also known as the Peripatetic School for its scholars' habit of walking about. Aristotle delved into many subjects, including metaphysics, logic, aesthetics, ethics, and political thought, and is regarded as one of the most influential figures in the history of Western philosophy. Aristotle was the first person to systematize the rules of logic, the specifics of which can be found in his *Organon*. Aristotle was chiefly concerned with the form of proof and was most interested in syllogism, which he assumed provided certain knowledge concerning reality gained by logical deduction. Besides syllogistic deductive reasoning, there are three laws of thought according to Aristotle.

1. *The Principle of Contradiction*: Asserts that a statement cannot be true and false at the same time.
2. *The Principle of the Excluded Middle*: Declared that a statement must be true or false; there is no "middle" possibility.
3. *The Principle of Identity*: States that everything is equal to itself.

In the *Analytics*, Aristotle considered not only deductive scientific proof or demonstration, but also induction, which enables one to reason from a particular instance to a general conclusion.

Repeatable Quotable

All men by nature desire to know. —Aristotle

Aristotle also was empiricist who claimed that all knowledge comes from experience, beginning with sensory experiences. Physical objects, including organisms, were composed of a potential, their *matter*, and of a reality, their *form*. In living creatures, the soul was the form; plants had the lowest type of souls, animals had higher souls with some feeling, and humans exclusively had rational, reasoning souls. Aristotle also differed sharply from medieval and modern thinkers in his belief that the universe was eternal. To Aristotle, change was cyclical. For example, water might evaporate from the oceans and rain down again, and rivers might appear and then perish, but overall conditions would never change.

Fast Fact

Aristotle thought that the true philosopher is one who desires knowledge about the ultimate causes and nature of reality and desires that knowledge for its own sake, not for any practical use.

The Stoics

The philosophies of Epicureanism and Stoicism arose after the deaths of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C. and Aristotle in 322, and the wars between the Greek city-states. No longer was knowledge and its pursuit believed to be ends in themselves.

Stoicism was a school of philosophy founded around 300 B.C. in Athens by Zeno of Citium. The essence of their belief was that one should resign oneself to fate, perform one's appointed duties faithfully, and thereby acquire tranquility of mind. According to Zeno, nature has implanted in all people an instinct for self-preservation. One must live a life "in accordance with nature," Zeno said, and for humans that meant living with reason. Reason, which animals lack, leads to virtue. The ethical lesson for us is to do nothing that nature would forbid. The Stoics sought happiness through not only accepting, but embracing whatever happens in life. They believed that, by controlling one's attitude and emotions and remaining free from jealousy or apathy, it was possible to achieve the serenity and happiness that was the mark of a wise person. While everything in the universe behaves according to divine law, happiness comes from existence and is not a by-product of choice. Freedom, therefore, is not the power to alter your destiny but rather the absence of emotional disturbance.

The Stoics believed there were four general types of passion (what they defined as an irrational impulse contrary to nature): distress, fear, appetite, and pleasure. They were further categorized as shown below.

Four Passions

Irrationally judged to be good: Pleasure (present object); Appetite (future object)

Irrationally judged to be bad: Distress (present object); Fear (future object)

Stoicism coincided with the Christian tradition, even as it was waning as a philosophical movement. Stoicism provided comfort for the Christians, since they knew that the pains of this world are ultimately insignificant in the course of eternity.

Epicurus

Epicurus (341–270 B.C.) was an atomist who believed that all things were composed of both regularly moving atoms and the void, and that some atoms “swerved in the void,” which accounted for free will. To Epicurus, the chief aim of human life is pleasure and true pleasure-filled life required an attitude of imperturbable emotional calm. This calm called for only the simpler things of life. The ultimate pleasure humans seek is the absence of bodily pain and the gentle relaxation of the mind.

Repeatable Quotable

Don't seek for things to happen as you wish, but wish for things to happen as they do, and you will get on well. —*Epicetus*

St. Augustine

St. Aurelius Augustine (A.D. 354–430) was born in Tagaste, a provincial Roman city in Algeria. When he was thirty-two, Augustine rejected his libertine ways and entered the Christian church. He is considered perhaps the most significant Christian theorist after St. Paul.

As a thinker, Augustine had a great affinity for Plato and his doctrines. While Plato thought of the philosopher's vision of the forms, Augustine referred to religious vision, a theory of *illumination*. "There is present in us the light of eternal reason, in which light the immutable truths are seen," he said. For Augustine, this illumination comes from God.

In his early work *Against the Academics* he addressed himself to the Skeptics of the New Platonic Academy who doubted that human beings could know anything at all with certainty. He reasoned that *you must exist* in order to doubt. In other words, you can prove the absolute reality of your own soul. Augustine said *Si Fallor sum*: if one can doubt then one surely is.

Reason and Faith

According to Augustine, philosophy must include both reason and faith. He believed that reason can never be religiously neutral, that reason and faith are not each independent approaches to the truth. The faith and reason issue also applies to moral knowledge. Contrary to the Socratic dictum that "Virtue is knowledge," and that knowing leads you to pursue the truth, Augustine maintained that knowledge does not produce goodness. According to Augustine, "Faith goes before; understanding follows after."

Fast Fact

Augustine's book *The Confessions* is a landmark in spiritual literature. It is considered the first western autobiography and is a brutally honest record of Augustine's own spiritual journey. His *City of God* helped to lay the foundation for much of Christian thought during medieval times.

Augustine accepted the notion of Creation as told in Genesis: that God created the world from nothing. Augustine also provided an argument for the existence of God and gave an explanation of how God's goodness could be accounted for in light of the evils in the world. Augustine contends that evil is not a positive reality but a privation — that is, the absence of good. The world is imperfect, but this does not imply that God is imperfect or responsible for the imperfections of the world.

The Platonic element in Augustine's thinking came from his belief that progress in wisdom is made when the mind turns upward toward God, away from the things of this world. Though for Augustine, this movement away from the sensible world toward the spiritual one can only be accomplished if the mind has been purified by faith.

Medieval Thought

The predominant system of theological and philosophical teaching in medieval times was known as *scholasticism*. Two fundamental problems persisted during this period, which lasted from 529 to 1453. The first was the problem of universals, or whether ideas could exist apart from things themselves. The second problem was devising logical proofs for the existence of God.

Person of Importance: St. Anselm

St. Anselm (1033–1109) was an Italian who became the abbot of a monastery in Normandy and was made archbishop of Canterbury in 1093. Like Augustine before him, Anselm tried to provide rational support for the doctrines of Christianity, assuming no boundaries between reason and faith. He thought that natural theology — that is, basing conclusions about God's existence on logical arguments — could provide a rational version of what he already believed. His significant writings include *Monologium* and *Proslogium*.

Other Medieval Thinkers

Avicenna (980–1037) was a Muslim philosopher who also thought that God's essence necessarily implied his existence. He coupled Anselm with Aristotle to arrive at his own doctrine of Creation: God is at the apex of being, has no beginning, is always active (i.e., in the Aristotelian sense of never being merely potential but always expressing his full being), and therefore has always created. According to Avicenna, then, creation is both necessary and eternal.

Averroes (1126–1198) was the most distinguished Arabian philosopher of the period and tried to integrate Islamic traditions with ancient Greek thought. Averroes held that there is no conflict between religion and philosophy. Rather, they are just different ways of reaching the same truth. He said there are two kinds of Knowledge of Truth. The first is the knowledge that religion is based in faith and therefore not subject to tests. The second knowledge is philosophy,

which was reserved for an elite few who had the intellectual capacity to undertake its study.

Moses Maimonides (1135–1204) was the greatest medieval Jewish philosopher. A century before St. Thomas Aquinas, Maimonides anticipated three of Aquinas's proofs for the existence of God. Using portions of Aristotle's metaphysics and physics, and relying on concepts like possible and necessary beings, Maimonides proved the existence of a Prime Mover, the existence of a necessary Being (relying here also on Avicenna), and the existence of a primary cause.

Peter Abelard (1079–1142) was a French theologian and philosopher whose most famous work, *Sic et Non* (Yes and No), exhibited a style of dialectical discussion by setting out more than 150 theological questions to challenge students.

William of Ockham (ca. 1280–1349), an English Franciscan, is known for "Ockham's razor," or the principle of parsimony. The principle of Ockham's razor reflects the idea that if you possess two different theories explaining some scientific data, you should choose the one that puts forward the minimum number of entities. In other words, Ockham (commonly spelled "Occam") thought that the simplest solution was often the correct one. Ockham, like Abelard, is also known for his nonrealist theory of universals.

St. Thomas Aquinas

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) was a prolific writer whose reputation is based largely on his ability to take Aristotle’s philosophy — by the thirteenth century translated into Latin across Europe — and join it to Christian thought.

By Aquinas’s time, there were two major paths in philosophy, Platonism and Aristotelianism. Aquinas’s philosophy is grounded in Aristotle. His terminology of form and matter, substance and accident, and actuality and potentiality, is the very framework Aristotle employed to express his ideas about objects in nature.

Fast Fact

Aquinas was the founder of the system declared by Pope Leo XIII (in the encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, 1879) to be the official Catholic philosophy.

It can be said that Thomas Aquinas synthesized faith and reason to a greater extent than any other philosopher. Aquinas made no sharp distinction between the natural and divine worlds, unlike Augustine, who did so in his *City of God*. He thought that all of creation, both natural and supernatural, and all truth, revealed or rational, emanated from God. Reason and revelation, the two sources of knowledge, do not conflict. Aquinas is regarded by many as the thinker who overcame the discrepancy between faith and reason.

Aquinas’s Thought

Like Aristotle, Aquinas was an empiricist and claimed that knowledge came from experience. For Aquinas, sense experience indicated that the universe was a system of causes and effects and lawful behavior. This religious view of the physical world, teleology, says that nature acts as if it were following a purpose

or aiming at some mark, and this world system requires a *transcendent* cause, or an intelligent designer.

Aquinas thought that reflection on familiar features of the physical world afforded evidence of God's existence. Because of this, he attempted five proofs to demonstrate the existence of God. Aquinas ends each of the arguments with the conclusion that God is the cause of some reality, since without God the reality would not be explainable.

At various times St. Thomas Aquinas has been ridiculed for being "Aristotle baptized." To his detractors, Aquinas forced Aristotle to fit into his own Christian assumptions about nature and morality. After all, the ideas of Aristotle's naturalism and Aquinas's Christianity are not the same. Nonetheless, the two philosophers agreed more than they disagreed. Aquinas sought to combine reason and revelation, and the resulting fit was a good one save for those instances where reason did not bear fruit and only Scripture could be trusted.

Renaissance Period

During the medieval period, philosophy was often viewed as “the handmaiden of faith.” Philosophy could be used to help establish beliefs by making use of reason and argument. When conflict arose between the claims of faith and the claims of reason, that conflict got “resolved” in favor of faith. But the credo of the two phases of the Renaissance is different. The arts and philosophy in the humanistic phase of the Renaissance (from 1453 to 1600) were human-centered, emphasizing the place of humans in the universe. Philosophy during the natural science phase (from 1600 to 1690) was cosmos-centered. The key thinkers of the humanistic period were Desiderius Erasmus and Martin Luther. By the end of the Renaissance, however, the significant figures were scientific thinkers, Nicolaus Copernicus, a mathematician and astronomer, and Galileo Galilei, a central figure in the scientific revolution, in particular.

Erasmus and Machiavelli

Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536) celebrated the human spirit in his writings and saw no tension between the classics and religious faith. While his work inspired the Protestant reformers to follow his lead, especially Martin Luther with whom Erasmus feuded, he wished to heal, not break, the church.

Niccolò di Bernardo dei Machiavelli (1469–1527) is undoubtedly the most important political philosopher of the era and is best known for *The Prince*, a work he viewed as an objective view of political reality.

Person(s) of Importance: Copernicus and Galileo

On his deathbed, the Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543) published his work that placed the sun at the center of our solar system. This work famously ran counter to the Ptolemaic system favored by the church. In his time, Galileo (1564–1642), the Italian astronomer, philosopher, and mathematician, took up the cause, based on his own

observations of the heavens. He was subsequently condemned by Rome and placed under house arrest. His thinking and experimental methods, however, became the basis for the scientific revolution in seventeenth-century Europe.

Protestant Reformation

Martin Luther (1483–1546) was outraged by the church’s policy of charging a monetary fee for the sacrament of confession — what he thought of as the selling of indulgences — and nailed his famous “Ninety-five Theses” to the door of the Wittenberg Castle church in 1517. In time his bold action would incite a major protest against the church — the Protestant Reformation — that would be felt across Europe. In undercutting the religious authority of the Catholic Church, downplaying subservience to tradition, and placing new importance on the individual, the Reformation caused a groundswell against all intellectual authorities and traditions.

Fast Fact

Technology was essential to the Renaissance. The invention of the printing press in the mid-1400s made the works of great authors widely available. Under Cosimo de’ Medici, forty-five copyists working feverishly for two years had produced just 200 volumes; by the year 1500 some thousand printers had produced over 9 million books.

Early Empiricism

Following the Renaissance, two forerunners of a scientific, experienced-based philosophy were Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes. Empiricism (which comes from a Greek word *emperia*, meaning “experience”) was a philosophy that stated all philosophy begins with experience.

Francis Bacon

Sir Francis Bacon (1561–1626) was an English philosopher, essayist, and statesman. After a failed career as public servant, Bacon spent his last years working on his lifelong project: the reform of learning and the establishment of an intellectual community dedicated to the discovery of scientific knowledge for the “use and benefit of men.” He called his project to reform the sciences “The Great Instauration,” which meant “restoration” or “renewal.” In fact, he completed only the first of three parts, called the *New Organon*.

In the *New Organon*, Bacon introduces his doctrine of the idols that impede knowledge.

- *The idols of the tribe* are innate human weaknesses, such as the tendency to trust one’s senses or to discern more order in events than actually exists.
- *The idols of the cave* vary between individuals and include prejudices or distortions due to unique backgrounds.
- *The idols of the market place* hinder clear thinking and are due to imprecise language.
- *The idols of the theater* derive from grand systems of philosophy.

Bacon was opposed to the rationalist tendency inherent in Plato’s teachings that dealt with examining the content and meaning of words to attain knowledge.

He also made attacks on Aristotle, the other giant of the classical period, for amassing data but making no scientific hypotheses.

Thomas Hobbes

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) became one of the great seventeenth-century philosophers. In *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes claimed that the physical motions of objects in the external world produce human sensations, and all events in nature and all behavior is determined. The determinism found in nature and human activity also applies to human motivation. Hobbes said that people are egoistic hedonists, always guided by their own pursuit of pleasure. Hence, people are unfailingly self-interested and therefore psychologically determined to seek their own pleasure. Because people live in a state characterized by fear and violence, self-interest compels them to create a government with a strong ruler.

Repeatable Quotable

Hobbes is the father of us all. —*Karl Marx*

While Bacon was a major player in the early empiricist movement in philosophy, he made no important scientific discoveries. Hobbes's reputation as an important thinker in many areas remains and he has been referred to as the founder of modern political science.

Descartes

René Descartes (1596–1650), French mathematician and philosopher, received a Jesuit education, traveled widely for ten years, and finally settled in Holland. Descartes is recognized as “the Father of Modern Philosophy” for his break with medieval thinking and using the methodology of the sciences to establish a rational foundation for truth. Descartes rejected the Scholastic concepts of forms and their causes, and their belief that knowledge began with sense perceptions.

His Philosophy

Descartes’s philosophy centered around three goals, the first of which was to eliminate doubt and find certainty. A second goal was his quest for a set of principles, or starting points, from which he could deduce all answers to scientific questions. His third goal was metaphysical for Descartes sought to reconcile his mechanistic view of the universe with his own religious perspective. If the world was a deterministic machine, as Hobbes and other materialists had argued, then how would there be room for human freedom? What need was there for God in such a universe? Descartes wanted to be loyal to two important masters: science and spirituality.

In *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), Descartes methodically questions all knowledge, whatever its basis. He then goes on to construct something about which he can be certain: because Descartes doubts, he exists. He states: *Cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am). From this foundation Descartes builds new justifications for the existence of God. One, a causal argument, suggests that his idea of God as a perfect being means that there is some cause of the idea, and that cause must be God. The second argument states that God’s essence as a perfect being contains his existence.

Descartes believed that the mind and the body were distinct, and he called this idea “mind-body dualism.” Consciousness is the essential property of the mind. By contrast, motion is the essential property of bodily, or material, substance. In *Passions of the Soul*, one of his last works, Descartes attempts to explain the cause-effect relationship between mind and body.

Defining Moment

On November 10, 1619, while serving in the military, Descartes had a series of dreams or daydreams during which he considered the nature of the world and the meaning of life. This experience led to his work in philosophy as well as analytical geometry.

Spinoza and Leibniz

Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) was a rationalist and, like other seventeenth-century philosophers such as Descartes and Hobbes, systematically laid out his beliefs as if it were a mathematically deduced proof. Though widely criticized — he was even excommunicated for his thinking — Spinoza remains one of philosophy's true original thinkers.

In 1661, he began writing a *Treatise on the Correction of the Understanding*, a work that criticizes Descartes while still illustrating how Spinoza was influenced by his predecessor. He began to write his major philosophical work, the *Ethics*, in 1663, but it was not completed until 1675 and not published until after his death.

In Spinoza's *Ethics*, written in the form of a geometrical treatise, he takes up the subject of the divine nature. He states that only substance is self-caused, free, and infinite, and therefore God must be the only substance. Because everything that exists exists in God, nothing can either be or be conceived without God. The universe contains nothing that is contingent or that could be other than it is. God is free in the sense of being self-determining — and uncaused — and He determines to produce things in a logically necessary manner. Besides calling the universe a “necessary” creation, Spinoza disagrees that God alone is perfect and that the natural order less than perfect.

Repeatable Quotable

[M]en believe themselves to be free because they are conscious of their own actions and are ignorant of the causes by which they are determined. —*Baruch Spinoza*

Spinoza asserts that material things are a part of God's nature, which contrasts loudly with Christian views that made God responsible for the creation

of the physical world, but had not made God himself material, even in part. People find happiness only through a rational understanding of this system and their place within it.

Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) was a German philosopher and mathematician (he developed calculus independently of Isaac Newton). Leibniz held that the world is composed of an infinite number of simple substances, which he called *monads*. Monads are the simplest units of existence and each monad is different. According to Leibniz, everything in the universe unfolds according to a pre-established pattern, and God is an infinitely perfect being who creates the best possible world from an infinite number of possible worlds.

Newton and Locke

Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727) and **John Locke** (1632–1704) were Enlightenment philosophers. Thinkers during the European Enlightenment were confident that man could solve his problems — problems of government, morals, and society included — by the use of reason. Even the universe could be mathematically understood.

Newton

Newton's genius had manifested by his early twenties. He made significant discoveries in mathematics and physics from 1664 to 1667, but his masterpiece, commonly known as the *Principia*, appeared in 1687. This important work set forth the mathematical laws of physics and “the system of the world.” Newton had always insisted on adherence to experimental observation and induction for advancing scientific knowledge, and he rejected speculative metaphysics. He believed nature would be revealed through mathematical treatment.

Locke

John Locke was also born in England and was the first great British empiricist. His legacy is vast: he was a notable political, economic, and religious thinker. He was a “latitudinarian,” one who conformed to the Church of England but placed little importance on the church's doctrine or practices. He was a broad churchman in theology and a liberal in politics. He argued against the authority of the Bible and the church. Locke maintained that political sovereignty depended upon the consent of the governed and ecclesiastical authority upon the consent of reason. He was also an ardent defender of freedom of thought and speech.

Defining Moment

Locke's political theory (set forth in 1690 in his *Two Treatises of Government*) defended the doctrine of human liberty and human rights against absolutism. These principles were incorporated into the Constitution of the United States.

Locke's greatest philosophical contribution is his *Essay on Human Understanding* (1690). Locke rejected the traditional belief of innate ideas, but believed that the mind was born blank and acquired knowledge through experience, which is perfected by reflection. Locke distinguishes between simple and complex ideas, and between ideas and objective reality, or the external world. He also differentiates between the primary qualities of things — solidity, extension, number — and secondary qualities such as color, sound, smell, and taste. Locke's philosophical empiricism was close to Newton and other founders of modern science. His political thought, expressed in his *Two Treatises of Government*, rejected the divine right of the monarch and established the idea of a social contract between citizens.

Repeatable Quotable

In the absence of any other proof, the thumb alone would convince me of God's existence. —
Isaac Newton

David Hume

David Hume (1711–1776) was a Scottish philosopher and historian who took empirical philosophy further than did Locke. He applied it relentlessly to issues of how people attain knowledge, to beliefs about God and miracles, and to moral philosophy. When he was twenty-eight, he published his first — and his greatest — philosophical work, the *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739). His reputation for attacking orthodoxies grew with the publication of his *Natural History of Religion* in 1757. His *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, a classic in the philosophy of religion, was published after his death.

Hume tried to describe how the mind acquires knowledge, which he divided into “matters of fact” and “relations of ideas.” Relations of ideas include science and mathematics for propositions either intuitive or demonstratively certain. Matters of fact can never be known for certain; their contraries are possible. Hume rejected the existence of metaphysical entities, such as God, soul, or self, as being outside human knowledge. Self, he believed, was a collection of perceptions.

Hume's Beliefs

Hume was a skeptic about God's existence. The existence of the universe is surely an empirical fact, but he thought the existence of God could not be inferred from it since people have neither an impression of God nor of the alleged act of creation. Hume provides a description of the way in which his belief about cause and effect arises. He states that cause and effect is not in the world but in us: we see pairs of events and believe that one is the cause and the other the effect. A “habit of association” is created in the mind through repetition. Hume also discusses morality in the *Treatise*. He believes that moral distinctions are not judgments of reason but emotional responses. Specifically,

moral approval is a type of pleasure that people experience, and this pleasure produces additional feelings of love or pride.

David Hume laid the groundwork for the skepticism and strict empiricism of the twentieth century. Hume gave philosophy the impetus to question any and all statements that could not be substantiated with reason or by exacting tests of experience.

Immanuel Kant

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) was born in Königsberg (now Kaliningrad), East Prussia. In his greatest work, *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), Kant achieved a synthesis of empiricism and rationalist thought. He claimed that knowledge was impossible without accepting truths from both rationalist and empiricist schools. He based his ethics on reason and said that moral duties could be deduced by all rational beings.

He noticed a problem with the empiricist manner of obtaining knowledge. If, as the empiricists said, only particular sensations or particular impressions are known, how is it possible to arrive at necessary and universal knowledge? How can the possibility of scientific knowledge be explained or, more precisely, the relationship between cause and effect, which enables the mind to grasp scientific truths?

Kant believed that humans are active in knowing the world. Although all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that all of it arises out of that experience. Instead of the outside-in approach to knowledge of the empiricists, in which objects cause passive perceivers to have “sensations” (Locke) or “impressions” (Hume), Kant said that the categories of space and time — which he called “forms of intuition” — were imposed on experiences by the human mind in order to make sense of it. Kant termed this basic insight into the nature of knowledge “the Copernican revolution in philosophy.”

Understanding

Kant proposed that the mind has “categories of understanding,” which catalogue, codify, and make sense of the world. The mind cannot experience anything that is not filtered through the mind’s eye and, therefore, can never know the true nature of reality. In this sense, Kant claimed that “perception is reality.”

Kant said that, in order to have any knowledge, the mind needs a set of organizing principles. These principles are found in our faculty of the understanding. Knowledge is the product of content (what is sensed) and understanding (space and time as forms of intuition) working together. In other words, both *a priori* and *a posteriori* elements are essential. Without sensation, no object would be perceptible. Without understanding, no object could be conceived. As Kant wrote in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, “Thoughts without contents are empty, perceptions without conceptions are blind ... Understanding can perceive nothing, the senses can think nothing. Knowledge arises only from their united action.”

Kant’s *The Critique of Pure Reason* marked the end of the Enlightenment and began a new period of philosophy for German idealism.

Person of Importance: Karl Marx

Karl Marx (1818–1883) was a German social philosopher and the chief theorist of modern socialism and communism.

For Marx, the history of humankind is a tale of the increasing development of man, and one of increasing alienation at the same time. Alienation is the consequence of historical materialism (defined as the idea that a society’s economic structure — be it feudalism, capitalism, or communism — determines the nature of its cultural and social structure) determining man’s will. In certain kinds of industrial labor, man is alienated from his humanity, his essence, which involves creativity.

Marx wrote the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) with Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), another German socialist whom Marx met in Paris. This work expounds historical materialism (“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles”) and predicts that communism would overthrow the existing power structure of society. The new banner of communism would read: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.” Workers in the new society would no longer be separated from the products of their labor and so alienation would cease.

The first volume of *Das Kapital* was published in 1867 and the second and third volumes, edited by Engels, were not published until after Marx had died. This major work revealed the tenets of Marxism and became the handbook for international socialism. Here, the economic drivers of society and history are explained in terms of labor and wages, and the exploitation of workers is identified as the basis for capitalism. Marx’s purpose in *Das Kapital* was to lay

bare “the economic law of motion of modern society.” He believed these laws were inevitable and would lead to the eventual triumph of the working class.

History has shown that capitalism has the potential to devalue workers and produce alienation on the job. However, capitalism has outlasted and in some cases replaced communism as a successful economic system.

Repeatable Quotable

The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it. —*Karl Marx*

Kierkegaard: The Father of Existentialism

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, and lived the life of a dilettante until age twenty-five when he experienced a reawakening and recommitted to the Christian faith. Kierkegaard's philosophy, by contrast to the grand systems built by Plato and Aristotle, stressed the existing individual and how he lived in the world day to day.

Kierkegaard was influenced greatly by the work of **Blaise Pascal** (1623–1662) who believed that, though God's existence could not be proved, men could and *ought to believe* in God's existence. The possibility of infinite gain — including a life of eternal blessedness in the afterlife — far supersedes any sacrifice of material gain in our present finite existence. Kierkegaard agreed that choice, rather than reason and experience, was the starting point for a sound philosophy.

Repeatable Quotable

The thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die. —
Søren Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard said that truth is subjectivity; there is no prefabricated truth for people who make choices. Kierkegaard had a higher regards for *subjective* truth than *objective* truth. It is the factor that makes Kierkegaard the “Father of Existentialism.” The individual acts on truth, he maintained, and this truth was a manner of existence. Man exists in his truth and lives in it. The highest expression of subjectivity is passionate belief. This is what it means to think “existentially.”

Three Stages

The essence of Kierkegaard's philosophy can be seen in his three stages of life experience: aesthetic, ethical, and religious. The aesthetic is a stage of living for the moment, the continual search for diversion, and ultimate futility. This leads to the ethical stage of decision and resolute commitment in which the individual accepts responsibility and follows rules of conduct. Because this lacks personal meaning, the ethical stage leads to the religious stage, one of obedience and commitment to God. This is a personal, subjective experience and relationship, and is, in Kierkegaard's view, a "leap of faith."

Kierkegaard's life and philosophy were centered on existential questions: "How shall I live my life?" "What kind of life is worth living — the aesthetic, ethical, or religious?" "What does it mean to have faith?" "What does it mean to love?" "What does it mean to accept one's suffering and how can one do this?" His discussions of these questions reveal his unfailing and uncanny philosophical acumen.

William James and Pragmatism

Pragmatism is an anti-systematic, anti-empirical, and anti-rationalist philosophy that grew up in America in the nineteenth century. Charles Peirce, John Dewey, and William James were American pragmatists. The practical consequences and meanings of ideas in the real world were more important to them than the theoretical coherence of some of the systematic philosophies of the past.

Although **Charles Peirce** (1839–1914) was “the Father of Pragmatism,” **William James** (1842–1910) gave the term its clearest expression. “Pragmatism asks its usual question,” said James. “‘Grant an idea or belief to be true,’ it says, ‘what concrete difference will its being true make in one’s actual life? What experiences will be different from those which would obtain if the belief were false?’” James insisted that all knowledge is pragmatic because it is difficult if not impossible to settle some philosophical questions — like whether there is a God or an afterlife. James thought that it was best to believe the theory that brings about the best consequences in one’s life.

Fast Fact

Charles Peirce founded an organization known as “the Metaphysical Club” that met in the 1870s in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to read and debate philosophical papers. The better-known members of this group included Peirce, William James, and future Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes.

Though the philosophical movement known as *pragmatism* originated about 150 years ago, it is as different and refreshing in the twenty-first century as it was in the mid-nineteenth century. It offered an altogether relaxed attitude about what is true, meaningful, and significant in people’s lives. Pragmatism opposed doctrines that believed truth could be reached through deductive

reasoning from a priori grounds. In contrast, it held that truth changes as discoveries are made and is relative to the time, place, and purpose of inquiry. What “difference” beliefs make is more obvious — and in some ways more important — than whether those beliefs are true.

Analytic Philosophy

Analytic philosophy, also known as linguistic philosophy, was a twentieth century philosophical movement especially strong in England and the United States. Analytic philosophy concentrated on language — making it unambiguous and concise — and the attempt to analyze statements in order to clarify philosophical problems.

There are at least two reasons for this “linguistic turn” in philosophy. First, philosophers thought science had taken over much of the territory formerly occupied by philosophy. As Moritz Schlick, an early member of the analytic movement, put it, “Science should be defined as the pursuit of truth” and philosophy as “the pursuit of meaning.” A second reason for the linguistic turn in philosophy stems from the new and more powerful methods of logic that had been developed in the twentieth century. These methods promised to shed new light on some of the old, philosophical stalemates by eliminating propositions that were vague, equivocal, misleading, or nonsensical.

One striking example of how language and issues of meaning can be applied to philosophical problems is logical positivism, also called *logical empiricism*. In his influential book *Language, Truth, and Logic*, **A. J. Ayer** (1910–89) employed a theory called “the verification principle” to statements to see if they are meaningful. The positivists were not trying to decide if a statement was true. They thought that was the job of science. Philosophy’s task was to decide what it means to say that a statement has meaning, or that it provides information about the world.

Person of Importance: Bertrand Russell

Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) touched almost every area of philosophy and made major contributions to mathematics and logical analysis. His theory of definite descriptions

maintained that sentences were descriptions consisting of a conjunction of separate entities. Each of the entities can be tested to determine if it's true. Logically, any statement that is a conjunction of entities is false if any one of the entities is false. Russell's theory of definite descriptions shows that it is possible to speak sensibly of things that do not exist. Since Russell, it has become a standard tool of logical analysis. There is little question that analytic philosophy changed the manner in which philosophers worked. Using newer methods of logical and linguistic analysis illuminated old philosophical queries in ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology.

Repeatable Quotable

Man is a credulous animal, and must believe something; in the absence of good grounds for belief, he will be satisfied with bad ones. —*Bertrand Russell*

Sartre and Existentialism

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) eventually became the leading voice of atheistic existentialism. In his essay “Existentialism and Human Emotions” (1947), he set forth a novel idea of human freedom. He used the phrase “existence precedes essence,” which says that there is no such thing as a given human nature. On the contrary, personal choices and acts make up one’s identity. Man first exists, and his choices then define his essence: individuals give meaning to facts by deciding how to act. Sartre also rejected the existence of God by pointing out that people are “free agents,” and this would not be the case if God existed.

Metaphysics and Ethics

Philosophers like Gilbert Ryle, A. J. Ayer, and Antony Flew brought new life to old metaphysical issues like mind-body interaction, God's existence, and the problem of evil. Their revelations were more about the analysis of concepts and the language used than in introducing new content. But good analytic philosophy brought new understanding to old problems.

Contemporary ethics have added a great deal to the history of ethical thinking in at least two ways. First, there has been increased attention to the meaning of ethical terms such as *fairness*, *justice*, and *goodness*. In addition, applied ethics including legal ethics, medical ethics, the ethics of sports, the philosophy of warfare, and medical ethics have responded to social concerns.

Repeatable Quotable

We are condemned to be free. —*Jean-Paul Sartre*

Cheat Sheet for Philosophy

- *Aesthetics* is the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of art and the criteria of artistic judgment.
- *Atomism* holds that the universe is composed of invisible, indestructible material particles.
- *Cultural relativism* is a descriptive thesis stating that moral beliefs vary across cultures.
- *Deists* were thinkers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who held that the course of nature demonstrates the existence of God.
- *Determinism* states that all events and actions are caused by an outside force.
- *Dialectical materialism* states that everything is material and that change takes place through “the struggle of opposites.”
- *Dualism* is the view that there are two types of substances, or realities, in conscious beings, mind and matter. According to many philosophers, these two substances interact with each other with the body producing mental events and the mind leading to physical action.
- *Empiricism* states that all knowledge derives from experience.
- *Ethical relativism* is the belief that moral judgments depend upon cultural acceptance.
- *Existentialism* is a belief system centered on the individual and her relationship to the universe or God.
- *Logical positivism* is a school of philosophy that attempted to introduce the methodology and precision of mathematics and the natural sciences.
- *Materialism* states that only matter and its properties exist. Even consciousness and various mental states are physical according to this doctrine.

- *Metaphysics* is the study of ultimate reality beyond empirical experience. This branch of philosophy includes free will, causality, the nature of matter, immortality, and the existence of God.
- *Nihilism* is the view that there are no valid moral principles or values.
- *Philosophy* is the study of the truths, causes, and principles underlying being, thinking, and conduct.
- *Rationalism* is the theory that reason alone, unaided by experience, can arrive at basic truth regarding the world.
- *Scholasticism* was the philosophy and theology of Western Christendom during the Middle Ages.
- *Stoicism* was a Greek school of philosophy that advocated resigning oneself to fate, performing one's appointed duties faithfully, and thereby acquiring tranquility of mind.
- *Subjective truth* is truth according to some perceiver.
- *Syllogism* is a form of deductive reasoning consisting of a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion.

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