



The Oxford History of Western Philosophy

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From Plato's *Republic* and St. Augustine's *Confessions* through Marx's *Capital* and Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, the extraordinary philosophical dialogue between great Western minds has flourished unabated through the ages. Dazzling in its genius and breadth, the long line of European and American intellectual discourse tells a remarkable story--a quest for truth and wisdom that continues to shape our most basic ideas about human nature and the world around us. That quest is brilliantly brought to life in *The Oxford History of Western Philosophy*. Featuring hundreds of spectacular illustrations--including sixteen pages of full-color plates--this splendidly written volume takes the reader on a magnificent chronological tour through the revolutions of thought that have forged the Western philosophical tradition from ancient times to the present. Throughout, the six contributors--an internationally renowned team of philosophers including Roger Scruton, Anthony Quinton, and Anthony Kenny--bring the astonishingly diverse, wide-ranging landscape of intellectual history into sharp focus, emphasizing how notions seen today as part of an inevitable march of ideas were in their own time often considered radical, if not revolutionary. Thus we are treated, for example, to lively accounts of how Plato's "theory of forms" and Aristotle's pioneering exercises in logic broke with the past to irrevocably alter the course of Western thought. The authors also reveal the relationships between landmark thinkers, and the ways they drew on their intellectual heritage. They show, for instance, how St. Augustine and Aquinas, though advancing the cause of Christian doctrine, picked up where their pagan Greek forebears had left off. We witness how, during the Renaissance, the profound empiricist ideas underlying Descartes's famous utterance--"I think, therefore I exist"--lived in a tense but complementary relationship with Locke's rationalist theories. Moving into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the book explores how Hume greatly influenced Kant's conception of the "transcendental aesthetic," and how Hegel drew upon the lesser known (but groundbreaking) work of Fichte and Schelling. The authors bring the story up to our own time, vividly recounting the existential trend from Nietzsche ("God is dead") to Sartre, along with other increasingly fractious schools of thought. Along the way, we not only encounter the vast intellectual riches of the Western mind, but we also meet the personalities behind the great thoughts, from the saintly Hume (described by Adam Smith as having "come as near to perfection as anybody could") to the ill-mannered outcast Fichte. And the hundreds of maps and striking illustrations (including full-color reproductions of art ranging from medieval manuscripts to the works of Raphael, Ingres, and Magritte) form an integral part of the book, revealing the interweaving of art and ideas through the ages, as artists have striven to give

visual immediacy to philosophical concepts.

The Oxford History of Western Philosophy is the most authoritative single-volume account ever written for the general reader. Engagingly written and astonishingly far-reaching, it provides the consummate introduction to the intellectual bedrock upon which Western civilization is built.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Readers might think that the last thing Western philosophy needs is another history. What sets this book apart is the analytic background of its contributors, among them David Pears, Roger Scruton, Anthony Quinton, and editor Kenny, thus presenting familiar names and ideas in a different light and transforming this from a "Socrates said X, Hume said Y" type of history into one in which the ideas and systems are subjected to thorough and clear criticism. Given the explosion of philosophical activity in this century, the decision to exclude living writers was wise, allowing contributors to focus on the roots of many of our ideas and delve into them using modern analytic techniques. The illustrations have been wisely chosen to show the constant play between art and idea. Some familiarity with analytic philosophy would be useful to gain the most from the text, but this is a significant addition to the literature even though it lacks the unity of a single-author volume. Recommended for all academic and larger public libraries.

Terry Skeats, Bishop's Univ. Lib., Lennoxville, Quebec

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From [Booklist](#)

Malt may do more than Milton can to justify God's ways to man, but St. Augustine and the rest keep trying to entice us from the taverns to the scriptoria to explain the ways the world works. Oxford's roster of eminent excogitators ranges from Plato to Russell, as summarized by six exceptionally clear-writing teachers. In a subject of, commonly, impenetrable obtuseness and dubious utility to daily life, their essays are apt to pull in the layperson untrained in, but still intrigued by, philosophy's lineage. If the prose doesn't, the riot of illustrations must; there are hundreds, spanning Raphael's *School of Athens*, statues of Marx, and every thinker in between. Editor Kenny, who takes on the Enlightenment in "Descartes to Kant," divvies up the duties amongst the ancients, the medievals, continental philosophers like Hegel, Nietzsche, and Sartre, and the English analyticals (Bentham and Mill), followed by a survey of political philosophies. As a group, the writers excel at showing how erroneous ideas went wrong, as well as the varieties of explanations for existence, sense, linguistics, and morality. Mead quaffers take note. *Gilbert Taylor*

Review

'courageously erudite compendium' Fiona MacCarthy, The Observer

'... a wonderfully lucid exposition of difficult ideas,' Jill Paton Walsh, The Tablet, Dec '94

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Rachel Louviere:

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Lewis Farnsworth:

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