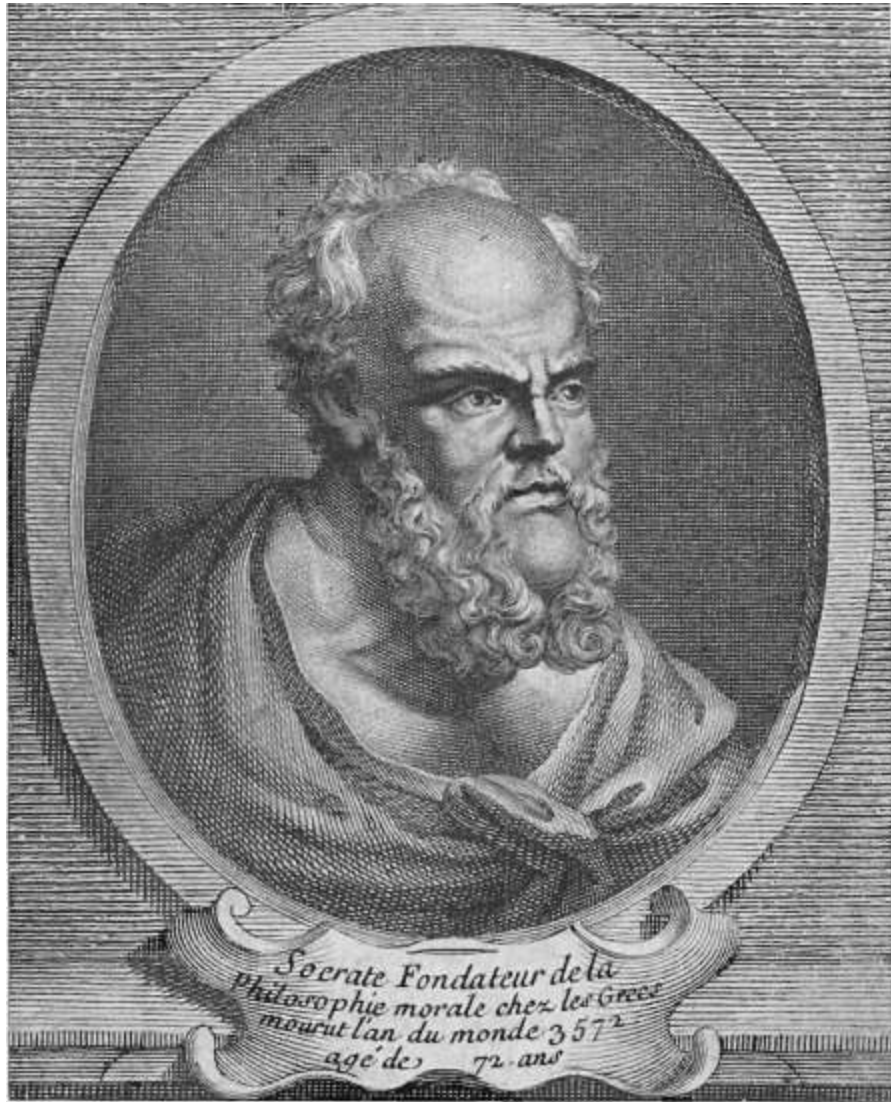


ARISTOTLE · JAMES · NIETZSCHE
RUSSELL · BERGSON · SPENCER
LOCKE · PLATO · CROCE · BACON
VOLTAIRE · SANTAYANA · SPINOZA
KANT · DEWEY · SCHOPENHAUER



The Story of Philosophy --- **Will Durant**

The lives and opinions of
the world's greatest philosophers
from Plato to John Dewey



Socrates

TO MY WIFE

Grow strong, my comrade . . . that you may stand

Unshaken when I fall; that I may know

The shattered fragments of my song will come

At last to finer melody in you;

That I may tell my heart that you begin

Where passing I leave off, and fathom more.

PEEFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

APOLOGIA PRO UBRO SUO

My publishers have asked me to use the occasion given by a new edition of *The Story of Philosophy* to discuss the general question of "outlines" and to consider some of the shortcomings of the volume. I am glad of this opportunity to acknowledge these, and to express with (M the weakness of mere words the gratityde that 1 must always feel for the generosity with which, despite so many defects, the American public has received this book.

The "outlines" came because a million voices called for them* Human knowledge had become unmanageably vaH; every science had begotten a dozen more, each subtler than the rest; the telescope revealed stars and systems beyond the mind of man to number or to name; geology spoke in terms of million* of years, where rpen before had thought in terms of thousands; physics found a universem the atom, and biology found a microcosm in the cell; physiology discovered inexhaustible mystery in every organ, and psychology in every dream; anthropology reconstructed the unsuspected antiquity of man, archeology unearthed buried cities and forgotten states, history proved all history false, and painted a ccmvas which only a Spengler or an Eduard Meyer could vision as a whole; theology crumbled, and political theory cracked; invention complicated life and war, and economic creeds overturned governments and inflamed the world; philosophy itself, which had once summoned all sciences to its aid in making a coherent image of the world and an alluring picture of the good, found its task of coordination too stupendous for its courage, ran

away from all these battlefronts of truth, and hid itself in recondite and narrow lanes, timidly secure from the issues and responsibilities of life. Human knowledge had become too great for the human mind.

All that remained was the scientific specialist, who knew "more and more about less and less," and the philosophical speculator, who knew less and less about more and more. The specialist put on blinders in order to shut out from his vision all the world but one little spot, to which he glued his nose. Perspective was lost. "Facts" replaced understanding; and knowledge, split into a thousand isolated fragments, no longer generated wisdom. Every science, and every branch of philosophy, developed a technical terminology intelligible only to its exclusive devotees; as men learned more about the world, they found themselves ever less capable of expressing to their educated fellow-men what it was that they had learned. The gap between life and knowledge grew wider and wider; those who governed would not understand those who thought, and those who wanted to know could not understand those who knew. In the midst of unprecedented learning popular ignorance flourished, and chose its exemplars to rule the great cities of the world; in the midst of sciences endowed and enthroned as never before, new religions were born every day, and old superstitions recaptured the ground they had lost. The common man found himself forced to choose between a scientific priesthood mumbling unintelligible pessimism, and a theological priesthood mumbling incredible hopes. /,

In this situation the function of the professional teacher was clear. It should have been to mediate between the specialist and the nation; to learn the specialist's language, as the specialist had learned nature's, in order to break down the barriers between knowledge and need, and find for new truths old terms that the illiterate people might understand. For if knowledge became too great for communication, it would degenerate into scholasticism, and the weak acceptance of authority; mankind would slip into a new age of faith, worship-

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ing at a respectful distance its new priests; and civilization, which had hoped to raise itself upon education disseminated far and wide, would be left precariously based upon a technical erudition that had become the monopoly of an esoteric class monastically isolated from the world by the high birth rate of terminology. No wonder that all the world applauded

when James Harvey Robinson sounded the call for the removal of these barriers and the humanization of modern knowledge.

v The first "outlines" the first efforts at the humanization of knowledge, were Plato's Dialogues. The pundits possibly know that the Master wrote two sets of works—one in technical language for his students at the Academy; the other a group of popular dialogues designed to lure the average literate Athenian into philosophy's "dear delight." It did not seem to Plato any insult to philosophy that it should be transformed into literature, realized as drama, and beautified with style; nor any derogation to its dignity that it should apply itself, even intelligibly, to living problems of morality and the state. By the humor of history, his technical works were lost, and his popular works remain. By the irony of history it is these popular dialogues that have given Plato his reputation in the schools.

For us, however, the career of the outline begins with H. G. Wells. The historians did not quite know what to do with *The Outline of History*; Professor Schapiro described it as full of errors, and a liberal education. It was full of errors, as any book of large scope is bound to be; but it was an astonishing and stimulating performance for one mind. The journalistic genius of Mr. Wells had tied the volumes up with the movement towards international peace, and had entered them as an important team in the "race between education and catastrophe." No one wanted catastrophe, and every one bought the book. History became popular, and historians be-

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came alarmed. Now it would be necessary for them to write as interestingly as H.G. Wells.

Strange to say, two of them did. Professor Brewster, of Chicago and Egypt, revised and improved an old text-book, and Professor Robinson did the same; an enterprising publishing firm gathered their work into two handsome volumes, gave them a captivating title—*The Human Adventure*—and issued the best outline of all, a masterpiece of exposition as authoritative as a German and as clear as a German. Nothing in their field has equaled those volumes to date.

Meanwhile Hendrik Willem van Loon had romped over the same ground with a pen in one hand, a pencil in the other, and a twinkle in his eyes. He cared nothing for dignity, and loved a joke surpassing well; he went laughing down the centuries, and pointed his moral with drawings and smiles. Adults bought *The Story of Mankind* for their children, and surreptitiously read it themselves. The world was becoming scandalously informed about history.

The appetite of the layman grew by what it fed on. There were in America millions of men and women who had been unable to go to college, and who thirsted for the findings of history and science; even those who had gone through college showed a moderate hunger for knowledge. When John Macy published *The Story of the World's Literature* thousands welcomed it as a genial and illuminating survey of a fascinating field. And when *The Story of Philosophy* appeared it had the good fortune to catch this wave of curiosity on the rise, and to be lifted to an undreamed-of popularity. Readers were astonished to find that philosophy was interesting because it was, literally, a matter of life and death. They passed along the word to their friends, and soon it became the fashion to praise, to buy, even, occasionally, to read, this book that had been written for a few. All in all it was such a success as no author who has known it once can ever hope to know again.

Then came the food. Outline followed outline, "story" followed "history"; science and art, religion and law, had their

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Nomographers and Becker's slight essay was avidly transformed into *The Story of Civilization*, an author produced in a volume an outline of all knowledge, thereby making the work of van Loon and Macy, Slosson's. Breasted and the rest superfluous. The public appetite was quickly satiated; critics and professors complained of superficiality and a lack of resentment set in which reached every outline from the last to the first. As quickly as it had come the fashion changed; no one dared any longer say a word for the humanization of knowledge; their denunciation of outlines, was now the easy road to critical repute; it became the style to speak with a delicate superiority of my non-fiction book that could be understood. The snob movement in literature began.

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Many of the criticisms, were disagreeably just. The Story of Philosophy was written through many defects. First of all it was incomplete- The total omission of scholastic philosophy was an outrage for only those who had suffered from it at college and university and presented it thereafter as rather a discredited theology than an honest philosophy. It is true that in some cases (Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Spinoza, Voltaire) the exposition, of doctrine was more complete than the histories of philosophy (in spite of their length) and it is true that the first part of the

book is not a complete history of philosophy. It is an attempt to humanize knowledge by centering the story of speculative thought around certain dominant personalities. Certain lesser figures have been omitted in order that those

selected might have the space required to make them live.

< (Preface.) ...;""! ^ ..>•-•.■.;-••.

Nevertheless the omissions remained. The worst sin of the book—though the critics do not seem to have noticed, it—was, the omission of Chinese and Hindu philosophy. Even a "story"

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of philosophy that begins with Socrates, and has nothing to say about Lao-tze and Confucius, Mencius and Chwang-tze, Buddha and Shanhara, is provincially incomplete. 1 As for the word Story, which has since been so abused with use, it was chosen partly to indicate that the record would concern itself chiefly with the more vital philosophers, partly to convey the sense that the development of thought was a romance as stirring as any in history.

No apology is offered for the neglect of epistemology. That dismal science received its due in the chapter on Kant where for forty pages the reader was invited to consider the puzzles of perception. This chapter should have

pleased the young pundit, for it came very near to obscurity. (However, one professor of philosophy, in a Midwest university, sent me the information that he had been teaching Kant for fifteen years, and had never understood Kant's meaning until he read this elementary chapter.) For the rest, the book suggested wonderfully that the feature of the knowledge process was but one *) upon the many proof that this single problem

was unfit to absorb the attention which the German had lavished upon it; and that its weary exploitation was utterly responsible for the decadence of philosophy. The French have not yielded to this craze for epistemology to the detriment of moral and political historical and religious philosophy; and today even the German recovering from the Hear Keyserling : M Philosophy is Essentially the completion of science in the synthesis of wisdom. . . . Epistemology, phenomenology, logic, etc., certainly are important branches of science." (Profoundly; Jwydreto science, like chemistry or anatomy.) "But it was an unmitigated evil that as the result of this, the way for the living synthesis should have disappeared." (Creative Understanding, New York, 1989, p. 125.) This from a German — a Daniel come to judgment. And Spengler describes the earlier Chinese philosophers, down

. *The first volume, of The Story of Civilization will attempt to atone for this omission. ■-' ' • •■*" ' " | "' '■ ■' • " :

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to Confucius, as "statesmen, regents, lawgivers, like Pythagoras and Parmenides, like Hobbes and Leibniz. » . . They were sturdy philosophers for whom epistemology was the knowledge of the important relations of actual life." (Decline of the West, vol. i, p. 4£.) Doubtless now that epistemology is dying in Germany, it will be exported to America, as a fit return for the gift of democracy.

The Chinese philosophers were not only averse to epistemology, they had an almost Gallic disdain for prolonged metaphysics. . No young metaphysician could admit that Confucius is a philosopher, for he says nothing about metaphysics, and less about epistemology; he is as positivistic as Spencer or Comte; his concern is always for morals and the

state. Worse than that y he is disreputably intelligible; arid nothing could be so damaging to a philosopher. But we "modems" have become so accustomed to wmdy verbiage in philosophy that when philosophy is presented without the verbiage we can with difficulty recognize it. One must pay a penalty for having a prejudice against obscurity.

The Story tried to salt itself with a seasoning of humor, riot only because wisdom is not wise if it secures away merriment, but because a sense of humor, being born of perspective, bears a near kinship to philosophy; each is the soul of the other. But this appears to have displeased the pwndits; nothing so hurt the book with them as its smiles. A reputation for humor is disastrous to statesmen and philosophers: Germany could not forgive Schopenhauer his story of Unzehnam, amd only France has recognized the depth behind the wit and brillicmce of Voltaire.

I trust that the book never misled its readers into supposing that by reading it they would become philosophers overnight, or that they would be saved the trouble, or pleasure, of reading the philosophers themselves. God knows there is no short-cut to knowledge; after forty years of seeking her one finds "Truth" still veiled, and what she shows of herself most disconcerting. Instead of aiming to be a substitute for philoso*

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pherSjthe Story explicitly offered itself as m introduction an& an invitation; it quoted the philosophers lavishly, so that the taste for them might linger when th&book was closed; time and again it prodded the redder to the original texts (e. g., on pp. m, 67 y 121, 289< 881,425, 438)1 and warniitg was given that m>e reading of t^ Cf.p.186:

, Spinoza i\$ not to be read, he is to be studied; you must approach him as you would approach Euclid, recognizing that in these brief two hundred pages a man has written down Ms lifetime's thought with stole sculptury of everything superfluous. Do not think to find its core by running over it Mpidly)' .'■.■ . Read the bobk toot all at once, but in small portions ai many sitting*. And having finished it, consider Jhat you have but begun to understand it. Read then some commentary, like Pollock 9 s Spinoza, or Martineau 9 s Study. of Spinoza, or, better, bothk Finally, read the Ethics

again; it will be a new book to you. When you have finished it a second time you will remain forever a lover of philosophy*

It is comforting to learn that the sales of the philosophical classics increased some twohundred per cent, after the publication of the Story. Many publishers have issued new editions, particularly of Plato, Spinoza, Voltaire, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. A Mgh official of the New York Public Library, who asks to be unnamed, reports that

ever since the publication of the Story of Philosophy We have had a wide and increasing demand from the public for the philosophical classics, and our stock of them in the branch libraries has been gradually increased. . . . Formerly, current books about philosophy were purchased in small quantities for the system; but in the last two or three years a readable new book about philosophy is purchased very generally at the outset, in anticipation of a demand which eventually develops, and quickly at that.

Let us not, then, be ashamed of teaching the people. Those jealous ones who would guard their knowledge from the world

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have only themselves to blame if their exclusiveness and their barbarous terminology have led the world to seek in books, in lectures, and in adult education, the instruction which they themselves have failed to give. Let them be grateful that their halting efforts are aided by amateurs who love life enough to let it humanize their teaching. Perhaps each kind of teacher can be of aid to the other: the cautious scholar to check our enthusiasm with accuracy, and the enthusiast to pour warmth and blood into the fruits of scholarship. Between us we might build up in America an audience fit to listen to geniuses, and therefore ready to produce them. We are all imperfect teachers, but we may be forgiven if we have advanced the matter a little, and have done our best. We announce the prologue, and retire; after us better players will come.

THE STORY OF PHILOSOPHY has been translated into German, French, Swedish, Danish, Jugoslavian, Chinese, Japanese and Hungarian. The