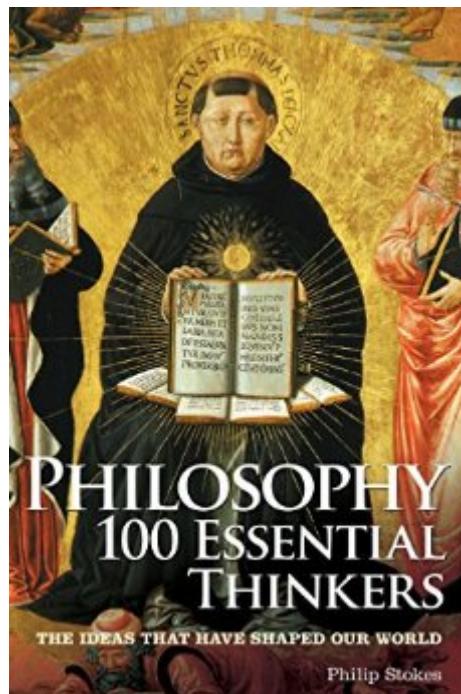


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Philosophy 100 Essential Thinkers



Synopsis

Who am I? What is justice? What does it mean to live a good life? Many of the fundamental questions of philosophy are questions that we begin to ask ourselves as young adults when we look at the world around us, at ourselves, and try to make sense of things. This engaging and accessible book invites the reader to explore the questions and arguments of philosophy through the work of one hundred of the greatest thinkers within the Western intellectual tradition. Covering philosophical, scientific, political and religious thought over a period of 2500 years, Philosophy will serve as an excellent guide for those interested in knowing about individual thinkers--such as Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau and Nietzsche, to name just a few--and the questions and observations that inspired them to write. By presenting individual thinkers, details of their lives and the concerns and circumstances that motivated them, this book makes philosophy come to life as a relevant and meaningful approach to thinking about the contemporary world. A lucid and engaging book full of thought-provoking quotations, as well as clear explanations and definitions, Philosophy is sure to encourage students and laymen alike to investigate further.

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Customer Reviews

I found Philip Stokes' *Philosophy: 100 Essential Thinkers* to be a real gem—the writing is clear, the content substantial, and the organization precise. Serving as a brief overview of Western philosophy, Stokes' work captures meaningful snapshots of a 100 different philosophers in 382 pages—designating about three pages to each thinker. Divided into 22 sections, *Philosophy: 100 Essential Thinkers* categorizes each philosopher by camps (the Presocratics, the Eleatics, the Academics, the Atomists, the Cynics, the Stoics, the Sceptics, the Neoplatonists, the Christians, the Scholastics, the Age of Science, the Rationalists, the Empiricists, the Idealists, the Liberals, the Evolutionists, the Pragmatists, the Materialists, the Existentialists, the Linguistic Turn, the Postmodernists, and the New Scientists). Since a three page presentation can only serve as an introduction to a person's work, Stoke's makes every sentence count. He introduces and explains their major ideas, along with the context they lived in, who they were influenced by, and in turn who they later influenced. An important reason I chose this book is "the Linguistic Turn". In this section, capturing philosophers from the 20th century, Stokes describes thirteen philosophers—by far more than any other category. "The Linguistic Turn" describes present day, mainstream academic philosophy in America—an area of philosophy I am unfamiliar with for several reasons, mostly because I have full-heartedly followed a lineage of philosophy, which we can call "Integral" or "Holistic", that has rarely entered mainstream academics. I find leaving out this lineage of integral philosophy—including thinkers such as de Chardin, Grof, Wilber, Laszlo, Sheldrake, etc—to be a short-coming of the book; after Hegel, it doesn't include any of these thinkers, except for the surprising inclusions of both Bergson and Whitehead. All these integral thinkers embraced a panpsychist perspective, a major element in my life, but not following this path is precisely why I chose this book, because, like the mainstream, it ended up following a different philosophical lineage than myself—one grounded in materialism and disembodied rationality. I felt angry while reading "the Linguistic Turn", and becoming aware of the state of modern day philosophy. Up until the 20th century, what I saw reading the book was the unfolding of Western philosophy, moving from thinker to thinker—a beautiful story taken in about 80 different snapshots, each person bringing in the richness of different ideas—until we get to the logic and linguistics after Existentialism—then it all gets stale. Before this point, whether or not I agreed with each thinker of the more than 2,500 year movement, each passionately made metaphysical and social

statements and authentically tried to understand themselves, the universe, and humanity—many making deeply meaningful contribution to knowledge and society. In comparison, 20th century philosophy—reduced to nothing more than meaning in language—seems like a massive detour; and arguably made no significant contribution to our culture. I had an impression of the absurdity philosophy has been reduced to in higher education, but now I know; I feel thoroughly disappointed. I am shocked what Western society has done to what I consider the most beautiful human discipline—we need to resuscitate what once was the greatest container for human knowledge and wisdom. That being said, by summarizing different pivotal thinkers that have influenced much of what we know, this book has much to offer. I believe this book is a must read for every philosopher—not because it brings an over-arching philosophical perspective like *Passion of the Western Mind*, or other books presenting a story of philosophy, but because it serves as a great companion to such books—since the writer delivers no philosophical perspective of his own, but simply gives a Wikipedia like description of each thinker. I have come to see that Western philosophy, as a discipline, carries a story—and includes its own myths, like that of Socrates and Galileo—and this book serves to deepen one's understanding of the characters in the play. For a long time I have wanted greater familiarity with the players we see in philosophical works, and reading a book on each person takes too long; *Philosophy: 100 Essential Thinkers* helps fill in some of the cracks. The only off-putting quality of the book is its large 14 size font; it makes the book seem less serious—though I am sure it was done to make the book look user friendly and accessible to the lay person. Still, the book definitely does not lack in content. Overall, it is an enjoyable read and serves as a great introduction to 100 lives—including biographical content, great works, and original ideas—that made major intellectual contributions in the evolution of Western society.

I am reviewing the Kindle edition of this book which currently sells for less than the price of a cup of coffee. Price alone wouldn't warrant a positive review (there's plenty of junk on sale for a dollar), but happily this is a serviceable little book for neophytes and philosophy students alike. The book has an active table of contents and is fully searchable with hyperlinks laced generously through the text referring to earlier and later chapters, as well as footnotes. The 100 philosophers are chosen judiciously (partisans can quarrel about glaring omissions and dubious inclusions, but in general choices are non-controversial) and presented more or less in chronological order. More or less, I say, because the author has thought to present the individual philosophers under general headings, so occasionally chronology bows down to conceptual structure. The headings include, for example

The Presocratics; The Eleatics; The Academics; The Atomists; The Cynics; Stoics; The Skeptics; Neoplatonists ; Scholastics etc. until we reach The Existentialists; The linguistic Turn; The Postmodernists and The New Scientists (Godel, Turing, Kuhn, Quine et al.) Though these spoonfuls on each philosopher are very broad overviews, they are surprisingly useful as either quick references or refreshers. Most pleasing for me was the generous links from chapter to chapter. Let's say you are reading "Derrida" and see a reference to linguist Saussure or anthropologist Levi-Strauss. No need for wikipedia if you don't know them or grasp the reference. Just click on the names ("Saussure") and voila, you're back to the chapter about him. I had fun bouncing around, and seeing these connections, particularly for authors I hadn't read for some time. As someone in the field of philosophy, I view this as one of several handy reference books in my Kindle Fire. I wouldn't read it cover to cover, but from what I have read, there are no egregious errors that I noticed, so curious readers, 1st or 2nd year undergrads and even the more advanced can shell out the 99 cents with--I would bet--no fear of buyer's remorse. A handy little e-book.

Though yet to complete reading the book, I liked the way the topic is covered chronologically from the early days to current thoughts. Having done some courses and also works of some philosophers, I found this tome handy and simply terrific.

This is a clear, understandable book that makes sometimes abstract, opaque and complex ideas accessible to the non expert. If you are a person that wants to acquire a basic knowledge of the fundamental questions of philosophy, you should find this book very helpful, perhaps even essential. I especially enjoyed the author's presentation of several different intellectual disciplines such as philosophical, scientific, political and religious thought. The giants of philosophy such as Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau and Nietzsche, are included. However, non traditional philosophical thinkers including Marx, Darwin, Einstein and Locke are also included. This expands the scope of philosophy and gives the reader a wider context and perspective than might otherwise be the case. The prose is clear and straightforward and the author presents the ideas in an understandable way. The individual portraits are concise with pertinent details. As a result, the author makes philosophy come to life as a relevant and meaningful part of a thinking person's existence. I found this book to be informative, engaging and thought-provoking and an excellent primer to what could be a subject that is way too abstract to have any relevance in daily life.

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