



A History of Western Philosophy: Ancient and Medieval (vol. 1)

Norman Geisler

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The term philosophy originally meant the love of wisdom. Eventually, it became the name given to the inquiry into the first principles and causes of things from the standpoint of human reason. Therefore, there are many reasons for studying philosophy—it is the history of thought.

First of all, one can see farther when standing on the shoulders of giants. The great philosophers of antiquity are truly the intellectual giants bridging the abyss between the past and the present. Unfortunately, the thoughts of the earlier thinkers were often conflicting and occasionally incorrect. Nevertheless, we can often learn from the errors of these great minds. There is a lot of truth to be learned from a significant error.

What is more, great minds produce great thoughts, and great thoughts are worth thinking again. Our mind is enriched by following in the intellectual footsteps of those that have gone before us.

Philosophy provides a basis of thought in virtually every other discipline. For example, one cannot truly know science without understanding the philosophy of science. Nor can one know theology without understanding the philosophical principles that it is built upon.

Your worldview is a philosophical construct. Because you view everything in the world through the lens of your worldview, you must thoroughly examine and completely understand the philosophical principles that frame this lens. Therefore, that with which we think, our worldview, is more important than that about which we think, our world; the former determines our comprehension of the latter. Philosophy is the basis upon which we build our thoughts about life.

The basic areas of philosophy—logic, epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics—unfold before us in the history of thought. Hence, an understanding of the history of philosophy brings with it an understanding of the diverse areas of philosophical thought. With the crucial knowledge of what the great minds before us have thought concerning the critical topics of life, we can better develop our own ideas about our world.

From a religious point of view, all theological, biblical, and hermeneutical issues are rooted in philosophy and its presuppositions. Without a knowledge of the history of philosophy, we cannot properly understand and resolve these issues.

Finally, the study of the history of thought is a worthy and rewarding enterprise all within itself. As Aristotle said, humans are rational animals. As such, we are capable of rational thought. On the other hand, ideas, important or petty, good or bad, have consequences. One need think only of men like Hitler, Stalin, and Mao to confirm the effect of a single man's ideas.

In view of all these reasons, you, the reader, could not spend your intellectual efforts more profitably than in the study of the unfolding of the history of great ideas. We do not live in a vacuum, thus, we must not think in a vacuum. With the preparation of the thoughts of those that have gone before us, we can influence the thoughts of those that come after us. Welcome to the history of philosophy. Enter, and experience the power of thought at your fingertips.

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