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to your everyday life*

Tom Morris, Ph.D.
Author of
If Aristotle Ran General Motors



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by Tom Morris, Ph.D.



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About the Author

Tom Morris has recently become one of the most active business speakers in America due to his unusual ability to bring the greatest wisdom of the past into the challenges we face now. A native of North Carolina, Tom is a graduate of the University of the North Carolina (Chapel Hill) and has been honored, along with Michael Jordan, as a recipient of its “Distinguished Young Alumnus Award.” He holds a Ph.D. in both Philosophy and Religious Studies from Yale University and for 15 years served as a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, where he quickly became its most popular teacher, in many years having as much as an eighth of the entire student body in his classes. He is now Chairman of the Morris Institute for Human Values in Wilmington, NC.

Tom’s twelfth book, *True Success: A New Philosophy of Excellence*, catapulted him over the walls of academia and launched him into a new adventure as a public philosopher and advisor to the corporate world. Recent audiences include General Motors, Ford Motor Company, Merrill Lynch, GTE, IBM, the U.S. Air Force, Price Waterhouse, Arthur Andersen, Campbell’s Soup, Target Stores, The Dayton Hudson Corporation, Schlotzky’s Delis, NBC Sports, Business Week Magazine, The Bayer Corporation, Deloitte and Touche, Federated Investors, American Funds, Taco Bell, The American Heart Association, the Young Presidents Organization, and the World Presidents Organization, along with many of the

largest national and international associations. His most recent book, prior to *Philosophy For Dummies*, is called *If Aristotle Ran General Motors: The New Soul of Business*.

Known by his Notre Dame students as “TV Morris,” this modern scholar is a former rock guitarist. He is also the first philosopher in history to appear in network TV commercials, where he has served as the national spokesman for Winnie the Pooh, Disney Home Videos, as well as being the only thinker ever to engage in early morning philosophy with Regis and Kathie Lee. He has appeared on CNBC’s early morning show *Business Today*, as well as on the NBC *Today Show* with Matt Lauer. Tom is known for bringing the insights of the great thinkers into the drama of everyday life with high energy and good humor. His message is helping to change lives and revolutionize business practices everywhere.

Dedication

To Mary, Sara, and Matt — the greatest possible family!

Author's Acknowledgments

I'd like to thank all the many dummies who helped make this book possible. Just kidding. They are all wise people. I'm especially thankful to Tami Booth, who suggested it and Kelly Ewing, who edited it. Reid Boates, my literary agent, encouraged me regularly to write at blinding speed and helped me to get flowers to my acquiring editor when I was late on a deadline.

I thank the thousands of Notre Dame undergraduates who helped me think through all these topics over a period of 15 years with their questions, comments, and loud laughter, as well as their occasional looks of utter perplexity. I'm also grateful to the many people in my business audiences around the country who have told me that they were thrilled that I was writing a book with this title — I think they typically wanted it as a present for their bosses.

I want to give the greatest thanks possible to my family, who supported me every day in a very intensive time of writing. But not even my tight deadlines put a stop to our beach walks, trips to guitar stores, and family snack times. My wife Mary, my daughter Sara, and my son Matt make me glad that I'm a philosopher, with no real schedule whatsoever. They offer me all sorts of fun and make wise comments on whatever subject I bring up. To all of them it is dedicated.

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Introduction

I only wish that philosophy might come before our eyes in all her unity, just as the whole expanse of the firmament is spread out for us to gaze upon! It would be a sight closely resembling that of the firmament. For then surely philosophy would ravish all mortals with love for her; we should abandon all those things which, in our ignorance of what is great, we believe to be great.

— Seneca (First century Stoic philosopher)

Philosophy For Dummies? What a concept! Is this the ultimate oxymoron, a contradiction in terms, or at least an impossibility in the making, an exercise in futility, on a par with Advanced Calculus For Toddlers, or Neurosurgery For Nit Wits?

No. Not at all. The ancient philosopher Socrates (fifth century, B.C.) thought that, when it comes to the Ultimate Questions, we all start off as dummies. But if we are humbly aware of how little we actually know, then we can really begin to learn.

In fact, Plato (circa 428–347 B.C.), the close student of Socrates, passed on an interesting story about this. He tells us Socrates had learned that the Oracle at Delphi had proclaimed him to be the wisest man in Athens.

Shocked at this announcement, he began to search out the men of Athens known for their wisdom and began to question them closely. He found out very quickly that, on truly important and basic issues, they didn't really know very much of what they were thought to know, and what they themselves believed that they knew. On the basis of this experience, he slowly came to understand that his own wisdom must consist in realizing how little he really knew about the things that matter most, and how important it was to find out whatever we can about these issues. It's not the complacent and self-assured intellectual who exemplifies wisdom, but the genuinely curious, open-minded seeker of truth.

Bill, reading aloud about Socrates:

"The only true knowledge is knowing that you know nothing."

Ted, stunned:

"Dude — That's US!"

— Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure

The word philosophy just means "love of wisdom." This is easy to understand when you realize that love is a commitment, and wisdom is just insight about living. Philosophy is, at its best, a passionate commitment to pursuing and embracing the most fundamental truths and insightful perspectives about life.

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) also had an insight we can use here. This great thinker, Plato's long time student, and

tutor to Alexander the Great (way back at a tender young age, when he was still just Alexander the Average) once said “Philosophy begins in wonder.” And he was right. If we allow ourselves to really wonder about our lives, about those things that we take for granted, and about those big questions that we usually manage to ignore during the busyness of our daily schedules, we are beginning to act as true philosophers. If we think hard about these things, and discipline our reasoning in such a way as to make real progress, we are beginning to act as good philosophers. But we can’t really live philosophically without acting in accordance with our insights. To be philosophers in the deepest sense, we must put our wisdom to work.

He is not wise to me who is wise in words only, but he who is wise in deeds.

— St. Gregory

About This Book

I’ve spent a good number of my years on earth wrestling with the questions that I will raise in this book. At the University of North Carolina, as an undergraduate, I majored in religion but took the equivalent of a double major in philosophy, turning my senior honors thesis in the philosophy of religion into my first published book. At Yale, I spent six years becoming only the second person ever to earn two master’s degrees and a joint Ph.D.

between the two departments of Philosophy and Religious Studies. I wanted to leave no ultimate intellectual stone unturned. My doctoral dissertation formed the basis of what would become my next two books and launched me into an international adventure of questioning and understanding that form the deep background of what I intend to cover with you in this book.

The 15 philosophical books that I've written before this one provide the scholarly side of my preparation for this book. But the intellectual action in the lecture halls and seminar rooms of the University of Notre Dame, where I taught for 15 years, is what really began to rev my philosophical engine and show me the practical effect of great ideas in launching a good life.

In that time as a professor of philosophy at Notre Dame, I sometimes taught as much as an eighth of the student body in a given year. My most popular course was my freshman Philosophy 101, Introduction to Philosophy. It was anything but a death march through the history of philosophy — no plugging along, putting one footnote in front of another, dragging my charges through names and theories, dates, and titles regardless of their relevance or interest to modern life. My students and I took, by contrast, a lively, energetic look, filled with all appropriate drama and humor, at the fundamental issues that pose the ultimate context for the most basic understandings of life.

Philosophical questions often deal with serious issues, but we don't need to be particularly somber in our approach to them. We can actually have fun thinking about things that matter. In my Notre Dame course, for example, I'd tell as many stories derived from the wild and weird events of everyday life at the end of the century as I'd take from the lives of the great philosophers throughout previous centuries. Personal tales from my own wild trajectory through this world often provided just the right imaginative boost necessary to help first-time philosophers see the importance of a particular philosophical question about life — and even glimpse the best path toward its resolution.

Philosophy is so awesome. Who would have guessed?

— A Notre Dame undergraduate

Since those days in the classroom, I've been living an incredible adventure as a public philosopher, engaged in soul searching and world-view building with people from all around the world and in nearly every walk of life. I've spoken to thousands of company presidents, military officers, and educators, as well as tens of thousands of managers, small-business owners, and front-line workers. And I've gleaned much more from them all than I ever imagined.

Extensive work in the world of business has shown me especially how many extremely smart people live in our time — those who regularly show great intelligence and

even brilliance in their professional activities and who don't want to feel like dummies in dealing with the ultimate issues of life, even though they may never get to think about such concepts in any extended or disciplined way. In these pages, I intend to use everything that I've learned to help you bridge some of those huge gaps that too often exist between academic philosophy and the practical concerns of real life that everyone faces daily.

The greatest philosophers always seek to understand life. They want to attain the deepest perspective they can about this world and about any other world that may exist. They take nothing for granted but question and probe in search of illumination, insight, and what some call "enlightenment." We all want to understand the context within which we live and move and exist. And getting at least a good start on that task is the humble purpose of this book.

*In the country of the blind, the one
eyed man is king.*

— Michael Apostolius

You don't need to be a world-class visionary to benefit from looking more closely at the fundamental issues of your life. Any new measure of understanding is a move in the right direction.

In our look at the great philosophical questions, we will allow ourselves to ask basic and probing questions about what it is to be a human being in this world, what life is