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ROOTS of WISDOM

A Tapestry of Philosophical Traditions

Helen Buss Mitchell

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Roots *of* Wisdom

A Tapestry of Philosophical Traditions

EIGHTH EDITION

Helen Buss Mitchell
Howard Community College

Australia • Brazil • Mexico • Singapore • United Kingdom • United States

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sources, truth tests, aesthetic experience), and concluding with axiology (political philosophy, social philosophy, ethics). Although they are topically organized, the chapters also move forward in time, following the canon of Western philosophy and including women, Asian and African thinkers/thought systems, and "The Peoples of the Americas" (Spanish-language and indigenous thinkers of the past and present) as they speak to the questions raised by the Western discourse.

The theme for this revision is "personhood." We are all human by virtue of our DNA. However, personhood is legally and socially constructed. And not all humans are considered full "persons" under the law or by social/cultural custom. Under the United States Constitution, for example, many groups were excluded from participation, including women and slaves who were further denied humanity and designated "property." In some cases personhood is intentionally diminished. In war (or ethnic cleansing), we must deny the "enemy" full personhood in order to kill or injure him/her.

The following reflect specific additions to this edition.

- **Chapter 3, Human Nature**, introduces language to describe the philosophical concept of personhood. Later in the chapter, there is a new section: "Confucian Socially Molded Self." The Confucian Project involves "Five Constant Relationships" and the so-called "womb to tomb" project of lessons and models in transcending selfishness and aspiring to become a *chun-tzu*, a noble or superior-minded person. This is notably an aristocracy, not of wealth but of character. This section connects with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in Chapter 1. Aristotle and Confucius are the two early proponents of what we now call Virtue Ethics.
- **Chapter 8, Political Philosophy**, examines the difference between "subject" and "citizen," and the role of "personhood" in this distinction. Subjects do not enjoy "personhood"; citizens potentially do. The transition from monarchy to republic often raises questions about who will be considered a person under the new regime and who will not. As emerging nations struggle to achieve state formation, questions of personhood are very much alive. Citizenship entails rights; it also entails duties.
- **Chapter 9, Social Philosophy**, looks at the possibilities for enhancing personhood in a planned city. Following "Justice in Buganda," which recalls a model of justice in an ancient kingdom, the new section details the history of Columbia, Maryland, the visionary creation of James W. Rouse in Central Maryland between Baltimore and Washington, DC. In contrast with long-established legal and social traditions, a planned city offers fresh opportunities to correct or temper injustices in the larger society. Columbia, Maryland, which declared its community open and welcoming to all races in 1967, celebrated its 50th anniversary on June 21, 2017.
- **Chapter 10, Ethics**, recounts the story of "The Bodhisattva and the Hungry Tigress" from Buddhist Scripture, as a way of highlighting the concept of personhood in nonhuman beings. When a wealthy and privileged young man enjoying a day of leisure in a park comes upon a tigress, exhausted by hunger and thirst and unable to hunt for herself and her five young cubs, he makes what will seem to most readers an irrational choice. Moved by compassion, he lays his body

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> down to feed the hungry animals. From the Buddhist worldview of interconnectedness, however, the tigers have personhood—for this enlightened being, they deserve life as much as he does. And, we learn at the end of the story that this man, Mahasattva, was to become the Buddha in his next life.

Some texts are written at such a difficult level that the instructor's task becomes explaining the text to the students. *Roots of Wisdom: A Tapestry of Philosophical Traditions* takes a different approach. I have spared none of the rigor and retained all the essential vocabulary, yet the style is conversational, the examples plentiful, and the illustrations lavish. This is a book students can read on their own, freeing instructors to offer their own emphasis and include additional material if they so choose. Students will have the basic foundation provided for them. This book makes difficult concepts simple without making them simplistic.

Special Content Features

Because formal philosophy is indeed a foreign language for beginning students, I have given special attention to offering many options for organizing and learning difficult new material. I have also taken care to provide the historical, cultural, and biographical context students need to appreciate the roots of philosophical wisdom. The following special content features support these goals.

Philosophy in Context: Historical Interludes

There are five Historical Interludes that begin and end the text as well as link the major sections and topics. The first provides a worldwide context for the beginning of Western philosophy; the second describes the blending of Greek rationalist thought and Hebrew religious thought in the exportation of Christianity to the gentile world; the third and fourth provide transitions from the medieval to the modern world and from the modern to the postmodern world, respectively; the last considers the implications of discoveries in brain neuroscience for philosophy. Together these Historical Interludes provide transitions between the three major divisions of the text—metaphysics, epistemology, axiology—and include information on key historical and cultural events without interrupting the flow of a chapter.

Logic: "How Philosophy Works"

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

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Biography: "The Making of a Philosopher" Boxes

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

Applications: "Doing Philosophy"

From the early "sophistry" of one of O. J. Simpson's defense attorneys to the fuzzy social contract, each chapter brings the method and questions of philosophy into the everyday lives of ordinary people. An African woman's story about "knowing" how to cure malaria, Simone Weil's decision to starve herself to death in solidarity with her compatriots in France, and the limits we might want to place on both cultural relativism and deconstruction stand beside questions of individual liberty versus respect for tradition, and the possibility of life after death; we explore how making music affects the mind and consider how granting limited personhood to great apes would affect the law. "Doing Philosophy" boxes explore the "real-life" dilemmas of being alive and make clear that philosophy is not a spectator sport.

Primary Material: "Philosophers Speak for Themselves"

In 250–400 word excerpts, philosophers across cultures and centuries speak in their own words about questions of vital importance to them. Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Hobbes, Descartes, Locke, and Kant from the Western tradition are joined by the author of the Taoist classic *Tao Te Ching,* the medieval mystic Hadewijch of Antwerp, and Mary Wollstonecraft from the Western Enlightenment.

Visual Features

Many students will be strongly visual learners. Words alone may be inadequate to convey concepts. Even for those who respond best to words, illustrations provide valuable reinforcement.

Time Lines

The time lines on the inside cover embrace the entire scope of the book, highlighting the flow of ideas throughout human history and revealing the multicultural nature of the search for wisdom. They offer "the course at a glance" and give instructors and students a ready reference for placing people and events in a historical context.

Maps

The roots of wisdom are deep in many cultures around the world, so some indication of where these cultures are geographically seems wise. Instructors can use the maps that accompany each of the Historical Interludes to combat our national cultural illiteracy. By freezing a moment in history, each of these maps highlights a time period and illuminates it with significant dates, events, and historical figures. The last interlude

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contains a "map" of the brain to conclude our exploration of interesting (and somewhat uncharted) territory.

Cartoons, Photographs, and Illustrations

Cartoons are used strategically, captioned in each case with a statement or question, tying it to the text and raising a specific philosophical issue or query. Since they come from a wide variety of sources (Doonesbury, Mother Goose and Grimm, Bizarro, and the work of several talented, independent individuals) and represent a wide range of subjects, these cartoons offer some students memory devices for anchoring course content.

Photographs, like cartoons, appear in every chapter and are similarly captioned. Specific philosophical concepts are examined through the medium of world art. In each case the culture that produced the art is identified and the caption ties the photograph to the content of the chapter. Although some of the art may be quite familiar to you, some of it may appear exotic. One of the best ways to know a culture is by studying its art forms, and this book looks to art for important information about how philosophy is done around the world. Striking color images have been added, demonstrating the power of art to express philosophical concepts visually. This edition also features electronically rendered "stills" from "For the Love of Wisdom," a multicultural telecourse based on *Roots of Wisdom: A Tapestry of Philosophical Traditions* that was produced by Howard Community College and is being distributed nationally by Dallas TeleLearning. As the creator and host of this series, I thank Howard Community College for allowing me to use these images.

Illustrations use graphic art or line drawings to visually represent difficult or challenging text material. As with the cartoons, each is captioned to tie the visual and verbal components together. Some of the African wisdom concepts are particularly well communicated through visual images.

In-Text Learning Aids

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

"The Issue Defined"

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

Key Terms and Glossary

Key terms are bolded in the text, described etymologically, and defined in the running margin glossary as well as in the master glossary in the back of the book. The more difficult terms are followed by a phonetic pronunciation guide. By listing and learning these key terms, students can create a philosophical skeleton on which to hang more complex ideas.

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Follow-Up

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

Supplementary Materials

In addition to *Readings from the Roots of Wisdom,* the reader that accompanies this text, two supplementary aids are available to complement the specific goals of the text outlined earlier. I have written them from the perspective of my own classroom experience over the last twenty-five years, the experiences of my colleagues, and the honesty of my students.

Instructor's Manual

I have tried to make the Instructor's Manual for this book the aid I wished for (but couldn't find) the first time I taught Introduction to Philosophy with less than two weeks' notice. Even if an instructor is not facing this rigorous a challenge, the new material in this text may benefit from some teaching suggestions. In the Instructor's Manual available only online at each chapter helps the instructor guide students through the language of philosophy. Vocabulary words are grouped into families, their etymologies and other interesting features explained, and ways to present them explored. The section on Method helps instructors relate the chapter's mini-lesson on logic to the overall chapter content. Next is a Discussion Starter for use during the class session when the instructor begins each chapter; this is followed by Background to help the instructor design a lecture or answer questions the text may raise for students. Each chapter in the guide concludes with Questions—25 multiple choice, 15 true/false, and 5 essay. The final section offers instructors one or two Resources unique to the chapter to get students thinking or reinforce learning that has already occurred.

Study Guide

The study guide for students (available only online at www.cengagebrain.com) takes a similar approach to Vocabulary and Method. Treating philosophy as a foreign language, the guide lists new words (as foreign language texts typically do) at the beginning of each chapter and relates them to the overall "culture" of philosophy as well as to the specific instructional content of a given chapter. The Method section helps students think of logic as a useful tool for life as well as philosophy class and uses real-life illustrations as examples. Study Suggestions are intended to deepen students'

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America for dazzling translations of the first and fourth editions of *Roots of Wisdom* into Spanish.

When I took my first philosophy course at Hood College, it was love at first sight. Paul Mehl showed me how easy it is to fall in love with wisdom and what a thrilling ride it offers. Tom Scheye and Frank Cunningham from Loyola College opened my eyes to the possibilities that emerge when literature and philosophy meet, and Frank Haig, S.J. helped me see the philosophical implications of modern physics. Kimpei Munei introduced me to the thought systems of Africa while he was an AFS student in our home. From my colleagues at Howard Community College—especially Valerie Lash, Yifei Gan, Ron Roberson, and Jane Winer—I have learned how art illuminates the philosophical quest.

A deep bow of gratitude to the following people who have made color images possible: Yifei Gan, for his two stunning scroll paintings, "Open Sky" and "Wind in Fall"; Shawn Sokoloski for his beautiful, original artwork, Vajra Artichoke; Doris Ligon and Jason Mitchell for making available and capturing, respectively, the Akua'ba Figure and the African House Post from the African Art Museum of Maryland; Barbara Whorton and Teresa Foster who made the Mayan Archetypal Female Figure available; and Carl Merritt who extracted four color images from the HCC-produced telecourse, "For the Love of Wisdom."

I am as always indebted to the reviewers who provided uniformly constructive and sometimes brilliant suggestions. From the beginning, their thoughtful comments have shaped the manuscript. Reviewers of the eighth edition were Robert Sliff, Coastline Community College; Tammie Foltz, Des Moines Area Community College; Luke Higgins, Armstrong State University; Brian Onishi, Wayne County Community College District; Nicholas Sugenis, Howard Community College; and Creed Hyatt, Lehigh Carbon Community College.

Finally, I would like to thank Julia Giannotti, Sharon Poore, Matt Gervais, and Hemalatha Loganathan for their technical expertise and guidance, as well as their enthusiasm for the new and revised material in this edition.

To my readers…

Please send your responses to *Roots of Wisdom: A Tapestry of Philosophical Traditions* to me electronically: hmitchell@howardcc.edu. I am especially interested in what works for you and what doesn't, as well as your suggestions for augmenting and improving the text.

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What Is Everything Really Like?

Questions of Metaphysics

PART 1

HISTORICAL INTERLUDE A

A Worldwide Context for Western Philosophy

CHAPTER ONE

Why Philosophy?

Is This All There Is?

CHAPTER TWO

Reality and Being

Is What You See What You Get?

HISTORICAL INTERLUDE B

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CHAPTER THREE

Human Nature

Who or What Are We, and What Are We Doing Here?

CHAPTER FOUR

Philosophy and Ultimate Reality

Is There an Ultimate Reality?

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HISTORICAL INTERLUDE A

A Worldwide Context for Western Philosophy

Philosophy—literally "the love of wisdom"—is a very ancient enterprise. People have probably been asking the "big questions"—Why am I here? How can I decide what's true and what isn't? What is everything made of? What's the right thing to do?—since the beginning of spoken language. We come into the world filled with questions. Children can't seem to stop asking them as they begin to wonder why things are the way they are. Why is the sky blue? Why does fire go up? Where is my dead goldfish now? How do you know it's time for me to go to bed? Why do I have to share my toys?

Philosophy assumes we never stop caring about the answers to those questions. What happens, for most of us, is that we get vague, unsatisfactory answers from grown-ups. At first we think they know better answers and are too busy to share the secrets with us. Later, we learn that they may not know either. Some people try to shut off the questions at this point, to concentrate on other things like making friends and money, seeking pleasure, popularity, and love. And, it works—for a while. But, the big questions have a way of coming back, especially during those moments when life gets our attention by stopping the ordinary flow of events with something startling and unexpected. A parent or friend dies young; a loved one betrays us; a cherished dream goes unfulfilled. At times like these, the questions come surging back. What is the purpose of life anyway? Does anything really matter? Are we on a short, unpleasant march toward death?

This book introduces some classical and some modern ways of thinking about those eternal questions. We begin with issues we all face at the beginning of a new millennium and link them with the roots of wisdom found in civilizations from ancient times to the present. There is wisdom in every culture, and no one culture has a monopoly on it. Although the principal thread running through this book is the story of Western philosophy, which began with the Greeks in the sixth century B.C.E. (before the common era), we will also be tracing lines of thought from other parts of the world, particularly China and Africa, but also India, Japan, and the Americas. Along the way we will be looking at often-neglected women philosophers as their arguments support or counter the classic conversation of Western philosophy and as they break new ground in engaging the big questions of life.

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Before we begin looking at the Greeks, it is important to survey briefly what was going on in other parts of the world. The Greeks had an enormous influence on the Western philosophical tradition, but they were neither the first nor the only culture to "do" philosophy. Actually, the centuries during which Greek culture flowered were a time of extraordinary spiritual and philosophical awakening in many parts of the world. To put Greek thought in context, we will look first at several near contemporaries of Thales, the first Greek philosopher, whom we meet in Chapter 1. They include Siddhārtha Gautama, known as the Buddha, who lived in India; K'ung Fu-tzu, or Master K'ung, known to the West as Confucius; and Lao-tzu, the Old Master, who began the tradition of Taoism. Both Master K'ung and Master Lao were Chinese, and all three of these men (Buddha, Confucius, and Lao-tzu) lived around the sixth century B.C.E. We then expand our initial exploration of the quest for wisdom by touching on Zen Buddhism, Native American and African thought, and finally the Hebrews, whose story will appear in more detail in the next Historical Interlude.

As you may have done, people living in other times and places looked into the vastness of the night sky and wondered about the importance of human life. Like you, they asked themselves, "How should we live our lives?" "Why is happiness so difficult to find and keep?" "What can I be sure of?" "Where did everything come from?" When they posed these questions, they were doing philosophy. We could just as accurately say they were doing science or religion. The love of wisdom and the search for answers to the eternal questions led our distant ancestors to wonder, and wondering is the root of science and religion as well as of philosophy. Today, these are three separate disciplines with separate focuses and methods, but at the time when the Buddha (the Enlightened One) began asking himself about the meaning of life, there were only those persistent questions and the human need to find answers.

Buddhism

Siddhārtha of the Gautama clan was born around 560 B.C.E. in what is today Nepal, just below the foothills of the Himalayan Mountains. According to legend, the young Siddhārtha grew up in a palace, surrounded by pleasures and protected from the harsh realities of everyday life. He was married to a lovely woman and, in his late twenties, fathered a son, but he had grown restless and discontented. Escaping from the secure but artificial world created by his loving father, Siddhārtha saw for the first time people who were old and diseased—even dead. How, he wondered, could anyone live in peace and happiness if this was what life had in store.

Renouncing his wife, child, father, and life of pleasure, he became a wandering beggar in search of answers. He spent some time with monks who lived in extreme **asceticism**, fasting and disciplining their bodies while they practiced yogic meditation. Although he fasted to the point that the texts claim he could feel his backbone when he sucked in his stomach and touched his navel, Siddhārtha did not find what he was looking for. According to tradition, enlightenment came when he sat beneath a bodhi (wisdom) tree on the night of the full Moon, resolving not to get up until he found the answer to life's riddles.

asceticism *the view that the body requires the discipline of mind or spirit, resulting in self-denial and even self-torture as a way of renouncing worldly longings in preparation for a happier existence after death*

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Taoism

The dynasties of China stretch back before 2000 B.C.E. when the Sage Kings of the Hsia dynasty, including the semilegendary Yellow Emperor (Huang Ti), ruled China. Silk and ceramics, writing, painting and music, the use of a calendar, and the art of healing all date from this period. By 1000 B.C.E., leaders of the Chou dynasty were praised as model rulers, but the time of Lao-tzu is known as the Warring States period. The classic Taoist (pronounced "dowist") text, the *Tao Te Ching,* was supposedly written at the request of the gatekeeper as Lao-tzu left the strife-ridden city during the sixth century B.C.E. for the quiet life of a hermit.

Tao *the Way, the fundamental principle of the world, the cosmic order, nature in Taoism*

Tao Te Ching means, roughly, the "book of the power, or virtue, of the Way." Reading from right to left, we arrive at the chief word in the title, ***Tao*** (pronounced "dow"). Lao-tzu and his disciple Chuang-tzu saw nature and the natural system as the heart of what is. To understand the *Tao,* which directs the natural system, is to understand everything. The *Tao* is the Way of nature that moves by perfect, effortless efficiency to fulfill its purposes. Summer turns to fall, which gives way to winter and then to spring. Night turns to day and day to night. We are born, grow up, grow old, and die. Only the foolish would attempt to oppose this system—to stand in the ocean and command a wave not to break. The wise person recognizes that—with a simple, egoless recognition of the way things are—all things can be accomplished.

yang *the active, male principle associated with action and doing*

yin *the receptive, female principle associated with quiet and being*

Wisdom lies in *letting* things happen rather than in trying to *make* things happen. Just as nature is sometimes ***yang***, full of the light, rising energy, and activity of the day, it is also ***yin***, full of the dark, falling energy, and receptivity of the evening. If one can let the *Tao* direct, things will always turn out right. As Lao-tzu puts it: "The *Tao* never does anything, yet through it all things are done."[1] Nature doesn't have to huff and puff to turn night into day; it just happens. Water, the softest and most yielding of elements, finds the lowliest places but can crack concrete with its power when it freezes. "Governing a large country," Lao-tzu says, "is like frying a small fish. You can ruin it with too much poking."[2] As the martial arts of T'ai Chi Ch'uan and Aikido recognize, the best way to oppose force is to yield to it: "When pushed, pull; when pulled, push."

Confucianism

Taoism urged withdrawal from the stress and conflict of city life in favor of quiet contemplation of nature. Confucianism, by contrast, was more worldly; it advocated embracing a common cultural heritage, with emphasis on observing the proper rituals. In the *Analects,* Confucius gave advice of a practical nature about how to live as a large-minded rather than as a small-minded person. The goal was living nobly and compassionately in the world, observing the appropriate dynamics of relationships. Subjects, for example, should obey their rulers who bear the Mandate of Heaven. Children should obey and respect their parents. Friends, however, have a more mutual relationship in which considerable give and take appropriately exists. As one of Confucius's students observed, "The Master is good at leading one on step by step. He broadens me with culture and brings me back to essentials by means of the rites."[3]

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All three of these great teachers recognized that life is not always in harmony with the ideal; yet, each of them had a different response to the situation, according to Benjamin Hoff's analysis in his best-selling book *The Tao of Pooh*. These variations are captured in an ancient Chinese scroll painting called "The Vinegar Tasters." The three masters, who represent the three great teachings of China—Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism—have each dipped a finger in the vat of vinegar and tasted it. Confucius's expression is sour, Buddha's is bitter, but Lao-tzu's is sweet.[4]

For Confucius, the present was out of step with the past and government on Earth was out of harmony with the Way of Heaven; life for him was sour and in need of sweetening. The Buddha saw life as a generator of illusions and a setter of traps. Because life was filled with attachments and desires that lead to suffering, his reaction to it was bitter. Only Lao-tzu viewed the world as a teacher of valuable lessons and a reflection of the harmony between Heaven and Earth. He taught that everything has its own nature and, if the laws of nature are followed, life, even with its vinegary moments, can be sweet. Winnie the Pooh who is neither smart nor obviously wise is the one for whom things always work out. He can always find his way home because he knows who he is, and that kind of wisdom is what makes a Taoist Master. When you finish reading this text, decide whether or not you agree with Hoff's analysis of "The Vinegar Tasters."

Native Americans

In the West, philosophers have tended to follow the Greeks in seeing themselves as objective observers of nature, but Native Americans, the people called "Indians" because Columbus thought he had landed in India, share with the Taoists of the Far East a profound respect for nature. In Native American thought, however, nature is more than a perfect teacher; nature is holy. Everything in nature possesses a life or spirit of its own—the earth, the sky, the trees, animals, and people. Before killing a deer or a rabbit, it was customary to ask the animal's spirit for permission to kill in order to eat. There is no sense of people as masters of creation, entitled to subdue the natural world, including other animals, as we find, for example, in the Western Judaic and Christian traditions.

According to a Cherokee creation story, in the beginning the white man was given a stone and the Cherokee a piece of silver; each threw away the gift, considering it worthless. Later the white man found and pocketed the silver as a source of material power, whereas the Cherokee found and revered the stone as a source of sacred power. Reflecting a similar attitude, Sioux author Luther Standing Bear has written, "The old people came literally to love the soil. They sat on the ground with the feeling of being close to a mothering power."[5] The worship of stones reflects this deep sense of the sacredness that pervades all nature.

Many legends recall a kind of Golden Age when humans and animals lived and talked together, each learning the other's wisdom. Native peoples revered the earth, the heavens, and the directions of North, South, East, and West as supernatural forces. The idea that all being is alive or animate is called ***animism***—from the Latin word for "spirit" ***anima***. We will find a similar belief that everything is alive when we look at the first Greek philosophers.

animism *the philosophical theory that all being is animate, living, contains spirit*

anima *Latin word meaning "spirit"*

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The wealthy and high born pictured themselves in the afterlife surrounded by the pleasures of the world.
Egyptian musician, papyrus detail from tomb of Nakht, Sheikh Abd El Qurna/Courtesy of and Photo by Quentin Kardos

If the holy was everywhere around you, the first Americans assumed that was the place to look for divine power. In the Guardian Spirit Quest, common to several native traditions, a young brave would go off alone, then fast and wait. After many days and nights, he might be rewarded by meeting a strong animal spirit in human form, perhaps in a dream, who would teach him his family and tribal duties, as well as give him his own sacred song and a special gift to become a leader or even a healer.[6]

Many archaeologists believe the people we call Native Americans migrated to North America from Asia by walking over a land bridge from Siberia to Alaska, crossing what is now called the Bering Strait. During the last Ice Age, the water levels in the oceans were much lower, and the theory is that the land bridge is now submerged. This migration may have occurred from 10,000 to 50,000 years ago. There are some similarities between the physical appearance, myths, and rituals of Siberian tribes and those of Native Americans. Some myths from the Americas, however, speak of an island "where the star of day is born" from which all humans came. The "star of day," or the Sun, rises in the east, and Sioux tradition speaks of an island toward the sunrise "where all the tribes were formerly one." These stories tell of people coming to their new home in canoes. Apparently, there are no myths about walking over a land bridge.[7]

We may never know for certain the origin of the many, varied peoples who came to populate the Americas before the arrival of European explorers. What we can be sure of are their enduring beliefs in the sacredness of nature and the infusion of supernatural power into the natural world. It may be useful to keep this in mind as you read of the beginnings of Western philosophy. The Greek notion of standing apart from nature to study it and understand its mysteries has split people from nature and made humans observers of rather than participants in the natural system. Some critics say the Greek emphasis on objectivity has meant the loss of wonder and reverence for the natural world; they urge Westerners to reenchant the world by recovering a sense of wonder and rediscovering the value of imagination.

African Philosophy: Egypt

One of the world's most long-lived and fascinating civilizations developed in the land of Egypt on the continent of Africa. The Egyptian civilization was already ancient when the Greeks began their philosophical speculation. As we discuss shortly, the roots of Western thought may actually extend to this extraordinary culture. Like the Native Americans, early Egyptians believed the great powers of nature—including the Sky, the Sun, the Earth, and the Nile River—to be gods. There was intense focus in Egyptian culture on the afterlife. The magnificent pyramids that awe tourists today were built as burial places for pharaohs, or kings, and bodies were mummified to prevent their decomposition. Although at first only the Pharaoh and the royal family were believed to be immortal, gradually even commoners had prayers recited over their bodies by the powerful priests of Egypt. The Pharaoh, however, was thought to be divine, a god-king ruling by divine right. Through him, the gods made known their wishes for the human family. There was no need for a code of laws because the word of the Pharaoh was the word of Heaven.

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The life of Egypt was controlled by the Nile River whose periodic overflowing and depositing of silt enriched the soil and made agriculture possible. Seeking to predict the annual flood, the Egyptians found a method in astronomy. Noting that the flood occurred after the star Sirius appeared in the sky, they developed a calendar based on this event. The Egyptian calendar divided the year into twelve thirty-day months and added five days at the end. Although this is not quite as accurate as present-day calendars, the Egyptian scheme was a major advance over the older calendar developed by the Babylonians of the Near East, which was based on phases of the Moon.

From ancient Egypt comes what may be the oldest surviving book in human history. Here are some "Instructions," or advice, for living in the world, written by Ptahhotep of Memphis between 3400 and 2150 B.C.E.:

> Don't be proud of your knowledge
> Consult the ignorant and the wise;
> The limits of art are not reached,
> No artist's skills are perfect;
> Good speech is more hidden than greenstone,
> Yet may be found among the maids at the grindstones...
> Follow your heart as long as you live...
> Don't waste time on daily cares
> Beyond providing for your household;
> When wealth has come, follow your heart,
> Wealth does no good if one is glum!...
> Be generous as long as you live...
> Kindness is a man's memorial...
> If you listen to my sayings
> All your affairs will go forward...[8]

This timeless advice, with its oddly modern sound, is as relevant now as it was in Old Kingdom Egypt. It also seems closely related to the attitudes expressed by Confucius and his disciples.

From a later period, about 600 B.C.E. (roughly the time of Buddha, Confucius, and Lao-tzu), comes this plea from the *Book of the Dead:*

> *The Address to the Gods*
>
> Behold me, I have come to you,
> Without sin, without guilt, without evil,
> Without a witness against me,
> Without one whom I have wronged...
> I have given bread to the hungry,
> Water to the thirsty,
> Clothes to the naked,
> A ferryboat to the boatless.
> I have given divine offerings to the gods,
> Invocation-offerings to the dead.
> Rescue me, protect me,
> Do not accuse me before the great god![9]

These excerpts give us some insight into cultural ideals for behavior in Egypt. Ptahhotep's lengthy instruction attempts to cover all circumstances in which a person might find himself, whereas "The Address to the Gods" lists the good works the dead hope will be pleasing to the gods in the afterlife.

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Egyptian civilization is a fascinating subject in its own right, but interest in it has been heightened by a major debate raging among scholars about the relationship between the cultures of Egypt and Greece. People in the West have been taught that Greece is the cradle of our civilization, but that tradition is being called "Eurocentric" by those who contend that much of Greek civilization was borrowed from Egypt. The "Afrocentric" thesis for the origins of Western civilization insists that much of what we call Greek or Western philosophy is copied from indigenous African philosophy of the "Mystery System."[10]

Supporters of the Afrocentric thesis argue that most of the early Greek philosophers, whom you will meet in Chapter 1, studied under Egyptian mystery priests or studied elsewhere under Egyptian-trained teachers. Pythagoras, some say, learned geometry in Egypt where it originated. Socrates, teacher of the great philosopher Plato, is credited with the maxim "Know Thyself," yet this saying was commonly written on Egyptian temple doors centuries before Socrates was born. As for Plato himself, it is said, his "alleged Theory of Ideas is borrowed from Egypt," and Aristotle, his foremost student, was educated in Africa before taking over an entire library of books on the Egyptian mystery system when Aristotle entered Egypt with Alexander the Great who had been *his* student.[11]

Although scholars continue to debate how much the Greeks may have learned from Egypt and other neighboring cultures, ancient evidence indicates that they did look to the Egyptians as a source of wisdom. Linked with ancient cultures by Phoenician sailing ships, the Greeks had the luxury of learning their wisdom from a distance. "There was Greece in her infancy on the one side, and the immemorial civilizations on the other . . . Thus it happened that the Greeks acquired the elements of culture from Babylon and Egypt without paying the forfeit of independence."[12]

Surviving fragments reporting the lives of such early Greek philosophers as Thales and Pythagoras suggest that they did in fact study in Egypt. Given the similarities between their ideas and those of Egypt and other surrounding cultures, there seems to be no reason to reject the hypothesis that Greek philosophy was influenced by the thought systems in Egypt and Babylon. The search for wisdom, even in ancient Greece, was international in scope.

A related question in the debate is, Were the Egyptians themselves black or white? If, as some contend, the Egyptians were black, then the unstated assumptions of many Westerners about white racial superiority would need to be reevaluated or at least questioned. Whatever their racial heritage may have been, the Egyptians remind us that the roots of wisdom are far older than Greek civilization.

Hebrews and Monotheism

Miles away from the Egyptians and the Greeks, a Hebrew religious tradition developed in what we now call the Middle East. King Solomon, who reigned about 950 B.C.E., collected wisdom sayings from around the known world, including Egypt. Solomon seems to have translated and paraphrased Egyptian wise sayings about nature and the living of one's life, adding his own contributions. The books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes in the Hebrew Scriptures include Solomon's collection of Egyptian wisdom and elements

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1 Why Philosophy?

IS THIS ALL THERE IS?

BEFORE YOU READ . . . Ask yourself what it would take to make you truly happy, to enable you to live your life to the fullest, regardless of what circumstances you might eventually have to navigate.

We never cease to stand like curious children before the great mystery into which we are born.
ALBERT EINSTEIN

Children, as soon as they learn to speak, begin asking questions about what they see and experience. They seem to know, at least on an intuitive level, that what you see may not necessarily be what you get—that there may be more to objects and events than what is immediately apparent. Some things that look good taste awful; others that look awful taste good. TV puppies bark, but there is no soft fur to touch. Grandpa can take out some of his teeth. Bubbles look so solid but break when you try to grab them.

If mustard and the Sun are both yellow and hot, a child may draw the logical conclusion that the Sun must be made of mustard. Parents who explain the distinction between appearance and reality may not realize that they are introducing the subject matter of philosophy. As children we begin, as the first philosophers in any culture do, without the benefit of sophisticated scientific explanations. Struggling to make sense of the world, we quickly learn to question surface qualities and look for deeper or more essential levels of meaning.

The Issue Defined

In this chapter we take our first look at the early Greeks and their efforts to separate appearance from reality. As they examined the world around them in search of the basic "world stuff" from which every particular thing is derived, another set of questions arose: How do we know what we think we know about what is apparent and what is real? Since I seem to have only my own private window on the world rather than an objective view of the world as it actually is, do I have a way to verify whether my perceptions are accurate?

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If a child sees a monster under the bed or in the closet, but Mom and Dad do not, whose perceptions are correct, and who will decide between the two conflicting versions? Parental assurances that "there is nothing there" have little effect on a frightened child who "knows" the monster is only waiting for the light to go out before reappearing. Adults may "know" that eating spinach or practicing the piano is good for you, while you remain unconvinced. How we know seems to be intimately connected with what we know.

As a human being, you have no choice about the fact that you need a philosophy. Your only choice is whether you define your philosophy by a conscious, rational, disciplined process of thought . . . or let your subconscious accumulate a junk heap of unwarranted conclusions, false generalizations, undefined contradictions . . . thrown together by chance.
AYN RAND

More critical still are questions about how to live and what (if anything) will make us happy. It may seem to us that some other state—being married or single, living alone or with a loved other, making our own money or not having to worry about earning money—holds the key to happiness. The grass always seems to be greener on the other side of the fence, but when we get there, the place we have just left takes on a romantic allure. And, we may find ourselves wondering if any place or any thing is really as wonderful up close as it appears to be from a distance.

Even more confusing is the feeling we get when we achieve some goal we have been pursuing for years and find ourselves with an empty feeling and the taste of ashes in our mouths. Earning the degree, getting the perfect apartment, finding a soul mate, making a lot of money, becoming a name in the news—these do not necessarily bring with them happiness or peace of mind. The person who becomes a partner in a prestigious law firm and buys a dream house and a Ferrari may experience a midlife crisis—is this all there is?

Why philosophy? When questions like these arise, philosophy helps us sort the important from the trivial and determine what is of lasting value and may finally make us happy. Philosophy begins by asking about what is real, about what makes a person a person, about whether there is a God and, if so, what this God is like. Philosophy provides us a structure and a method for continuing to ask, "Is this all there is?"—about reality, knowing, the quest for human happiness, and the path we want to walk in life. To launch our exploration of this issue, we will start with the Greek philosophers who came before Socrates and look at how they first asked and answered the basic questions of philosophy 2500 years ago.

Philosophizing is the process of making sense out of experience.
SUSANNE K. LANGER

The Pre-Socratic Cosmologists

The earliest Greek philosophy we have on record consists of speculations about the nature of reality. It is called *pre-Socratic* in reference to Socrates, the first major figure in the Western tradition, and indicates that this early work came before Socrates and laid the groundwork on which his later, more sophisticated worldview could be constructed. We call these first Greek thinkers cosmologists because they saw the world as a **cosmos**, a comprehensible and ordered whole. **Cosmology** studies the basic principles of the cosmos with an eye to unlocking its secrets.

cosmos *the world as an ordered whole*

cosmology *the branch of metaphysics dealing with the study of the principles underlying the cosmos*

Unlike children, these early Greek philosophers brought maturity and experience to their exploration of the basic questions of reality, knowledge, and values. Stories about the origins of things are as old as human speech, and Greek culture was alive with tales of the gods and goddesses who had brought humans into being and controlled the natural world while fighting among themselves for power and status. In asking and answering the basic

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question "Is this all there is?" what Thales and his fellow Milesians did was to take a new, more systematic approach, one that gave birth to what we now call philosophy.

The Milesians

If we wanted to assign a very arbitrary date, we could say that Western philosophy began May 28, 585 B.C.E., at 6:13 P.M. You might ask yourself what could have happened at that moment of sufficient significance to allow us to choose it as the beginning point for Western philosophy. It is not the birth or death of a philosopher, although those are logical guesses. In fact, what happened was that Thales, a Milesian mathematician, predicted an eclipse of the Sun would occur at that exact moment—and it did. Why was this event so striking?

The prevailing worldview attributed events like eclipses and other major cosmological events, as well as more minor occurrences like rainbows and thunderstorms, to the activities of the gods and goddesses. If lightning bolts flew across the sky, it meant the god Zeus was once again angry with his wife-sister Hera. Thales startled his fellow Milesians by figuring out that eclipses are caused by the movements of heavenly bodies and calculating mathematically when the next such alignment would occur. When his prediction was proved accurate, Thales had a ready audience for his theory that events have rational causes and that we, as rational beings, can understand and anticipate them.

Thales's feat was a world-changing event for the Greeks of Miletus. Instead of an unpredictable world, operating according to the whims of the all-too-human gods and goddesses who could at any moment turn things upside down, Thales postulated a rational cosmos in which things happen in an orderly and predictable manner. No less powerful was his assumption that humans are rational, or reasoning, creatures capable of unraveling the apparent mysteries of the cosmos. As we have seen, Thales's "givens" contain the seeds not only of Western philosophy but also of science. To those of us brought up in Western culture, these assumptions are so familiar that they seem obvious and hardly worth stating. Yet, they have far-reaching implications.

Thales's cosmology assumed that the "world" has an independent, objective existence separate from us knowers. Fortunately, as an orderly and rational place, the world can be known by us because there is a match between ourselves as rational creatures and the world as an intelligible place. If either condition is not met, no knowledge is possible. If the world is orderly and rational but we are not, we can never understand its order. On the other hand, if we are rational but the world is not, it will not yield itself to rational explanation.

Besides emphasizing rationality as the key to knowledge, Thales's account affirmed the characteristically Western distinction between the subject who knows and the object that is known. Understanding the world means standing back from it as if we, the knowers, were completely separate from it. To this day we in the West value "objective" knowledge that is obtained by rational means. Our philosophy and science generally presuppose Thales's distinction between an objective, rational world and the conscious subject who "knows" it. These assumptions are so fundamental to the way we approach the world that it is difficult for us to see the world, and

THE MAKING *of a* PHILOSOPHER

Pre-Socratic Cosmologists

(6TH TO THE 4TH CENTURIES B.C.E.)

Thales proved geometric theorems, measured the pyramids, and was an engineer and astronomer. He proposed a central federal government with common citizenship for the twelve Ionian cities. *Anaximander* drew a map of the known world and wrote a book—the first prose treatise in Europe. *Pythagoras* developed a key geometric theorem and led a research institute–church in Croton, which was open to men and women. By 532 B.C.E. he had moved to southern Italy to live among the Dorian Greeks. He asserted the transmigration of souls, a kind of reincarnation. *Heraclitus,* born in 540 B.C.E., was a nobleman from Ephesus in what was then Asia Minor and is today Turkey. His ideas suggest he may have had contact with the East. *Empedocles* was a prince who was offered the kingship of his native city in Sicily but declined it. He wrote songs and practiced rhetoric. He saw himself as a prophet and claimed to have recalled the dead to life. His school of medicine was reputed to be the equal of the more famous one of Hippocrates. To prove his own immortality, or perhaps because Empedocles believed in reincarnation, he jumped into Mount Etna, the active volcano on the island of Sicily. A year later it spit out one of his sandals. *Anaxagoras* was the first Athenian philosopher. Drafted into the army of the Persian General Xerxes, Anaxagoras defected when the Persians were defeated and then settled in Athens. *Democritus* (ca. 460–370 B.C.E.) devoted his life to science and travel. He wrote more than sixty books, but unfortunately none survives. He claimed he would rather "discover one causal explanation than gain the kingdom of the Persians." Together, these men took the first steps in establishing what we today call Western philosophy.

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knowledge, any other way. Yet, in some of the cultures we will be studying, the distinction between the knower and the known and the emphasis on reason as the key to knowledge are either denied or softened.

Worldviews that emphasize the interdependence and interrelatedness of all things, for instance, do not assume a separation between the knower and the known. If reality is characterized by interrelatedness rather than separateness, then knowing "reality" from the "outside" is impossible. We know only from the "inside" and by routes that are not exclusively "rational" in the sense affirmed by the Greeks. In fact, only in the West do we find such an absolute distinction between subject and object, knower and known. As we examine Eastern and African approaches to reality and knowing, you will see that different assumptions lead to quite different views of the world.

Thales was able to make the kind of intellectual detour he did largely because he lived in Miletus, a Greek colony across the Aegean Sea from Greece. It was part of what in the ancient world was called Asia Minor and on today's maps is labeled Turkey. As a trading colony, Miletus depended on foreigners to buy its products and to sell its citizens the goods they needed. There were always different-looking people in the marketplace, wearing a variety of clothes and speaking languages other than Greek. In a later period, Greeks would call all foreigners "barbarians" because their languages sounded to the Greeks like *bar, bar, bar,* but Milesians could not afford to alienate the foreigners who were so essential to their economy.

All things are full of gods.
THALES OF MILETUS

The arithmetic of life does not always have a logical answer.
INSHIRAH ABDUR-RAUF

In fact, as a trading colony, Miletus fostered an openness to foreigners. If you want to sell something to someone else, you must try to understand not only their language but also the way they see the world. Every successful sales representative knows how to get inside the head of a client—to figure out what the client needs or to create a desire for what the salesperson has to sell. As good salespeople, the Milesians were probably more open to fresh ideas than other Greeks were.

Their flexibility and openness may have been the key ingredient in promoting acceptance of Thales's new ideas. There was also another factor. No one in Miletus worked full time or achieved social status based solely on religious activities. Unlike the powerful Egyptian priests, for example, those who presided over temple services in Miletus did so part time, and they had other roles in the community. If Thales proved that the gods and goddesses did not exist or were not nearly so powerful as previously supposed, no one's power or prestige was directly threatened.

After his startling eclipse prediction had gotten the attention of his fellow Milesians, Thales went on to apply his belief in rationality to the most basic question in philosophy—the difference between appearance and reality. How is it, for example, that cows eat grass and it turns into milk? Was the milk already present in some latent way in the grass or, if not, how did one substance turn into another? Questions like these soon led early philosophers to inquire into the fundamental nature of everything. If some things we observe are only appearances and not what is fundamentally real, then what permanent substance or substances exist behind those appearances? Is there some original, common substance from which all the variety in the world comes?

archē *[AHR KAY] the first principle or basic stuff from which everything derives*

Assuming that such a substance exists, the Greeks called it the ***archē***, which means "first" or "beginning," and Thales reasoned that the *archē* might

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HOW PHILOSOPHY WORKS • Worldviews

As we consider the classical Greek worldview that has been so influential in shaping the Western world, let's pause to examine the power of worldviews. Each of us has a worldview, a way of seeing the world and ourselves within it, and we probably believe that people everywhere see the world as we do. Our worldviews may be brought to the level of conscious awareness only when we encounter a worldview that conflicts with our own.

The classical Western worldview trusts reason and experimentation, assumes that reality is composed of separate and discrete units of matter, and believes the individual is more important than the group. Much of the non-Western world trusts intuition, asserts that everything is interconnected, and looks to the community to shape the individual. In a recent series of experiments, Dr. Richard Nisbett and his colleagues at the University of Michigan discovered that European Americans and East Asians think differently. People in Japan, China, and Korea appear to pay "greater attention to context and relationship, relying more on experience-based knowledge." North Americans, by contrast, tend to "detach objects from their context and rely more heavily on formal logic." Describing an animated scene that features a large fish among smaller fish and other aquatic life, Japanese students typically began with the background, whereas Americans were more likely to begin with the biggest fish (*New York Times,* 8 August 2000, D1).

Even our languages reflect our consciousness and shape our worldviews. The English language depends heavily on nouns, which express separation and assume static entities. Most indigenous languages, however, rely on verbs, which convey process and motion and express ways of being in the universe. "In traditional Navajo consciousness," for example, "everything is part of a sacred wholeness, everything is *Diyin*." There is no literal translation possible in English for this organic life process that is "not separate from the human being nor from the human life experience, which is the process." As we will see in the next chapter, we come closest to this indigenous, holistic thinking in quantum physics, "where scientists are learning that the English language has no words to describe what they are finding...that life is a process, a flux...[that some] entities cannot be clearly defined as waves or particles...[and] are neither nouns nor verbs." The Navajo language has ancient terms that describe these realities (*Shift,* June–August 2004, no. 3, pp. 25–27).

When we speak, we bring a world into being with our words. And, our ways of thinking may be radically different from those of other human beings. So powerful are our worldviews that we may be unable to experience real communication without acknowledging them. Billions of people around the world watch American television programs. This has the potential to homogenize our worldviews into what some have called a *monoculture*. If everyone watched the same movies, listened to the same music, wore the same jeans, and shared the same personal, cultural, and spiritual values, would this be a good thing?

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be water. After all, water is an excellent example of a substance that changes its appearance when it assumes different states—ice, liquid, and steam. Moreover, water is basic to all of life, another reason it seemed a good candidate for the original, fundamental substance.

Milesians, no doubt, fished their dinner from the water. They had certainly noticed that humans can go weeks without food but only a few days without water. They probably had observed that just before the birth of a goat or human baby there is a bursting of the bag of waters (what we would name the amniotic sac) and a flow of water (amniotic fluid). Thales seems to have chosen an appropriate element on the level of symbol, too. Later Christians, wishing to symbolize new spiritual life in baptism, decided to sprinkle water or immerse a person in it to indicate a transformation from one form of life to another.

For Thales then, the permanent substance from which all the variety in the world derives was water. As the first of what later scholars would call the pre-Socratic cosmologists, he shared his ideas in Miletus and attracted students—the first people in the Western world to do what you are doing now, studying philosophy. One of them did what students often do; he

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motion (and therefore change) is logically impossible, then apparent motion and change must be illusion. So, Parmenides's theory takes the distinction between appearance and reality to perhaps its ultimate extreme.

Other philosophers covered in later chapters may reason themselves into theories that seem to deny common sense. Like Parmenides, they do not accept the evidence of the senses as certain. For this reason, Parmenides is sometimes called the first logician, or the first philosopher to rely on logic rather than on sense experience or common sense.

Pluralists

Clearly, Heraclitus and Parmenides cannot both be correct. If reality is characterized by constant and unending change as Heraclitus supposed, then Parmenides must be wrong. If, on the other hand, Parmenides is right in his logical analysis that there can be no motion, then Heraclitus must be mistaken. The next group of philosophers reasoned themselves out of this impasse by broadening the base a little. Perhaps, they suggested, reality is too complex to be captured in a single element. It may be that reality is plural—that is, when things have been analyzed into their most fundamental elements, there are many of these elements instead of a single one. Philosophers who hold this view are called **pluralists**.

pluralist *pre-Socratic philosopher who believed the archē was multiple or any philosopher who believes reality is plural*

Drawing on existing wisdom in fifth-century B.C.E. Sicily, Empedocles concluded that four elements could account for all the variety in the world: *earth, air, fire,* and *water.* Taken together, the four elements traditionally used in the ancient world to explain reality offered a wide enough range to accommodate everything in the natural environment. In Empedocles's way of thinking, alternating world cycles fully mixed and then fully separated the four elements. Thus, we observe the elements both as separate and as combined in complex objects. The mixing and separating were accounted for by the two opposing forces of love/attraction and strife/repulsion. These forces accounted for motion and change.

For before this I was born once a boy, and a maiden, and a plant, and a bird, and a darting fish in the sea.
EMPEDOCLES OF SICILY

Anaxagoras, a Greek contemporary, took Empedocles's theory to another level. If four elements helped explain variations, an even more complex explanation would arise from an *infinite number of seeds,* or *germs,* no two of which were alike. This, Anaxagoras believed, accounted for all the many qualitative differences we perceive in things. In all that exists, he wrote, there is a mixture of everything. The way a particular object appears is the result of the proportions occupied by the various seeds, or germs.

There is no smallest among the small and no largest among the large; but always something still smaller and something still larger.
ANAXAGORAS

To understand what Anaxagoras is saying, consider hair color. Observe any group of people and you will find a large variety of hair colors. Forced to categorize, you could place everyone into five main groups: black, blond, gray, red, and brown. Most people, however, have a unique hair color that is some combination of these categories—auburn, ash blond, salt and pepper. Anaxagoras would explain this phenomenon by asserting that all of us have some portion of every possible color; our own unique color reflects which colors predominate.

One should cultivate much understanding, not much knowing.
DEMOCRITUS

The last of the fifth-century B.C.E. pluralists, Democritus developed a theory that anticipates the understanding of the world expressed by classical physics. Reality, he wrote, is composed of *atoms and the void.* He conceived atoms as indivisible particles of matter that can neither be created nor destroyed. Unlike Parmenides, Democritus stipulated the void, the empty square into which the other squares in the puzzle can move.

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Table 1.1 Pre-Socratic Philosophers *Each of these early Greek philosophers sought the basic stuff of which everything in the world was made. They fall into three general categories depending on how they conceived of the archē.*

PRE-SOCRATIC PHILOSOPHERS

	Philosopher	*Archē*
Milesian monists	Thales	Water
	Anaximander	The boundless
	Anaximenes	Air
Other monists	Pythagoras	Numbers
	Heraclitus	Change (fire)
	Parmenides	Being
Pluralists	Empedocles	Earth, air, fire, water
	Anaxagoras	Seeds, or germs
	Democritus	Atoms and the void

Based on this theory, he concluded that the weight of composite bodies will depend on the density of their atoms. Small but very densely packed bodies could weigh more than larger, less densely packed ones. Colliding atoms, he stated, will behave according to mechanical principles, and because atoms are in motion, objects are not fixed and static but dynamic and changing. One intriguing aspect of his theory, already being discussed by a contemporary group of philosophers known as the Sophists (whom we discuss in the next section), was that if an object is composed of matter in motion it must appear differently to each observer.

For a summary of the different theories of the *archē* that we have just considered, see Table 1.1 above.

Cosmogony and Cosmology

The theories of many of these early Greek philosophers encompassed both *cosmology,* the basic principles of the universe, and **cosmogony**, an account of how the cosmos came to be. In describing the present state of the universe, these early thinkers offered rational, prescientific explanations for phenomena rather than attributing them to the actions of the gods and goddesses. Thales, for example, described Earth as a disk floating on water. This had the advantage of accounting for earthquakes; they were, he said, the result of water turbulence rather than the antics of the god Poseidon. When the boundless is in motion, Anaximander said, it spins off hot (fire) and cold (air, water, and earth). Air wraps fire in tubes with breathing holes; we call them the Sun and Moon. When the holes become blocked, we have eclipses and phases of the Moon. Earth is also a cylinder suspended in space.

cosmogony *[kos MAH go nee] theory about the origins of the cosmos*

Anaximenes adapted Thales's theory to say that Earth is a flat disk floating on air. The sky is a crystalline vault, with the Moon and stars stuck to it like leaves. Earth turns on a polar axis the way a cap turns on a person's head. When the Sun and Moon disappear, it is because they have gone behind high mountains. Rainbows are caused by the Sun's rays falling on dense air, not by the goddess Iris. Pythagoras was convinced that Earth is a spherical planet, one among many and not the center of the system; Parmenides accurately hypothesized that the Moon shines from the reflected light of the Sun.

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Observing that human babies remain helpless for such a long time, Anaximander concluded that we must be descended from some other species, paving the way for the theory of evolution. Heraclitus reasoned that behind the change that was the very heart of reality there must be a rational principle responsible for its apparent order. He called it the *logos,* using a Greek word that literally means "word." As words impose order and meaning, so Heraclitus saw the *logos* ordering the cosmos. Anaxagoras said something similar in his theory of seeds, or germs. *Nous,* or mind, he argued, is the cause of all motion and contains the *telos* (end, or purpose) to which the motion is directed. *Nous,* or pure intelligence, was also the source of all creation.

Perhaps more important than the specific answers offered by the early philosophers of the Western world is the process by which they went about speculating on fundamental questions. Instead of turning to the cultural wisdom found in religious myths and poetic explanations, each tried to reason his way to an accurate understanding of reality based on objective principles that would make the world intelligible on its own terms. This belief in the orderliness of the universe, and our human ability to understand it, is perhaps the most important legacy of the pre-Socratics. It is also what most clearly separates philosophical thought in the West from similar speculation in Asia and Africa.

Furthermore, the questions asked in sixth- and fifth-century B.C.E. Greece have not gone away. We are still struggling today with questions about what is real, how everything in the cosmos came into being, what accounts for change, and whether the universe is orderly and purposeful or merely chaotic. These are the basic questions of one of the three main branches of philosophy called **metaphysics**. Aristotle's writings about "being" followed his writings about physics, so people began referring to them as *ta meta ta physica biblia* (literally, "the books that come after the Physics"). We will encounter the other two branches, **epistemology** (theories of knowledge and truth) and **axiology** (theories of values), later in this chapter.

metaphysics *the branch of philosophy investigating what is real*

epistemology *the branch of philosophy dealing with the study of knowledge, what it is, and how we acquire it*

axiology *the branch of philosophy dealing with the study of values*

Metaphysics is sometimes referred to as first philosophy because it deals with the first or most basic questions about what it means to call something or someone real. In this text we will be using the term *metaphysics* in its broadest sense to cover all questions related to reality and being. As we have seen, the early Greeks began doing philosophy by focusing on cosmology, the study of the principles underlying the cosmos. The next step in the development of Greek philosophy brings us to the other portion of metaphysics, which focuses on being. To keep our terms separate, we will call this branch **ontology**. You should keep in mind, however, that this division is somewhat arbitrary. For many people, metaphysics is synonymous with ontology.

ontology *the branch of metaphysics dealing with the study of being*

The Sophists

philosophy *literally, the "love of wisdom"*

As you may remember from Historical Interlude A, the word **philosophy** literally means "love of wisdom." The prefix *phil-* occurs in words like *philharmonic,* an orchestra that loves harmony. *Adelphi* means "brothers," so we can see why Philadelphia is sometimes called the "city of brotherly love." The second part of the word *philosophy* comes from the Greek word *sophia,* meaning "wisdom." Those of you who are sophomores might have been told that the word *sophomore* literally means "wise fool." Freshmen, it seems,

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HOW PHILOSOPHY WORKS • Sophistic Logic, or Sophistry

Sophists were accused of making the weaker argument appear the stronger and, generally, of distorting the truth. Here is a Sophist story. Read it and decide for yourself whether the charges are justified.

Protagoras took Euathlus as a student in rhetoric. Since Euathlus had no money, teacher and student agreed that when Euathlus won his first court case he would pay Protagoras for his education. Time went by, and Euathlus did not appear in court. Protagoras grew impatient and brought a suit against Euathlus for payment. Protagoras reasoned that whichever way the court decided he would win: If the court decided in his favor, Euathlus would have to pay, and if Euathlus won his first court case he would have fulfilled the original condition and be obliged to pay his teacher. Confident of the outcome, he arrived in court. Meanwhile, Euathlus had learned his lessons well. He reasoned this way: If the court decides I must pay Protagoras, I will still not have won my first case and not be obliged to pay, but if I win then the court will have decided I do not have to pay Protagoras.

Should Euathlus have to pay Protagoras?

---

know nothing and know they know nothing; sophomores, on the other hand, still know very little but think they know a lot more than they do.

The **Sophists** are literally the "wise ones." Their name is derived from *sophia,* just like the last part of the word *philosophy.* To be called a Sophist, however, is not necessarily a compliment. Committed to individualism and relativism, the Sophists unsettled Greek society. Plato blamed them for the breakdown in values that he believed led to the death of his teacher and friend Socrates. Plato also treated them as a unified group when in fact there were at least three types: Sophists of culture, like Protagoras and Gorgias, who sought to stimulate the minds of the young; encyclopedists, like Hippias, who sought to systematize and classify knowledge and information; and, Sophists of eristic, who specialized in debate and disputation, preparing people for public life and the law.[3]

Sophist *a teacher of practical applications for philosophy in early Greece*

Unlike the pre-Socratic cosmologists, who pursued wisdom for the love of it, the third group of Sophists claimed to be wise enough to teach whatever you might want to know as long as you were willing to pay them the required fees. Although Plato felt these Sophists argued for the sake of argument—paying scant attention to truth or falsity—and had little or no true wisdom to offer, we must concede that their popularity indicates they were meeting a real need in Greek society.[4]

More men are good by training than by nature.

CRITIAS, A SOPHIST

Traveling from city to city from the mid-fifth to the mid-fourth centuries B.C.E., Sophists learned what people who stay at home never find out: People in other places may have a totally different way of doing something than you and all of your friends do, and they may be making assumptions about what is appropriate behavior that may be very different from your own. All of us tend to assume the way we and our families and friends see the world is the only way or at least the right way. Living with someone from another culture or even from a different region of your own country may be your first opportunity to learn what the Sophists learned: There may be no one, universally appropriate way of doing anything.

If this is the case, the Sophists concluded, then there can be no absolutes of any kind. We cannot say it is always right or wrong to do something; we cannot even speak about how something *is,* as if it had a fixed and absolute reality. The fact is, they concluded, everything is *relative.*

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DOING PHILOSOPHY • Shapiro for the Defense

Richard E. Vatz and Lee S. Weinberg

Awed by his aggressive defense tactics in the O. J. Simpson case, we researched Robert Shapiro's early career. It turns out that his first case was defending a man who had been ticketed for parking overtime. Here is his cross-examination of the officer who ticketed his client.

Mr. Shapiro: Officer, how long have you been ticketing cars?
Officer: For 10 years, sir.
S: Now, the average meter cop has been ticketing for 15 years, is that right?
O: I don't know, sir.
S: You don't know? This has been your beat for 10 years, and you don't know the average time others have been on your own beat?
O: No, sir.
S: Now, officer, the meter in question was registered "expired," correct?
O: Correct, sir.
S: Now, officer, did anyone else witness the "expired" signal on the meter?
O: No, sir.
S: So, without verification, without eyewitnesses, you just took it on your own authority that the meter said "expired," right?
O: Yes, sir.
S: Officer, when is the last time you had an eye exam?
O: Five years ago.
S: Five years ago? Doesn't the department require meter cops to have regular eye exams?
O: No, sir.
S: So, in theory, officer, you could have terrible vision—be nearly blind—and no one in your department would know.
O: I guess not.
S: Now, officer, the meter which you THINK read "expired" was located in FRONT of the defendant's car, correct?
O: Correct, sir.
S: Now, many meters are located BEHIND parking spaces, is that not correct?
O: Correct, sir.
S: Now, if that's true, officer, how do you know that THIS meter was the meter for the defendant's car?
O: I could just see it, sir.
S: But you've had no training in differentiating between meters located in FRONT of parking spaces and meters located BEHIND parking spaces, have you?
O: Training in front and behind? No, sir.
S: And in 1984, when you started, you once read the wrong meter, erroneously giving an undeserved ticket, didn't you?
O: Well, yes, but...
S: And, finally, officer, another policeman in your precinct has testified that you have stated that people should buy American cars, right?
O: Well, yes, but...
S: And the defendant's car is a Toyota, isn't it?
O: Yes, but...
S: And you once said, and I quote, "I would ticket foreign cars for nothing," didn't you?
O: Well, I may have said that as a joke, but...
S: Of course, you wouldn't ticket all cars for nothing, would you?
O: No, but it was just a kind of joking...
S: So, you have no witnesses, your eyesight is untested and probably your vision is bad, you sought no corroborative testimony, you've erred on meter-readings in the past, and you are out to get foreign-car owners. How do you expect that 12 jurors would find it true beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant's car was overparked?
O: I don't, sir.

"Shapiro for the Defense," *Baltimore Morning Sun,* 9/2/94. Courtesy of Richard Vatz and the *Baltimore Sun.*

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If you recall, Democritus and the atomists had reasoned that matter in motion implied that the same object might appear differently to different people who viewed it from unique angles or from various moments in time. The Sophists took this idea to its extreme and asserted that it makes no sense to ask "What is something like *really*?" The only "answer" is that it "really" is the way it appears to me, the way it appears to you, and the way it appears to everyone else when they observe it. If there are no absolutes and

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In this hierarchical society, some were free and some were not.

ocrates questioning a slave boy/Still from the telecourse "For the Love of Wisdom"/Oedipus consulting the Delphic oracle/Courtesy of and photo by Helen Buss Mitchell.

realizes that he does not know the solution and is eager to figure it out.[8] This is a key ingredient in what is called the **Socratic method**. To find out where you are ignorant is the first step in pursuing knowledge or wisdom. As long as you are confident you know all there is to know, you will not seek the truth, and you may remain happily in error.

Socratic method *the method of the dialectic, reported in Plato's dialogues*

Continuing to question, Socrates leads the slave boy through a proof that begins with the 16-square-foot figure and inserts a square turned diagonally to appear as a diamond inside the space. By dividing each of the 4-foot square spaces (that make a 16-square-foot area) in half diagonally, it is possible to create an area of 8 square feet (see Figure 1.1). "Now then, Menon," Socrates concludes, "what do you think? Was there one single opinion which the boy did not give as his own?" When Menon agrees that Socrates is correct and asserts that no one has taught the boy geometry, Socrates reveals Plato's theory of knowledge. If no one has taught him and if Socrates was able to elicit this knowledge only by asking the right questions, then it must be the case that the knowledge (like the babies his mother helped deliver) was already there. Speaking of the ideas the slave boy has been revealed to have, Socrates asks Menon, "Then if he did not get them in this life, is it not clear now that he had them and had learnt at some other time?"[9]

The conclusion seems inescapable. If someone who has never even heard the word *geometry* can be led by skillful questioning to solve a geometric problem, it must be the case that knowledge even the boy did not realize he had was already there. And, if it was not learned in his earthly life (which Menon asserts it was not), then it must have been present all along. In fact, Plato's epistemology leads him to assert the immortality of the soul. In this somewhat later dialogue, we cannot be certain that Socrates is the source of this assertion.

Geometric Proof
—Meno

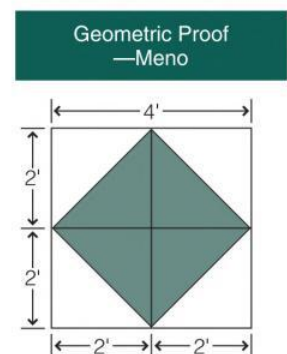

FIGURE 1.1 Geometric Proof: Meno ***The diagram of the proof that Socrates elicited from the slave boy illustrates that much of what we call knowledge is actually remembering. The area enclosed by the diamond equals 8 square feet.***

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For Plato, however, because we know things we could not possibly have learned in this earthly existence, it seems necessary to conclude that we brought this knowledge with us when we entered earthly life. The question of how we know what we appear to know leads directly to the issues of metaphysics or the nature of reality. What, for example, must we conclude about what it means to be a human being, if we have proved that human existence begins before birth and logically can continue after death? In the area of ontology, we cannot speak about what is real without, at the same time, dealing with epistemology—how we think we know the answer to this or any question.

Questioning both revealed to Socrates essential truths and uncovered claims to knowledge that were unjustified. Under his relentless barrage of questions, most people were revealed to be quite ignorant about things they claimed to know and understand. Try explaining to someone the meaning of a concept like "truth" or "justice," and you will quickly learn how difficult a task it is to defend what you think you know, especially if the other person persists in probing everything you say.

As you might imagine, in his pursuit of truth, Socrates managed to embarrass most of the prominent citizens of Athens as he questioned them and they revealed their ignorance. Young men of the town started following him around to enjoy the sport of intellectual humiliation, and some of them began their own questioning of adults. It was not long before accusations were leveled against Socrates: He was corrupting the youth of the city and dishonoring the gods of the state.

At the age of seventy, Socrates was brought to trial before a group of 501 citizens (a subset of the larger group of 6000 citizens chosen by lot to hear cases on a rotating basis). The charges against him were irreligion and corrupting the youth. In response to them, he gave a defense of his actions that has come down to us through Plato's dialogue *The Apology*. **Apology** in this context means a "philosophical defense." Socrates was not apologizing for his actions, because he regarded them as both moral and necessary.

apology *a philosophical defense of an action, position, or viewpoint*

In his defense, Socrates pointed out that, unlike the Sophists, he did not take money for his teaching. Indeed, his entire life was devoted to one thing—the search for wisdom. It is because he was successful in pursuing

HOW PHILOSOPHY WORKS • The Dialectic

As developed and used by Socrates, the dialectic was a method of arriving at truth or of revealing falsity by persistent questioning. Socrates believed that by clarifying the use of terms and following each thought to its logical conclusion it would be possible to arrive at certainty. In many cases, Socrates's relentless interrogation quickly revealed the weakness or muddiness of an argument and, in the process, made the person answering look foolish. This earned him enemies in high places and no doubt contributed to the accusations made against him. As we have seen in this chapter, the dialectic could also be used as a tool for deriving knowledge already present. Using only skillfully constructed questions, Socrates assisted the slave boy in Meno in recovering what he already knew about geometry. Much of what appears logical, Socrates thought, would, if dissected through questioning, be revealed as illogical. And, it is also true that we know more than we think we do. The method of dialectic draws out what is true and unmasks what is false. Conducted in the public eye, it is an essential tool for separating what can be relied upon from what cannot.

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wisdom that he stands before the jury accused of crimes. Admitting that it sounded egotistical to claim to be wise, Socrates told the court a story about his friend Chaerephon and the oracle at Delphi.

You may know that the Delphic oracle was a priestess who, by entering a trancelike state, was believed to speak for the god Apollo. Many approached the oracle and asked her questions; often they received interesting and unexpected answers. Oedipus, for instance, was stunned to hear he would kill his father and marry his mother. Although he did everything he could to avoid this fate, circumstances led him unknowingly to do exactly these two things. When a general asked the oracle what would happen if he attacked an enemy army, he was told, "A great nation will be destroyed." He set off confidently, but the great nation he destroyed was his own.

The oracle's answers were usually true and often paradoxical.

Oedipus consulting the Delphic oracle/ Photo by Quentin Kardos.

The oracle's prophecies often had this enigmatic character. They were phrased in ways that turned out to be open to more than one interpretation. When Chaerephon went to see the oracle, he asked if anyone was wiser than Socrates, and the priestess answered that no one was wiser. Having learned not to take these pronouncements at face value, Socrates told the court, he had set out to prove the oracle wrong by finding someone wiser than himself.

When he approached those who had the reputation for being wise, Socrates explained, he had a strange experience:

> When I examined…one of our statesmen…I thought this man seemed to be wise both to many others and especially to himself, but that he was not; and then I tried to show him that he thought he was wise, but was not. Because of that he disliked me and so did many others who were there, but I went away thinking to myself that I was wiser than this man; the fact is that neither of us knows anything beautiful and good, but he thinks he does know when he doesn't, and I don't know and don't think I do; so I am wiser than he is by only this trifle, that what I do not know I don't think I do.[10]

The difficulty was that poets thought their ability to compose verse made them wise in other matters as well. Similarly, craftsmen assumed their ability to manage their art qualified them to speak about greater things with wisdom. A genuine ability in a specific area made these Athenians arrogant about their claims to general knowledge and even wisdom. We see the same phenomenon today when athletes endorse products that have nothing to do with athletic accomplishment or when actors promote medical products, saying "I'm not a doctor, but I play one on TV."

By revealing that no one is as wise as he claims to be, Socrates acquired many enemies. Bystanders, he said, always assumed that Socrates himself was wise. When the rich and idle among the young imitated his example, they were able to find many people who thought they knew a lot but really knew little or nothing. These victims of Socratic questioning took their anger out on Socrates, he told the court, accusing him of harming Athenian society and corrupting the young.[11]

Although Socrates continued to insist he should be rewarded rather than punished for being a kind of god-appointed gadfly to Athenian society, he accepted the sentence they imposed on him, death by drinking a cup of hemlock (poison), with easy grace. In fact, he could easily have avoided it by proposing an alternate sentence. No one wished to see him dead, but many wished to shut him up. If he had agreed to stop questioning and live the remainder of his life in exile and silence, the court would almost certainly have accepted these conditions.

THE MAKING *of a* PHILOSOPHER

Plato (428–348 B.C.E.)

Plato spent ten years learning from Socrates and used Socrates as the main character in the dialogues he wrote to convey key ideas in philosophy. About eleven years after the death of Socrates, when Plato was forty years old, he founded his Academy. It was the first real university in the Western world, a place where people came together for higher education and research in mathematics, astronomy, and philosophy. It lasted for 915 years. He was invited on three different occasions to Siracusa in Sicily to put his theories on the training of a philosopher-king into practice, but on all three occasions, political changes canceled the experiment. Plato had studied mathematics with Pythagoras and was struck by the certainty of geometric proofs. Plato decided that because no one can argue that contradictory opinions about triangularity are both true, the Sophists must be wrong and certain knowledge about objects must be possible. Over the entrance to his Academy was written, "No one without geometry may enter." Plato died suddenly and peacefully at the age of eighty while attending a wedding.

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Unfortunately for Socrates, this was the one condition he could not meet. Speculating about his own reaction if the court should offer him this kind of bargain, Socrates vowed:

> If you should let me go free on these terms which I have mentioned, I should answer you, "Many thanks indeed for your kindness, gentlemen, but I will . . . never cease being a philosopher, and exhorting you, and showing what is in me to any of you I may meet, by speaking to him in my usual way . . ."[12]

In his search for what is true and what is real, Socrates could not agree to stop questioning. In his view, "Life without inquiry is not worth living for a man."[13] This saying is often translated as "The unexamined life is not worth living."

Relentless pursuit of what really matters in life is at the heart of philosophical speculation. Socrates was willing to drink the cup of hemlock rather than agree to stop doing philosophy. For him, a life lived on "automatic pilot"—a life in which your opinions and ideas are those of your parents, teachers, and friends rather than your own—is no life at all. It is a kind of existence, to be sure, but not a life. Living means searching for what you yourself believe and struggling with fundamental questions.

Plato

Plato takes up this theme again in his long dialogue *Republic,* which explores what an ideal society would be like. This work contains many of his central ideas. Like Socrates, Plato believed most of us live in ignorance most of the time. The worst of this situation is that we do not even know we are ignorant.

To illustrate this point, Plato asks us to imagine a cave. The inhabitants are chained hand and foot, and their heads are in a fixed position so that they can only see the wall in front of them. On this wall shadows appear, and the prisoners assume these shadows are reality (Figure 1.2). What else could they think, since all of them have been in the cave since birth? This is the only reality they have known. As he explains this allegory, Plato lets us know that the shadows are produced by a fire burning at the cave's entrance, and they actually reflect objects carried above a wall by people walking by it. We know something the cave dwellers do not know. We recognize that they have mistaken shadow for substance. They think they know what is real, but we know they are in fact living in the dark, both literally and figuratively.

As the allegory progresses, Plato asks us to imagine that someone comes into the cave, unshackles one of the prisoners, and leads him or her out of the cave into the sunlight. What do you think this person's reaction would be? Blinded by the brightness of the Sun, the prisoner's first reaction would probably be to run back into the safety of the cave. It would require time and patience before the prisoner's eyes adjusted to the light and saw things as they really are. Once that happened, however, the former prisoner would clearly see that what had passed for knowledge was in reality only shadows.

Going back into the cave to explain "reality" to the other prisoners, this person would surely meet resistance. All of them would continue to believe the shadows were real. Hearing about a new and strange version of reality would most likely convince them that their fellow prisoner had gone crazy. "Wouldn't they say that he'd come back from his upward journey with his

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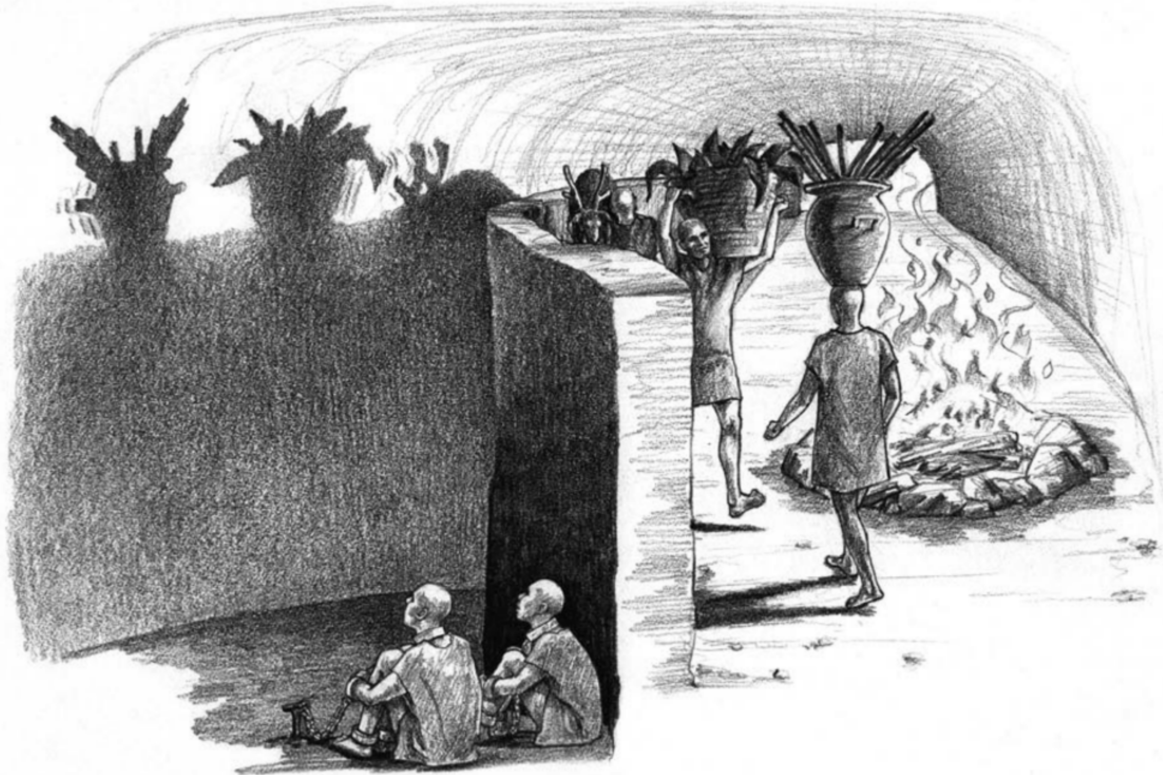

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FIGURE 1.2 Plato's Cave Allegory *The prisoners in the cave mistake shadows for reality as Plato suggests we do when we try to rely on the senses rather than reason.*

eyes ruined, and that it wasn't even worth trying to go up there?" Plato asks, "And wouldn't they—if they could—grab hold of anyone who tried to set them free and take them up there and kill him?"[14]

Ordinary life, Plato is telling us, is the life of the cave. This is the life from which Socrates had escaped and to which he was never willing to return. We are the prisoners, living in a world of untested assumptions, relying on our senses to tell us about reality, and assuming that only what we can see, hear, touch, taste, or smell is real. How much we are missing, Plato suggests,

> The region which is accessible to sight should be equated with the prison cell, and the firelight there with the light of the sun. And, if you think of the upward journey and the sight of things up on the surface of the earth as the mind's ascent to the intelligible realm, you won't be wrong.[15]

Plato may also be observing how strong the power of "group think" can be. If all our friends like or dislike something, if everyone in our country makes certain assumptions, if our family patterns have convinced us there is only one way to do something, we will be very comfortable with these preferences, assumptions, and patterns. If what is at issue is eating sauerkraut with the Thanksgiving turkey or assuming that toilet paper should feed over rather than under the roll, these patterns and assumptions may be harmless. The real danger is that we will trust our senses rather than our reason and accept what we see and what "everyone knows" as true and real rather than

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whole of the mind, isn't it right for it to rule, and for the passionate part to be subordinate and its ally?"[17]

As you can see, Plato's ontology (theory of being) and epistemology (theory of knowledge) join with his axiology (theory of values, especially morality). For Socrates and Plato, there is a direct link between what a person knows and what a person does. For this reason the questions raised by epistemology are linked with those raised by axiology.

Quite simply, Plato was convinced that the person who truly knows what is good or right will act accordingly. All people seek "the Good," or we might say perfect Goodness, by their very nature. No one who grasps the idea of the Good would voluntarily reject it. If people do wrong, then, it is because they have an incomplete or misguided view of what is good. Believing as he does in the power of reason, Plato concludes that intellect controls will. What we know will determine what we do. It follows that those who do wrong should be educated rather than punished. If they are brought to a deep understanding of what is right and good, they will act in accordance with it. People must be led from the cave of ignorance into the sunlight of true knowledge. When they are, the rational aspect will properly preside over the desiring and spirited elements.

In Plato we see for the first time in the Western tradition a philosopher concerned with uniting and integrating all three of the major branches of philosophy—metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology. What is real, what we know, and how we should live are not separate questions for Plato. Speculation in one area necessarily spills over into the other two. Conclusions must be consistent because the three areas are so closely related. As an enormously influential Western philosopher, Plato will appear in later chapters as we consider aesthetic experience, political philosophy, and social philosophy.

Do you see the Greek ideal of harmonia *in this temple?*
Greek temple at Segesta, Sicily/Courtesy of Joseph R. Mitchell

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Perictyone

Not all the philosophers in ancient Greece were men. Perictyone, who may have been the mother of Plato, was, like him, trained in the Pythagorean tradition. Pythagoras advocated the principle of ***harmonia***, or harmony among diverse elements, which both Plato and Perictyone follow. Plato's three-part human nature—combining reason, spirit, and desire—reflects this tradition. In a similar way, Perictyone points out the value of philosophy for women within the home and in the wider world:

harmonia *[har moh NEE uh] the Pythagorean principle of desired harmony among elements*

> A woman should be a harmony of prudence and temperance. Her soul should be zealous to acquire virtue; so that she may be just, brave, prudent, frugal, and hating vainglory. Furnished with these virtues, she will, when she becomes a wife, act worthily towards herself, her husband, her children, and her family. Frequently, also, such a woman will act beautifully towards cities, if she happens to rule over cities and nations, as we see is sometimes the case in a kingdom. If she subdues desire and anger, there will be produced a divine symphony.[18]

As in Plato's cave allegory, Perictyone urges women to hate "vainglory" and, instead, to pursue "prudence and temperance." Like Plato, she sees the consciousness or awareness of goodness as the key to virtue. A woman who is able to subdue both desire and anger will be fit to rule her household and perhaps even a city.

My virginity,
oh my virginity,
Where will you go when
I lose you?

SAPPHO

Most Greek women, living at this time, led very restricted lives, confined by social custom to an existence centering on the home. Although a life of wisdom, governed by reason, might equip a woman to rule, there was very little likelihood that she would get such an opportunity. What all high-born or wealthy women did do, however, was rule over the home. This included authority over children and over household servants, some of whom were likely to be slaves.

Pythagorean thought compares both household management and city government to the care and tuning of a musical instrument. One must organize the elements and mingle them skillfully "according to virtue and the laws."[19] The little we know about Perictyone places her firmly within this Pythagorean tradition. The principle of *harmonia* and the image of the tuned string inspired both men and women as a model for personal and political balance.

Aristotle

Too loose and the string loses its tone; too tight and it snaps. What is needed is the right amount of tension to produce the proper note and to create harmony in the orchestra. This is the theme of Aristotle's master work on **ethics**, the philosophical discipline concerned with vice and virtue, the rightness or wrongness of actions. Dedicated to his son Nicomachus, the book has come to be known as the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In it, Aristotle describes the life of moderation that reason dictates for humans.

ethics *the branch of philosophy concerned with judgments about moral behavior and the meaning of ethical statements and terms*

He begins in Book 1 by examining what we mean by happiness. All human activities, he says, aim at some good. Happiness, however, is that good desired for its own sake (everything else being a means to this end), and it therefore assumes the status of chief good. Humans, Aristotle believes, are uniquely able to experience happiness. Happiness is "one of our most divine possessions," so it follows that "we do not speak of an ox or a horse or any other animal as happy, because none of them can take part in this sort of activity."[20]

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HOW PHILOSOPHY WORKS • Logic—A Method for Evaluating Arguments

Many of the How Philosophy Works boxes in this text will introduce you to the most common forms of deductive arguments. In a deductive argument, a group of *premises* claim to support a *conclusion*. Premises consist of *terms*—nouns or phrases—arranged in subject-predicate order as statements. Each form of deductive argument has its own set of rules that determines whether or not the *premises* support the *conclusion*. If they do, the argument is considered *valid*. If they do not, the argument is considered *invalid*.

Please note that a *valid argument* does not necessarily yield a *true conclusion*. Once we have established that an argument is *valid,* the next step is to examine each of the *premises* for truth or falsity. A *valid argument* consisting of *true premises* will yield a *valid argument* that is also *sound,* because it is true. And, a *valid argument* with *false premises* will be unsound, leading to a *false conclusion*.

In the Western world, logic has been an essential tool of philosophy. As we consider the arguments set forth by Western philosophers in future chapters, we will illustrate some of them, using various forms of deductive arguments, including the categorical syllogism (Chapter 2), the hypothetical syllogism (Chapter 4), the hypothetical chain argument (Chapter 8), and the disjunctive syllogism (Chapter 9). Some other elements in the basics of Western logic may also be found at the beginning of Chapter 6.

In addition to these forms of deductive reasoning, we'll also look at inductive reasoning in Chapter 3 and examine some of the most common forms of informal fallacies in Chapters 6 and 7. Unlike *formal fallacies,* in which the rules of inference are not followed, informal fallacies distort an argument and appear to make it work or not work falsely.

Finally, some How Philosophy Works boxes acknowledge truth tests based on experience rather than on logic (see Proverb as Method in Chapter 5), as well as the limits of traditional logic (see Fuzzy Logic in Chapter 10). Use these logic boxes to build your skill in constructing valid arguments and in spotting invalid ones.

---

virtue *for Aristotle, a life lived in accordance with the highest human capacity, reason*

Happiness or human flourishing (what the Greeks called *eudaimonia*) is tied to **virtue**, which for Aristotle means living in accordance with our highest human ability—the ability to reason. "Since happiness is an activity of the soul in accordance with perfect virtue," Aristotle reasons, "we must examine the nature of virtue; for perhaps in this way we shall be better able to form a view about happiness too." Moral virtue, in his view, is acquired by practice. As Aristotle puts it, "Moral goodness . . . is the result of habit . . . We become just by performing just acts, temperate by performing temperate ones, brave by performing brave ones."[21] We are not born good or bad; rather, we learn to be one or the other by the activities in which we engage.

The *Nicomachean Ethics,* like Pythagorean treatises on harmony, is a practical guide to moral decision making that stresses common sense and moderation. The good life, for Aristotle, involves intelligent decisions made in response to specific problems. Yet, he recognizes that people are not entirely rational—there is also a passionate nature that can neither be fully ignored nor totally eliminated. To surrender completely to desire is to descend to the level of a beast, but denying the passions is also a foolish and unreasonable rejection of human nature.

golden mean *the moderate action between undesirable extremes; used by Aristotle to describe an ethical ideal*

Our goal should be to avoid extremes of behavior and rationally choose the way of moderation. This middle way between extremes, sometimes called the **golden mean**, is the cornerstone of Aristotle's ethical thought (Figure 1.3). In Plato's system, the norms for ethical conduct are based on the idea of the Good, which in his system represents perfect goodness or goodness itself. Aristotle suggests that one does not necessarily have to know universal Good to choose the good in a practical situation. It may be enough to know that both too little and too much management will ruin the harmony. Greek scholar H. D. F. Kitto calls the idea of a mean a characteristically

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Aristotle's Golden Mean		
Rashness	Bravery	Cowardice
Boastfulness	Honest Self-Appraisel	False Modesty

FIGURE 1.3 Aristotle's Golden Mean *Aristotle conceived of virtue as a mean between two extremes.*

Greek concept. The model or the ideal is the tuned string—not "the absence of tension and lack of passion, but the correct amount of tension which gives out the true and clear note."[22]

When he speaks about ethics, Aristotle wants his listeners to understand that his focus is on practical wisdom and not on a purely intellectual wisdom that contemplates unchanging reality. In the realm of intellectual wisdom (such as that proposed by Plato), it may be possible to speak in absolutes, but day-to-day moral decision making must always take into account the variable aspects of a particular situation. Moral decisions, for Aristotle, must always be based on the circumstances surrounding the issue. It is not appropriate to speak about moral truth in an isolated and pure sense; rather, we must speak about it in harmony with right desire.

As in the Pythagorean writings, the goal is harmony. What Aristotle advocates is the right action, undertaken in the right way, toward the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, and with the right motive. Without knowing the details surrounding a particular situation, it is impossible to state in advance what someone ought to do. The only fixed and unchanging principle is, therefore, the *mean*. The goal must always be moderation, the appropriate response, the action that falls between two extremes.

Here is one of Aristotle's illustrations: The person who "exceeds in confidence is called Rash, and the one who shows an excess of fear and a deficiency of confidence is called Cowardly."[23] Both responses represent extremes. The life of virtue, which leads to happiness, contains neither cowardice nor rashness. Instead, the goal of a virtuous life is the mean between these two extremes: bravery.

To consider another example, both boastfulness and false modesty are to be avoided. A person who is always bragging about what he or she has done is as far from virtue as is the person who cannot accept a compliment and insists on taking no credit for anything. The goal is truthfulness that accurately represents your own contribution. Extremes, in Aristotle's ethical system, are generally to be avoided:

> Thus there are three dispositions, two of them vicious (one by means of excess, the other of deficiency), and one good, the mean. They are all in some way opposed to one another: the extremes are contrary both to the mean and to each other, and the mean to the extremes...A brave man appears rash compared with a coward, and cowardly compared with a rash man...[24]

In any situation then, the virtuous action will usually be the one that falls between two possible extremes. Some ethical systems condemn all anger as wrong. Aristotle, however, would approve the right amount of anger, directed

THE MAKING *of a* PHILOSOPHER

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.)

Born in Thrace in northern Greece, Aristotle was the son of the official court physician to King Phillip of Macedon; however, Aristotle was orphaned early. At the age of eighteen he entered Plato's Academy and remained there twenty years, until Plato's death. King Phillip invited Aristotle to return to Macedon in 342 B.C.E. as tutor

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at the right person, in the right way, with the right motive. If the person in front of you in the grocery line has eleven items instead of ten, beating that person over the head with your frozen turkey would be excessive. At the other extreme, though, if you accept abuse without reaction, you would be deficient in anger.

Aristotle was very aware that the mean is difficult to attain. The life of virtue is not for everyone, and in some situations the most moral action possible may simply involve choosing the lesser of two evils. Clearly, there are also times when moderation does not apply. Aristotle speaks of adultery as one area in which it would be inappropriate to be moderate. Still, the mean remains the moral ideal, and the life of virtue continues to be the road to happiness.

Like Plato, Aristotle speculated about every area of philosophy. Although this chapter has explored only his views on axiology, you should be aware that Aristotle was interested in everything. He laid the foundations for Western formal logic, which we will begin examining in the "How Philosophy Works" boxes in Chapter 2. His theories about art and literature appear in Chapter 7. The early experiments he conducted in embryology anticipated the concerns of biology, and his desire to catalog and categorize classes of animals and plants established the disciplines of botany and zoology. In the next chapter, we will investigate his theories of reality and knowledge and compare them with Plato's.

THE MAKING *of a* PHILOSOPHER

Aristotle *(continued)*

to his son Alexander. When Phillip died, Aristotle fled, fearing he might be put to death as Socrates was. Alexander later conquered the world and is known to us as Alexander the Great. In 335 B.C.E., Aristotle founded his own school, the Lyceum. It had a covered walkway, and students and teachers were fond of strolling along its shaded paths talking about philosophy. Graduates of Aristotle's Lyceum staffed the great library in Alexandria, Egypt. Aristotle died at the age of sixty-two of a chronic stomach ailment. According to those who knew him, he was thin-legged and bald, with small eyes set close together, and he lisped.

Metaphysics, Epistemology, and Axiology in Asian Thought

Both Asian and African philosophies differ from Greek philosophy in the assumptions they make about the three main branches of philosophy—metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology. Succeeding chapters will examine some of these differences in greater detail. We consider Asian variations in a preliminary way here, beginning with the ideas of the Buddha on some of the same questions that interested the early Greeks and concluding with a brief look at the Confucian tradition in China.

Buddhism

Let's begin by noting a similarity between Siddhārtha Gautama—known after his enlightenment as the Buddha, the one who woke up to the truth—and Aristotle. We have been considering Aristotle's practical bent, his insistence that virtue be considered not in the abstract but in the context of actual moral situations that are always particular and not subject to broad generalizations. The Buddha shared this practical outlook and went considerably further than Aristotle in his preference for it. Metaphysics, and in fact all abstract philosophical speculation, was of no interest to him.

His message focused entirely on the human situation and could be said to parallel Aristotle's search for happiness. The Buddha began by noting that life is characterized by suffering. Sooner or later, old age, sickness, and death will visit all of us. Youth, wealth, and health may temporarily blind us to these realities, but there is no escaping them. Fear of these realities is what makes us unhappy.

THE MAKING *of a* PHILOSOPHER

Siddhārtha Gautama, the Buddha (CA. 563–483 B.C.E.)

Siddhārtha, sometimes known as Sakyamuni (sage of the Sakya tribe), was born into the Gautama family, a warrior caste in India. At the age of nineteen, he married his beautiful cousin Yasodhara and later fathered a son Rahula. Renouncing his fortune and family, he traveled through the Ganges River Valley as a begging monk. The disciples who began following him formed an order, which

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> And trouble will follow you
> As the wheel follows the ox that draws the cart...
> Speak or act with a pure mind
> And happiness will follow you
> As your shadow, unshakable.[25]

Millions of people—from Hong Kong to Tibet, from Burma to Tokyo, as well as throughout North America—call themselves Buddhists. There are several major doctrinal and practical divisions within Buddhism, but the influence of Siddhārtha Gautama has been considerable. Blending with existing ideas and practices as it moved into new geographical areas, Buddhism enriched what it found and was itself enriched. As the many statues of a meditating, slightly smiling Buddha suggest, the enlightened one, the one who woke up and saw things as they are, continues to inspire and intrigue people around the world today.

Pan Chao and the Confucian Tradition

When Buddhism made its way from India to China, it blended with existing systems of thought and behavior, especially Confucianism and Taoism. By the first century C.E., Confucianism had become well established in the Han Dynasty court where Pan Chao was acknowledged as the foremost woman scholar. Chosen to study, write, and teach in the library as well as instruct the empress in astronomy and mathematics, Pan Chao was also a significant contributor, along with her father and brother, to the *Hou Han Shu,* an ambitious collection of literary and historical sources.[26]

From her surviving writings, it seems clear that Pan Chao revered the Confucian classics and modeled her life after their teachings. As we learned in Historical Interlude A, the Confucian ethical ideal was living nobly and compassionately in the world. In terms of cosmology, the emperor was seen as standing between Heaven and Earth, receiving and interpreting the Mandate of Heaven. In terms of relationships, subjects and ministers would obey the emperor, children would honor parents, wives would submit to husbands, older siblings would lead younger ones, and friends would encourage one another in virtue.

When Pan Chao applied these instructions to her own life, however, she was forced to question the system of education then in effect that offered teaching only to boys. If only half the population has access to the classics, she observed, proper relationships might not be established:

> Now examine the gentlemen of the present age. They know only that wives must be controlled, and that the husband's rules of conduct manifesting his authority must be established. They therefore teach their boys to read books and (study) histories...Yet only to teach men and not to teach women,—is that not ignoring the essential relation between them? According to the "Rites," it is the rule to begin to teach children to read at the age of eight years, and by the age of fifteen years they ought then be ready for cultural training. Only why should it not be (that girls' education as well as boys' be) according to this principle?[27]

For Pan Chao, knowledge and wisdom hold the key for understanding both reality and virtue. In other words, epistemology leads to metaphysics and axiology. If a woman were to join what is sometimes called "the aristocracy of the wise," she would need a proper education. The wisdom of

THE MAKING *of a* PHILOSOPHER

Pan Chao (CA. 45–115 C.E.)

Called the foremost woman scholar of China, Pan Chao lived and worked at the court of the Eastern Han Emperor Ho. Members of the Pan family had been court scholars since 32 B.C.E., and Pan Chao followed in the tradition of her father Pan Piao and one of her twin brothers, Ku. When Pan Ku died before completing the *Hou Han Shu* (a history of the Han family), Pan Chao was asked to complete it. Although she did not have the formal title of Historian to the Imperial Court, in effect this was the post she occupied. Working in the imperial library, she supervised the work of other scholars and furthered the work begun by her father and brother. And, at the emperor's request, she instructed the young empress and her ladies-in-waiting in the Confucian classics, history, astronomy, and mathematics. At the death of the emperor, his twenty-five-year-old widow Teng became regent first for an infant son, who died a year later, and then for the infant son's thirteen-year-old cousin. Teng relied on her teacher, "Mother Pan," for advice concerning affairs of state and at Pan Chao's death declared a period of mourning. Pan Chao is remembered for her narrative poetry and essays, as well as for her work as a scholar and teacher.

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the past would lead her to understand both cosmology (humans as the link between Heaven and Earth) and the ontology embodied in the five relationships. Most important, education would enable her to become a large-minded or superior person—in other words, a person of virtue.[28]

Pan Chao is the first of many women you will meet to claim for her own sex the benefits that flow from learning. Like Perictyone, Pan Chao recognizes that a virtuous woman benefits the home in exactly the same way that a virtuous man enriches political and social life outside the home. Her argument for equal access to education comes from "Lessons for Women," a book of instructions she requested unmarried girls to copy. In Pan Chao's worldview, subjects would still obey emperors, and wives would continue to submit to husbands—she is clearly not advocating rebellion. Instead, she argues that education is indispensable for the life of virtue. This, incidentally, was also Plato's claim—that one who knew the good would do the good.

In later chapters, we will examine in detail the other major thought system of China—Taoism. Looking to nature rather than to the social order for the wisdom required for living a fully human life, Taoism sees no need for the kind of learning found in books. Books give us knowledge, but nature teaches us wisdom. As chapter 48 of the Taoist classic, the *Tao Te Ching,* points out:

> When we pursue knowledge,
> acquiring more is the goal.
> When we pursue wisdom,
> simplicity is the path . . .[29]

Metaphysics, Epistemology, and Axiology in African Thought

If one learns from others but does not think, one will be bewildered. If, on the other hand, one thinks but does not learn from others, one will be in peril.
CONFUCIUS

They must often change, who would be constant in happiness or wisdom.
CONFUCIUS

In addition to Asian thought, each chapter of this book considers how the chief concerns of philosophy have been addressed in traditional African thought. Our focus will be on two cultural traditions: the East African, as articulated by the philosophy department of Makerere University in Uganda, and the West African, chiefly as expressed by the Akan and Ewe tribes, based principally in Ghana.

Western-educated, contemporary African philosophers are in the unique position of being able to reflect on traditional African cultures, using the categories of Western philosophy. They can help us examine how the indigenous peoples of Africa—before being influenced by the West—saw the cosmos, the human person, ways of knowing, and morality. These thinkers live in both worlds, so they will be our cultural translators.

Sociological and intellectual differences exist between East and West Africa, as do differences within each of these traditions, but they all share some basic similarities. We will be exploring these common assumptions as we compare systems of African thought with those of Europe and Asia. In some significant ways, African philosophical thought represents a middle ground between Western and Asian traditions: It is neither as preoccupied with rationality and individualism as the West nor as convinced of essential interconnectedness as Buddhism.

In contrast with the West, the traditional African view is that all areas of life are part of an integrated whole, which includes nature. The Greek notion

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Her large head and neck rings symbolize beauty and health. Blessed by a priest, this serene female figure promotes conception and ensures the birth of beautiful children.

Akua'ba Figure/Ghana/Courtesy of The African Art Museum of Maryland/Photo by Jason Mitchell.

of standing apart from nature and studying it objectively would be incomprehensible to an African who does not feel separate from nature and whose goal is to "know" nature the way a child learns to know its mother. Mere intellectual knowing (the goal of the early Greeks) would be very limiting and would leave out the physical and emotional knowing that, together with intellectual knowing, constitute a complete relationship.[30]

From the cycles of renewal at the heart of nature comes the idea that humans are also self-renewing. Like Buddhism, traditional African thought assumes the continuity of generations, believing "that ancestors do not die out but are reborn in the young."[31] The resemblance of children to dead relatives reinforces the idea of an ongoing cycle of birth-death-rebirth. If a baby is, at least in some sense, an honored elder reborn, that child has a sacred nature. Bearing children becomes a special blessing, miscarriage a curse, and abortion unthinkable.[32] As we have seen, metaphysics (what is real?) leads to axiology (which values are correct?).

Living apart from nature, Westerners may forget they have any connection with it. If food comes from the supermarket and water from a faucet, ecological implications may seem very distant. There is a temptation to try to exercise control over both nature and one's own body. African philosophy affirms that people and nature enjoy a reciprocal relationship. Hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, and droughts remind us we are connected with and dependent on nature. One cannot live a full life apart from nature any more than one can live an integrated life that ignores the body (another Western tendency) and focuses exclusively on the mind. It would be foolish to try.

In a traditional African society, a baby is seen as being born into a tribe or a clan and not just into an individual, nuclear family. The child's identity

Do you agree that the mother-child relationship is the most basic one in society?

Seated mother and child from Zaire/ Courtesy of the African Art Museum of Maryland/Photo courtesy of Quentin Kardos.

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will, from the beginning, have social implications. All members of the tribe, as well as the ancestors, will have a stake in how that child behaves. As Professor Kwasi Wiredu puts it, "The primary responsibility for an action, positive or negative, rests with the doer, but a non-trivial secondary responsibility extends to the individual's family and, in some cases, to the environing community."[33]

This is a social concept of self that falls somewhere between the Western emphasis on individualism and the Asian insistence on interconnectedness. Traditional African epistemology also seems to blend some aspects of Asia and the West. It rejects exclusive reliance on either reason or intuition and insists on including the practical and the down-to-earth. To understand this version of epistemology, let's briefly review what we already know about Buddhism and Greek philosophy.

In the West we have favored rational and analytic thought, especially logic, as the best or only route to certain knowledge. Aristotle, as you know, developed and refined a system of logic that laid the bedrock for Western epistemology. Western technology rests on this kind of thinking, and we have applied it to social and psychological challenges as well. At times we have discounted both intuition and the practical knowledge that comes from lived experience, insisting that if something cannot be proved logically it is not really true.

Asian cultures have tended to favor more intuitive ways of knowing over purely rational ones in pursuit of enlightenment. Although Buddhist and Hindu systems of rational argumentation share many interesting points of similarity with Aristotle's logic, the Buddhist truth that life is suffering can be felt or known intuitively. One can grasp it immediately and understand it "in a flash" without having to proceed through logical steps of analysis. Knowing intuitively that to harm another being is really to harm oneself is very different from knowing logically that individual actions have social consequences.

African cultures represent a third approach. They typically embody knowledge and wisdom in art motifs and in proverbs rather than in systems of logic. From the Akan culture of West Africa, we have this illustration: a crocodile with one stomach and two heads locked in combat. Human beings, this picture tells us, have many common interests (symbolized by the shared stomach), but they also have conflicting interests that can lead to struggle (symbolized by the fighting heads). The aim of morality, we might conclude, is to reconcile or harmonize these warring interests through adjustment and adaptation. In other words, axiology derives from lived experience.

Notice here that there is no absolute standard of right and wrong, as we found, for instance, in Plato's notion that the Idea of the Good should define human behavior. What is right is what will unlock the heads and get the food to the common stomach. In other words, individuals must learn to balance their own interests with the social good.[34] How this might work is not carved in stone or written in the sky but is determined by the lived experience of people in society. This particular African understanding has more in common with Aristotle than with Plato.

The proverbs that express African epistemology may be thought of as distilled human experience. Over many years, maybe many generations, people learn through trial and error what works and what does not. Through painful mistakes, a society learns what it can afford to tolerate and what it must condemn if the community is to prosper. These lessons are embodied in proverbs. Consider this one: "If you do not allow your neighbor to reach

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nine, you will never reach ten." Again, there is nothing here about absolute right and wrong, just the simple truth that holding your neighbor back harms not only your neighbor but yourself. "Sticking into your neighbor's flesh, it might just as well be sticking into wood" highlights the insensitivity to the pain of others that is the basis for all selfish behavior. It offers the moral basis for what is sometimes called the "silver rule." If the "golden rule" advises treating others as you would like to be treated, the silver rule suggests *not* treating others as you would *not* like to be treated.[35]

This is much closer to Aristotle than to Plato. There may be one basic principle—the silver rule or the golden mean—but it cannot be discussed in the abstract. Ethical principles, in both Aristotelian and Akan thought, must always be understood in the specific circumstances of a particular moral problem. Western thought has in general tended more toward absolutes. In the Judaic and Christian religious traditions, as well as in the philosophy of Plato, classic Western thought has favored moral ideals that are always true and mistrusted the notion that differing conditions might require differing actions.

The Peoples of the Americas

A final thread we will be following throughout this text involves the worldviews and value systems of both the indigenous peoples of the American continent and the Spaniards who conquered and intermingled with them as well as their varied descendants—those who live in or have emigrated from Centroamerica as well as those who sometimes call themselves the first Americans. You may notice similarities between the views of some of these diverse peoples and those of the Africans we have just met. We will hear their voices when we explore cosmology and ontology, when we take up questions of human nature and God, as well as in our investigations of knowledge, truth, and value.

What is life?
It is the flash of a firefly in the night
It is the breath of a buffalo in the wintertime
It is the little shadow on the grass, as it loses itself in the sunset.
CROWFOOT OF THE BLACKFEET

The first to speak is Rigoberta Menchú, 1992 winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for her work in organizing the peasants of Guatemala. Here she describes the welcoming of a new life into the community:

> Candles will be lit for him and his candle becomes part of the candle of the whole community . . . Candles are lit to represent all the things which belong to the universe—earth, water, sun, and man—and the child's candle is put with them, together with incense (what we call *pom*) and lime—our sacred lime. Then the parents tell the baby of the suffering of the family he will be joining. With great feeling, they express their sorrow at bringing a child into the world to suffer . . . It is also when the child is considered a child of God, our one father . . . To reach this one father, the child must love beans, maize, the earth. The one father is the heart of the sky, that is, the sun. The sun is the father and our mother is the moon. She is a gentle mother. And she lights our way.[36]

I am a medicine woman. I live in the beyond and come back.
AGNES WHISTLING ELK

In this brief account we find a cosmology in which the Sun and the Moon are "pillars of the universe" and a child is born into a community as well as what we might call a nuclear family. What is known with certainty comes from a respected tradition, and the life of virtue will honor both the ancestors and the Earth.

Among the Nahuatl-speaking peoples in the central Mexican highlands, during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, we find a similar concern

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life at all. Philosophy asks us to wake up and critically examine what everyone else may be taking for granted. Is this all there is?

Is it true, as some claim, that in America philosophy has lost its "voice" in the public forum, that, despite greater efforts to apply philosophy to current issues, whatever philosophers are saying they are saying only to one another? Has the rest of the culture stopped paying attention? Does philosophy still have anything worthwhile to contribute as we struggle with personal and social issues? When then Vice Admiral James Stockdale reported for duty on an aircraft carrier off the coast of Vietnam in 1965, he carried with him a copy of the *Discourses* of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus. Born as a slave in 55 C.E. on the eastern fringes of the Roman Empire, Epictetus had attracted followers with his message of rational control over the passions. Although we cannot control our external circumstances, we can choose how we respond to them. As he was shot down and parachuting into what would be a seven-and-a-half year ordeal in captivity, much of it spent in solitary confinement, Stockdale whispered to himself, "Five years down there at least. I'm leaving the world of technology and entering the world of Epictetus." Stockdale used the philosophy of **Stoicism** (see Historical Interlude B) not only to survive but also to rally his fellow prisoners, among whom he was the senior officer.[39]

Stoicism *[STOW us sism] the belief that virtue and happiness are achievable by mastering oneself and one's passions and emotions*

France, which has a long tradition of philosophical discussion in café society, is once again attracting thousands of ordinary citizens to the practice that Socrates felt made life worth living—asking and attempting to answer the fundamental questions of life. By 1998 Paris had eighteen "cafés-philo," and there were about one hundred throughout the country. Today, hundreds more have sprung up throughout the United Kingdom and the United States. Once a week people of all ages and walks of life gather for the "practice of philosophy." Topics are suggested by the group: "Is freedom anarchy?" "Is God dead?" "Can there be good and bad violence?" "Can one still speak of democracy without laughing?" "Are we what we do?" Philosophy is a required subject in French high schools, so most people have had some basic training and experience in acquiring the skills of thinking clearly and arguing coherently. There are no membership fees. Whoever shows up is eligible to participate.[40] Are these people better able to navigate the ups and downs of life as a result of engaging in philosophical inquiry? What does philosophy have to offer ordinary people? Why do they come back week after week?

Summary

If you enjoy what you do, you'll never work another day in your life.

CONFUCIUS

In this chapter we have begun to explore the territory and the methods of philosophy. Beginning with the pre-Socratic cosmologists who launched the Western tradition of philosophy, we have marked off the traditional divisions of philosophical thought. Metaphysics considers what is real through cosmology (which studies the cosmos) and ontology (which studies being). Epistemology explores the sources of knowledge and considers how we know what we think we know. Axiology focuses on values, especially ethics and its emphasis on morality and rules for conduct.

Western philosophy is said to begin with Thales because he and his fellow Milesians were the first in the West to ask and answer the eternal

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questions philosophically. In the process they postulated an understanding of the world as an orderly place and humans as rational knowers, which has provided the basis for Western science as well as philosophy.

Other monists, looking for a single explanatory principle, which the Greeks called the *archē,* brought Western philosophy to an impasse. Heraclitus's idea that reality is eternal change, suggested by the image of a burning fire, clashed with Parmenides's logical deduction that if only being is real, there can be no not-being and hence no empty space. What appears to be change must be an illusion because the possibility of change is excluded logically.

Pluralists resolved the impasse by postulating multiple explanations of reality. Empedocles's use of the traditional elements—earth, air, fire, and water—and Anaxagoras's imaginative speculation about an infinite number of seeds, or germs, stirred into being by *nous,* or mind, broadened the base of philosophical speculation and allowed for more commonsense explanations.

Some of the speculations about cosmogony or the origins of the universe that we find in these early pre-Socratic philosophers have an oddly modern sound. Pythagoras's idea that our world is one among several and not the center of the system, as well as Anaximander's evolutionary hypothesis, remind us that many "new" ideas have very ancient roots.

The relativism and individualism of the Sophists sparked interest in epistemology. If each of us can only know a private version of reality and if each person's version is equally valid, perhaps questions about metaphysics and ultimate reality are a waste of time. These controversial teachers of rhetoric were a great commercial success in ancient Athens, and they shifted the focus of philosophy from metaphysics to axiology, especially to questions about human happiness.

Socrates and his method of persistent questioning have created the model for the Western search for truth. Using the dialectic method, false ideas can be exposed and discredited. True ideas will be those that stand up to relentless probing. Although he wrote no philosophy, Socrates dignified philosophy as a lifework and the love of wisdom as something worth dying for.

Plato's cave allegory warns us against mistaking shadows for reality. Using our senses, we may become confused. Only reason can guide us unerringly to the truth. With it we have the tool for distinguishing what is real from what is merely appearance. The wise person will be certain that his or her desiring and spirited natures are subordinate to the rational element.

Similarly, Perictyone gives us insight into the Pythagorean goal of *harmonia* as it applied to the lives of Greek women. If harmony, or balance, was the highest human aspiration, men might practice it in the city while women practiced it in the home. Each would be living the life of reason and following the cultural ideal. The image of a well-tuned string captures the concept of a mean between extremes.

Aristotle's ethical theory develops this concept of the golden mean into a classic of Western philosophy. Both excess and deficiency are to be avoided in pursuit of an ideal of moderation. The right amount of reaction, at the right time, in the right manner—rather than adherence to an unvarying code of conduct—becomes the ideal.

The Buddha shares Aristotle's practical, down-to-earth focus but parts company with the West on the question of what is real. For the Buddha, the concept of a rational knowing subject and a separate known object, first articulated

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