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# The Pimlico History Of Western Philosophy

Edited by Richard H. Popkin

# About the Book

**From Plato to Wittgenstein and from Aquinas to Heidegger, the volume provides lively, in-depth and up-to-date historical analysis of all the key figures, schools and movements of Western philosophy. Richard Popkin has assembled 63 leading scholars to forge a highly approachable chronological account of the development of Western philosophical traditions.**

*The Pimlico History* significantly broadens the scope of Western philosophy to reveal the influence of Middle Eastern and Asian thought, the vital contributions of Jewish and Islamic philosophers, and the role of women within the tradition. Popkin also emphasizes schools and developments that have traditionally been overlooked. Sections on Plato and Aristotle are followed by a detailed presentation on Hellenistic philosophy and its influence on the modern developments of materialism and scepticism. Another chapter considers Renaissance philosophy and its seminal influence on modern humanism and science. Turning to the modern era, the contributors give equal attention to both sides of the current rift in philosophy between continental and analytic schools, charting the development of each right to the end of the twentieth century.

Each chapter includes an introductory essay, and Popkin provides notes that draw connections among the separate articles. The rich bibliographic information and the indexes of names and terms make the volume a valuable resource. Combining a broad scope and penetrating analysis with a keen sense of what is relevant for the modern reader, the

book provides an accessible intro for students and general readers.

THE PIMLICO  
HISTORY OF  
WESTERN  
PHILOSOPHY



EDITED BY  
RICHARD H. POPKIN



PIMLICO

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*I should like to dedicate this volume to my wife, Juliet. She knew me when, as a young student at Columbia College, I first became interested in the history of philosophy. She has supported me over more than half a century as I have researched and written on various aspects of that history. And in the three years of the preparation and completion of this volume, she has been an invaluable consultant, helping me overcome a host of crises. I hope that this volume is worthy of all of her help.*

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## THE PIMLICO HISTORY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

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## ***Acknowledgments***

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most helpful in assisting me in overcoming various problems and difficulties.

In addition, I should like to thank all of the contributors for their excellent work and for jointly making this a volume that we all can be proud of.

Finally, I would like to express my personal feeling of satisfaction that it was my alma mater, Columbia University, that proposed this project to me. Columbia's philosophy department has been in the forefront of those encouraging the serious scholarly study of the history of philosophy throughout this century, even while it was being abandoned in many other intellectual centers. It was at Columbia, as both an undergraduate and graduate student, that I was able to study the history of philosophy with distinguished professors including John Herman Randall and Herbert W. Schneider, who later encouraged me in my researches over the last half century. I owe special thanks to Paul Oskar Kristeller who taught me and encouraged me and who also examined my plan for this volume and made several significant suggestions.

# ***Introduction***

***RICHARD H. POPKIN***

There have been many histories of philosophies, but few presented in one large volume for the educated layman. Two such ventures that have endured for many decades, *The Story of Philosophy* by Will Durant and Bertrand Russell's *A History of Western Philosophy*, are eminently readable, but cover only the high spots of the field. Durant, who was a very popular lecturer on philosophy at Columbia University, primarily discusses only a few of the great men. Nevertheless, his popularization has been a gateway into philosophy for a great many readers during much of this century. Russell wrote his book hastily out of financial desperation while jobless in New York City at the beginning of World War II. Since Russell was a scholar of very few of the topics he covered, and uninterested or hostile to others, his opus is most engaging as Russelliana but hardly as history of philosophy. Both Durant's and Russell's works are still in print and are widely available in paperback editions.

This work is not intended to compete with these classics. During the last half century the number of new serious scholarly findings and interpretations concerning various portions of the history of philosophy has increased enormously. Previously unknown materials by and about

various major figures in the history of philosophy have been discovered. The manuscripts of important figures from ancient times to the present have been or are being edited, increasing our understanding of the authors. For example, an edition of John Locke's writings based on previously unknown manuscripts has begun to see print; the edition of G. W. Leibniz's unpublished writings started in the 1920s continues to produce new volumes. New historical perspectives are being cast upon the materials, so that they can now be seen in their full intellectual and social contexts instead of as just isolated systems of ideas.

All of this has led to many multivolume histories of different portions of the history of philosophy. The enormous German *Überweg* history of philosophy, long the standard one for detail, is now in the process of being redone with a substantial increase in depth of coverage and amount of material; when completed, it will finally consist of dozens of highly specialized volumes. Large histories of various periods in the history of philosophy have also been issued, as well as countless volumes about individual philosophers.

In the light of all that has been discovered, edited, and reinterpreted, it seems appropriate to attempt to put together much of the new material and many of the new interpretations, as well as updated explanations and analyses of the accepted history of philosophy, in a form in which nonprofessional readers can appreciate the riches now available in the field. I have been concerned to give due attention to certain portions of the history of philosophy that much too often have been overlooked. After setting forth ancient Greek philosophy from the pre-Socratics to Plato and Aristotle, we then turn to a detailed presentation of Hellenistic philosophy, which is too frequently ignored or slighted. The philosophies of the Epicureans, the Stoics, and the Sceptics—the sources of modern materialism, scepticism, and forms of neo-Stoicism—are examined.

Neoplatonism, a philosophical system that played a great role in the various forms of Renaissance and Cambridge Platonism, is fully described here, though scholars have often written it off as too mystical. We also go into the development of philosophical forms of Judaism and Christianity that developed from the first century onward.

The chapter on Hellenistic philosophy is followed by a detailed presentation of Islam-Arabic and Jewish medieval philosophy as it developed in the Islamic Empire. This material, which was of the greatest influence upon the development of European philosophy in the Christian Middle Ages and afterward, is of great interest philosophically in its own right, as it embodies an important joining of monotheistic religions with Greek philosophy. The way various Muslim and Jewish thinkers such as Avicenna, Averroës, Ibn Gabirol, and Moses Maimonides utilized the Greek tradition is traced. And the various philosophical-theological positions of the great medieval Christian thinkers are set forth.

Following this, we deal with Renaissance philosophy, which is too often just skipped over as if nothing serious took place in the history of philosophy between the late medieval Christian thinkers such as John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham and the rise of modern philosophy in the seventeenth century, starting with René Descartes. It seems *prima facie* improbable that a period of such tremendous artistic and literary activity should have produced no interesting philosophy. So, we examine Renaissance humanism, Renaissance Platonism, the forms of Aristotelianism of the period, and newer philosophies such as Kabbalism and scepticism that had great effects in the periods that followed.

Turning to the post-Renaissance period with which many readers will be more familiar, we have tried to give the major modern philosophers their due, while giving some

attention to intellectual movements that are out of the mainstream of the history of philosophy, such as that of the Kabbalah, which greatly influenced many major figures including Baruch Spinoza, Leibniz, Isaac Newton, and F. W. J. Schelling. Similarly, the revival of Greek scepticism and its presentation by Michel Montaigne influenced most thinkers from Descartes onward, so we trace seventeenth- and eighteenth-century presentations of scepticism along with the great philosophical systems of the time. We also consider the impact of European contact with China, which played a significant role in the early Enlightenment by casting doubts on some of the claims of the unique wisdom of Western thought.

In the following chapter, due consideration is given to the theories offered by those leading French Enlightenment thinkers who are usually ignored while modern philosophers concentrate only on the movement of ideas from Locke to George Berkeley and to David Hume that is said to culminate in the efforts of Immanuel Kant. We have also sought to place Kant's achievements in the context of philosophical thought in Germany before, during, and after his so-called "Copernican Revolution" in philosophy. Instead of seeing Kant solely as having been awakened from his dogmatic slumber by Hume, we portray the mix of ideas in German academia, in the Prussian Academy, and among "popular" philosophers such as Moses Mendelssohn, and among Kant's contemporaries and critics from Königsberg, Johann Herder and Johann G. Hamann.

Providing adequate coverage of nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophy poses some of the greatest problems for historians of philosophy. A canon has hardly been formed for these periods yet. The nineteenth century intellectually is seen merely as the antecedent of the twentieth century. We therefore find new concerns and interests in the period in terms of what ideas twentieth-

century thinkers are building upon. Karl Marx, Søren Kierkegaard, and Friedrich Nietzsche, who hardly appeared in histories of philosophy or anthologies of nineteenth-century philosophical writing published in the first half of this century, are obviously dominant figures now. We cannot understand much of twentieth-century thought without considering their ideas. Wilhelm Dilthey, Edmund Husserl, and Martin Heidegger are now crucial figures in the development of contemporary Continental European philosophy. In their cases, we have to look back to see where their ideas came from, whose work they built upon, and whose ideas they rejected. And we have traced currents in Continental philosophy up to almost the end of the twentieth century.

Similarly, in the twentieth-century analytic-philosophical tradition, so much has happened recently that we must rethink the roles and influence of Bertrand Russell, the Logical Positivists, the pragmatists, and the early philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. We have sought to follow developments from the rise of modern logic up to the most recent forms of analytic thinking.

Obviously, the history of philosophy will be written many more times in terms of emerging themes and theories; in terms of the interests and concerns of thinkers yet to come; and in terms of new information and insights about the past. Here we can only try to provide adequate and interesting coverage as we see it up to this point in our own intellectual history, nearing the end of the twentieth century.

This is a collective volume in which the many authors have been chosen for their scholarly ability, their achievements in their fields, their knowledge, and their interest in this particular project. All of the contributors understand that one of the purposes of this volume is to revise the general prevailing understanding of the history of philosophy among present-day academics. No effort has

been made to force the different authors into a common expository style or into a common point of view. Readers will find that the various authors, like philosophers in general, have many points of view and often differ with each other. Each of the chapters has had an overall editor or editors who have organized the material covered therein. They, with my concurrence, have chosen the authors of the various sections within their chapters. I, as overall editor as well as the editor of the chapters on the Islamic and Jewish Middle Ages, the seventeenth century, and the eighteenth century, have placed connecting passages where I thought appropriate in order to relate one section to another and to make the narrative as continuous as possible. (My connecting passages are labeled "RHP.") We have tried to supply enough bibliographic material in each section so that the reader can easily move beyond our summaries and evaluations of different philosophers and movements to a deeper and more complete study of them. We encourage the reader to use this volume as a launching pad to further philosophical knowledge and understanding.

The history of philosophy, like the history of any other part of mankind's intellectual achievements, needs to be written and rewritten by every generation in terms of what is of importance to present-day intellectuals. Philosophy itself develops in specific historical and cultural contexts. However, unlike many other intellectual fields, philosophy as written usually presents itself as independent of any particular time and place. It presumes to deal with problems that have had various expressions since ancient times. It has been said for too long by philosophers that the history of philosophy is nothing but footnotes to Plato and Aristotle. This view reduces philosophy to basically just what Plato and Aristotle said it was. Every view afterward is thus seen as just elucidation or restatement of what the two great

Greek philosophical masters said over two thousand years ago.

In each age, however, thinkers seek to understand themselves and their times as being especially important and meaningful to those around them. Usually, thinkers find much aid and comfort in positioning themselves in the long historical tradition. Sometimes they find insight thereby into their own unique contributions by treating what came before them as “a short introduction to the history of human stupidity,” centuries of errors and misunderstanding now about to be overcome by the present-day thinker and his generation. People who work in disciplines that develop in more obviously linear fashions, like the sciences, are often amazed that philosophers continue to read books written over two thousand years ago as if they are at all relevant—even most relevant—to understanding current philosophical problems and solutions. Further still, each philosophical age tries to depict itself as the proper culmination of thought experiments launched by thinkers long ago in the Eastern Mediterranean world. Even the most antihistorical philosophies of the present world still present themselves as accomplishing something significant that their predecessors going back to the ancient Greeks were never able to do. So despite all claims of absolute truth, the history of philosophy is, has been, and remains closely linked to the ongoing process of philosophizing.

The history of philosophy does not, however, describe a simple linear progression from Plato and Aristotle to our present intellectual situation. Developments in other areas such as religion and science provide some of the new problems that have had to be thought through, using historical materials as guides and aids. These new problems and new proposed solutions provide new lenses for studying and interpreting the past, and this revised version of the



past then provides some new ways of looking at the present.

Obvious examples of this dialectical role of philosophy in history can be seen in what happened when Jewish, Christian, and Islamic monotheistic religious views replaced pagan ones. The new religious views were understood in terms of previous philosophical models, and the philosophical theologies then became ways of assessing the philosophical past. Again, something like this has also happened during the last three centuries as the “new science” became the dominant explanatory way of accounting for our experiences. Philosophies have since been measured in terms of how they relate to science, and the scientific outlook became a way of assessing the merits of past thought systems and attitudes.

In the half century during which I have been an active teacher and scholar in the history of philosophy, I have seen amazing changes in perspective. Philosophers who were hardly mentioned in history of philosophy courses taught fifty years ago have now been resurrected, studied anew, and seen as intimately related to exciting theories of the present. Schemata for explaining the course of intellectual history, such as the dichotomy between empiricism and rationalism, which seemed so clear a half century ago, now are much disputed. Other paradigms are offered that may be more helpful or useful for our present-day philosophizing and concerns.

The philosophical current that I have devoted much of my intellectual life to studying, scepticism, was hardly taken as a serious movement in the history of philosophy a half century ago. The chief ancient text, the writings of the third-century pedant Sextus Empiricus, were mainly ignored or treated as a curiosity of no particular interest or concern to modern thinkers. When I proposed in my papers as a graduate student that the philosophy of David Hume was

like that of Sextus, and that Hume may have drawn some of his critical arguments from him, my teachers thought I might have an interesting or intriguing way of looking at the material, but that it was up to me to find some actual historical links between the devastating scepticism offered in Sextus's texts and the modern critical empirical philosophy of Hume. I have devoted a good deal of scholarly research and energy for the last fifty years to finding those links. But in the meantime there has developed a worldwide intellectual industry of ferreting out just such a course of sceptical arguments from ancient times to the present. Much of the history of philosophy is now being recast by many historians of philosophy in terms of its relation to sceptical ideas.

Something similar has happened in terms of ancient religious themes and ways of looking at the world previously written out of intellectual history by the Enlightenment and enlightened critics during the last two centuries. The study of the Kabbalah and of its influences, of various theosophies such as gnosticism, has helped us to understand parts of our past and parts of our present.

And, of course, the influence of scientific developments on philosophy in the last three centuries has been enormous. The mathematization of physics by Galileo and Descartes offered a great incentive to develop philosophies that justified or explained the new scientific outlook and that used the mathematical way of thinking in philosophy. Some thinkers, as we shall see, have seen as their mission the development and presentation of a scientific philosophy. Whatever could not be presented scientifically was deemed nonphilosophical. As the twentieth century nears its end, the computer, the findings of neurophysiology, the great advances in biotechnology, and research into artificial intelligence have presented a brave new world for some philosophers, and they have looked for intellectual

antecedents for this seemingly unending march of scientific progress. On the other hand, those who have seen that scientific progress has not solved many of the problems facing mankind today have sought in the rich past evaluations of humanity's achievements and his failings in order to account for both a most advanced scientific world and one that cannot resolve most basic human problems.

All of this indicates that the history of philosophy will be constantly rewritten in order to provide intellectual ammunition for present-day thinkers. At the close of the twentieth century, we have tried to present a conglomerate history that we hope can help readers understand where we are philosophically and what we might be able to do about it. By seeing our philosophical heritages in relation to contemporary thought, we may have a better perspective on our past, our present, and our future.

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