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ROOTS of WISDOM

A Tapestry of Philosophical Traditions

Helen Buss Mitchell

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Roots *of* Wisdom

A Tapestry of Philosophical Traditions

EIGHTH EDITION

Helen Buss Mitchell
Howard Community College

Australia • Brazil • Mexico • Singapore • United Kingdom • United States

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Antiquity to Pre-Modern Era

3000 B.C.E. | 1200 B.C.E. | 600 B.C.E. | 300 B.C.E.

WESTERN TRADITION

Pre-Socratic Cosmologists

(6th century B.C.E.)

Classical Greece

ca. 490 Protagoras

ca. 470 Socrates

ca. 428 Plato

384 Aristotle

ca. 4th century B.C.E. Perictyone

4th century B.C.E. Diotima of Manitea

EASTERN TRADITION

ca. 605 Lao-tzu

ca. 563 Siddhārtha Gautama (Buddha)

ca. 551 K'ung Fu-tzu (Confucius)

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN CIVILIZATION

2680–2565 Great Pyramids built

ca. 1500 Moses leads Hebrew exodus from Egypt

Before 10,000 Migration to Americas from Siberia

ca. 1500–450 Vedas, earliest literature of India, composed

ca. 1000 Chavin culture in Peru; Olmec culture in Mexico

GREEK AND ROMAN CIVILIZATION

ca. 600 Egyptian *Book of the Dead*

323 Death of Alexander the Great

31 Caesar Augustus becomes first Roman emperor

221–206 Ch'in Empire unifies China

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Antiquity to Pre-Modern Era

300 C.E. | 600 C.E. | 900 C.E. | 1200 C.E.

Early Christian Era

327 Macrina

354 Augustine of Hippo

355 Hypatia of Alexandria

Muslim Philosophers

870 Al-Farabi

1126 Averröes

Middle Ages

1033 Anselm of Canterbury

1098 Hildegard of Bingen

1225 Thomas Aquinas

1347 Catherine of Siena

ca. 45 Pan Chao

DARK AGES | MIDDLE AGES | RENAISSANCE

ca. 29 Death of Jesus

70 Romans destroy temple at Jerusalem

325 Council of Nicaea

ca. 476 Fall of Roman empire

529 St. Benedict founds monastery at Monte Cassino

632 Muhammad founds Islam

1150 Founding of University of Paris

ca. 100–300 Buddhism spreads to China

550 Buddhism enters Japan

ca. 730 Invention of printing in China

1100–1500 Islam spreads to eastern Europe, India, and southeast Asia

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Modern and Post-Modern Eras

1500 C.E. | **1600 C.E.** | **1700 C.E.**

CONTINENTAL

Continental Rationalists

1596 René Descartes

1632 Baruch Benedict de Spinoza

1646 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz

European Enlightenment

1712 Jean-Jacques Rousseau

1724 Immanuel Kant

BRITISH

1588 Thomas Hobbes

1759 Mary Wollstonecraft

1631 Anne Finch, Viscountess Conway

British Empiricists

1632 John Locke

1685 George Berkeley

1711 David Hume

AMERICAN

ca. 1650 Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

REFORMATION

1517 Martin Luther begins Protestant Reformation

1543 Copernican theory of solar system published

1492 Columbus discovers “New World”: beginnings of European expansion and colonialism

SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION

1609 Galileo constructs astronomical telescope

1665 Isaac Newton formulates law of gravity

1619 First African slaves in North America (Virginia)

AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

1751–1772 Publication of French *Encylopédie*, grand attempt to summarize all rational knowledge

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Modern and Post-Modern Eras

1800 C.E. | 1900 C.E. | 2000 C.E.

1770 G. W. F. Hegel
1775 Friedrich von Schelling
1788 Arthur Schopenhauer
1813 Søren Kierkegaard
1818 Karl Marx
1823 Clarisse Coignet
1844 Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche
1889 Martin Heidegger
1905 Jean-Paul Sartre
1908 Simone de Beauvoir

British Utilitarianism

1748 Jeremy Bentham
1806 John Stuart Mill
ca 1807 Harriet Taylor Mill
1872 Bertrand Russel
1889 Ludwig Wittgenstein

1815 Elizabeth Cady Stanton
1820 Susan B. Anthony
1860 Charlotte Perkins Gilman

American Pragmatism

1839 Charles Sanders Peirce
1842 William James
1859 John Dewey
1921 John Rawls
1938 Robert Nozick

African American

1868 W. E. B. Du Bois
1925 Malcolm X
1929 Martin Luther King, Jr.
1953 Cornel West

AGE OF REVOLUTION

1776 U.S. Declaration of Independence

1789 French Revolution

1808–1826 Latin American revolutions overthrow European rule

INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

1859 Charles Darwin publishes theory of evolution

1865 13th Amendment ends slavery in United States

1905 Albert Einstein publishes special theory of relativity

1920 19th Amendment gives women right to vote in United States

POST-INDUSTRIAL AGE

1945 First all-electronic computer; U.S. drops atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki

1957 First artificial satellite (Sputnik)

1967 First human heart transplant

1978 First "test tube" baby

1939–1984 Overthrow of European colonialism in Near East, Africa, India, and southeast Asia

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In memory of Ruth and Joe, who believed in me from the beginning.

For Joe and Jason, who supported me to the end.

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Preface

As we learn in our first course in philosophy, the concerns of this ancient discipline are those of people everywhere—who we are, how we know, how we should live. Drawing on what Huston Smith calls the world's wisdom traditions offers the teacher of philosophy rich resources for addressing the challenges and opportunities of the present age. It is in this spirit that I have written *Roots of Wisdom: A Tapestry of Philosophical Traditions.*

As its subtitle implies, this is an introductory text in World Philosophy, designed for the beginning student. Recognizing the global village in which we now live, it places the worldviews of many cultures in conversation with one another, addressing specific philosophical topics. On the ontology of human nature, for example, we study Western claims of human uniqueness juxtaposed with the Taoist celebration of our similarity to other beings and the traditional African insistence that we are members of a community before we are individuals. Modern virtue ethics brings the voices of women philosophers into the discussion, and we consider questions of justice in the context of contemporary struggles for equality of citizen rights—for African Americans, Latinos/Latinas, and for all women.

In addition to broadening the philosophical conversation to include many voices, I was also motivated to write this text because, as a professor, I spent a lot of time saying, "What the author means is…" My goal is to address the basic philosophical questions in a straightforward, conversational style, offering references to popular culture as anchors and drawing students into the discussion. The professor is then free to build on this base, adding new material or going more deeply into specific concepts.

To paraphrase Aristotle, all people desire to know. Yet, for nearly all students, philosophy is a foreign language, both in its specialized vocabulary and in its approach to knowledge. Students have to master the methods and tools of a subject they have not previously studied; this tends to be both frightening and exhilarating. Those of us who teach philosophy try to convey the power that made us fall in love with wisdom and to show our students how to use its methods to address all the questions of human life. Firmly grounded in the Western tradition, we are learning to incorporate the traditional wisdom of Asia, Africa, and the Americas as well as the voices of women into our search for meaning. This enlivens our teaching and provides an increasingly diverse student body with mirrors in which to see themselves as well as windows on a wider world.

These are the goals that animate *Roots of Wisdom: A Tapestry of Philosophical Traditions.* Its ten chapters are framed with thought-provoking issues representing major topics in philosophy, beginning with metaphysics (reality, human nature, ultimate reality), moving to epistemology (knowledge

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sources, truth tests, aesthetic experience), and concluding with axiology (political philosophy, social philosophy, ethics). Although they are topically organized, the chapters also move forward in time, following the canon of Western philosophy and including women, Asian and African thinkers/thought systems, and "The Peoples of the Americas" (Spanish-language and indigenous thinkers of the past and present) as they speak to the questions raised by the Western discourse.

The theme for this revision is "personhood." We are all human by virtue of our DNA. However, personhood is legally and socially constructed. And not all humans are considered full "persons" under the law or by social/cultural custom. Under the United States Constitution, for example, many groups were excluded from participation, including women and slaves who were further denied humanity and designated "property." In some cases personhood is intentionally diminished. In war (or ethnic cleansing), we must deny the "enemy" full personhood in order to kill or injure him/her.

The following reflect specific additions to this edition.

- **Chapter 3, Human Nature**, introduces language to describe the philosophical concept of personhood. Later in the chapter, there is a new section: "Confucian Socially Molded Self." The Confucian Project involves "Five Constant Relationships" and the so-called "womb to tomb" project of lessons and models in transcending selfishness and aspiring to become a *chun-tzu*, a noble or superior-minded person. This is notably an aristocracy, not of wealth but of character. This section connects with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in Chapter 1. Aristotle and Confucius are the two early proponents of what we now call Virtue Ethics.
- **Chapter 8, Political Philosophy**, examines the difference between "subject" and "citizen," and the role of "personhood" in this distinction. Subjects do not enjoy "personhood"; citizens potentially do. The transition from monarchy to republic often raises questions about who will be considered a person under the new regime and who will not. As emerging nations struggle to achieve state formation, questions of personhood are very much alive. Citizenship entails rights; it also entails duties.
- **Chapter 9, Social Philosophy**, looks at the possibilities for enhancing personhood in a planned city. Following "Justice in Buganda," which recalls a model of justice in an ancient kingdom, the new section details the history of Columbia, Maryland, the visionary creation of James W. Rouse in Central Maryland between Baltimore and Washington, DC. In contrast with long-established legal and social traditions, a planned city offers fresh opportunities to correct or temper injustices in the larger society. Columbia, Maryland, which declared its community open and welcoming to all races in 1967, celebrated its 50th anniversary on June 21, 2017.
- **Chapter 10, Ethics**, recounts the story of "The Bodhisattva and the Hungry Tigress" from Buddhist Scripture, as a way of highlighting the concept of personhood in nonhuman beings. When a wealthy and privileged young man enjoying a day of leisure in a park comes upon a tigress, exhausted by hunger and thirst and unable to hunt for herself and her five young cubs, he makes what will seem to most readers an irrational choice. Moved by compassion, he lays his body

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> down to feed the hungry animals. From the Buddhist worldview of interconnectedness, however, the tigers have personhood—for this enlightened being, they deserve life as much as he does. And, we learn at the end of the story that this man, Mahasattva, was to become the Buddha in his next life.

Some texts are written at such a difficult level that the instructor's task becomes explaining the text to the students. *Roots of Wisdom: A Tapestry of Philosophical Traditions* takes a different approach. I have spared none of the rigor and retained all the essential vocabulary, yet the style is conversational, the examples plentiful, and the illustrations lavish. This is a book students can read on their own, freeing instructors to offer their own emphasis and include additional material if they so choose. Students will have the basic foundation provided for them. This book makes difficult concepts simple without making them simplistic.

Special Content Features

Because formal philosophy is indeed a foreign language for beginning students, I have given special attention to offering many options for organizing and learning difficult new material. I have also taken care to provide the historical, cultural, and biographical context students need to appreciate the roots of philosophical wisdom. The following special content features support these goals.

Philosophy in Context: Historical Interludes

There are five Historical Interludes that begin and end the text as well as link the major sections and topics. The first provides a worldwide context for the beginning of Western philosophy; the second describes the blending of Greek rationalist thought and Hebrew religious thought in the exportation of Christianity to the gentile world; the third and fourth provide transitions from the medieval to the modern world and from the modern to the postmodern world, respectively; the last considers the implications of discoveries in brain neuroscience for philosophy. Together these Historical Interludes provide transitions between the three major divisions of the text—metaphysics, epistemology, axiology—and include information on key historical and cultural events without interrupting the flow of a chapter.

Logic: "How Philosophy Works"

A minicourse in logic appears throughout the text with arguments drawn from the chapter content. Each chapter contains a "How Philosophy Works" box that instructors can use to teach reasoning while covering content. Because the methods of reasoning are connected with the arguments of philosophers within the chapter, logic appears as the natural and indispensable tool of the philosopher, rather than something to be learned in isolation from content. Forms of argument range from Aristotle's formulation of the categorical syllogism to the new science of fuzzy logic that makes our air conditioners run efficiently by affirming the range of points at which something is neither fully A nor fully non-A.

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Biography: "The Making of a Philosopher" Boxes

"The Making of a Philosopher" boxes provide biographical material and present thinkers as real people with human motivations and problems as well as great ideas. Because women as well as men inhabit these boxes and because some of the philosophers are Asian and African American, the multicultural focus of the text is maintained.

Applications: "Doing Philosophy"

From the early "sophistry" of one of O. J. Simpson's defense attorneys to the fuzzy social contract, each chapter brings the method and questions of philosophy into the everyday lives of ordinary people. An African woman's story about "knowing" how to cure malaria, Simone Weil's decision to starve herself to death in solidarity with her compatriots in France, and the limits we might want to place on both cultural relativism and deconstruction stand beside questions of individual liberty versus respect for tradition, and the possibility of life after death; we explore how making music affects the mind and consider how granting limited personhood to great apes would affect the law. "Doing Philosophy" boxes explore the "real-life" dilemmas of being alive and make clear that philosophy is not a spectator sport.

Primary Material: "Philosophers Speak for Themselves"

In 250–400 word excerpts, philosophers across cultures and centuries speak in their own words about questions of vital importance to them. Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Hobbes, Descartes, Locke, and Kant from the Western tradition are joined by the author of the Taoist classic *Tao Te Ching,* the medieval mystic Hadewijch of Antwerp, and Mary Wollstonecraft from the Western Enlightenment.

Visual Features

Many students will be strongly visual learners. Words alone may be inadequate to convey concepts. Even for those who respond best to words, illustrations provide valuable reinforcement.

Time Lines

The time lines on the inside cover embrace the entire scope of the book, highlighting the flow of ideas throughout human history and revealing the multicultural nature of the search for wisdom. They offer "the course at a glance" and give instructors and students a ready reference for placing people and events in a historical context.

Maps

The roots of wisdom are deep in many cultures around the world, so some indication of where these cultures are geographically seems wise. Instructors can use the maps that accompany each of the Historical Interludes to combat our national cultural illiteracy. By freezing a moment in history, each of these maps highlights a time period and illuminates it with significant dates, events, and historical figures. The last interlude

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contains a "map" of the brain to conclude our exploration of interesting (and somewhat uncharted) territory.

Cartoons, Photographs, and Illustrations

Cartoons are used strategically, captioned in each case with a statement or question, tying it to the text and raising a specific philosophical issue or query. Since they come from a wide variety of sources (Doonesbury, Mother Goose and Grimm, Bizarro, and the work of several talented, independent individuals) and represent a wide range of subjects, these cartoons offer some students memory devices for anchoring course content.

Photographs, like cartoons, appear in every chapter and are similarly captioned. Specific philosophical concepts are examined through the medium of world art. In each case the culture that produced the art is identified and the caption ties the photograph to the content of the chapter. Although some of the art may be quite familiar to you, some of it may appear exotic. One of the best ways to know a culture is by studying its art forms, and this book looks to art for important information about how philosophy is done around the world. Striking color images have been added, demonstrating the power of art to express philosophical concepts visually. This edition also features electronically rendered "stills" from "For the Love of Wisdom," a multicultural telecourse based on *Roots of Wisdom: A Tapestry of Philosophical Traditions* that was produced by Howard Community College and is being distributed nationally by Dallas TeleLearning. As the creator and host of this series, I thank Howard Community College for allowing me to use these images.

Illustrations use graphic art or line drawings to visually represent difficult or challenging text material. As with the cartoons, each is captioned to tie the visual and verbal components together. Some of the African wisdom concepts are particularly well communicated through visual images.

In-Text Learning Aids

In addition to the special sections described earlier, each chapter includes the following elements to guide and reinforce students' learning.

"The Issue Defined"

"The Issue Defined" is an attention-getting opening, designed to draw the student in and answer the unspoken "so what?" question. Artificial intelligence, national information databases, test-tube babies, virtual reality—these are a few of the topics in the opening sections of chapters in this text.

Key Terms and Glossary

Key terms are bolded in the text, described etymologically, and defined in the running margin glossary as well as in the master glossary in the back of the book. The more difficult terms are followed by a phonetic pronunciation guide. By listing and learning these key terms, students can create a philosophical skeleton on which to hang more complex ideas.

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Follow-Up

Each chapter ends with "For Further Thought" and "For Further Exploration." The former leads students to apply and integrate chapter material with other text matter and with their own experiences; the latter lists books (fiction and nonfiction) and films related to the chapter topic. "For Further Thought" offers thought-provoking questions designed to deepen student understanding, pull specifics together into concepts, and link philosophy with life. "For Further Exploration" suggests ways instructors and students can go more deeply into the material covered in the chapter. Debates, informal writing and formal papers, group work, and individual presentations can all have their genesis in these books, short stories, and films.

Supplementary Materials

In addition to *Readings from the Roots of Wisdom,* the reader that accompanies this text, two supplementary aids are available to complement the specific goals of the text outlined earlier. I have written them from the perspective of my own classroom experience over the last twenty-five years, the experiences of my colleagues, and the honesty of my students.

Instructor's Manual

I have tried to make the Instructor's Manual for this book the aid I wished for (but couldn't find) the first time I taught Introduction to Philosophy with less than two weeks' notice. Even if an instructor is not facing this rigorous a challenge, the new material in this text may benefit from some teaching suggestions. In the Instructor's Manual available only online at each chapter helps the instructor guide students through the language of philosophy. Vocabulary words are grouped into families, their etymologies and other interesting features explained, and ways to present them explored. The section on Method helps instructors relate the chapter's mini-lesson on logic to the overall chapter content. Next is a Discussion Starter for use during the class session when the instructor begins each chapter; this is followed by Background to help the instructor design a lecture or answer questions the text may raise for students. Each chapter in the guide concludes with Questions—25 multiple choice, 15 true/false, and 5 essay. The final section offers instructors one or two Resources unique to the chapter to get students thinking or reinforce learning that has already occurred.

Study Guide

The study guide for students (available only online at www.cengagebrain.com) takes a similar approach to Vocabulary and Method. Treating philosophy as a foreign language, the guide lists new words (as foreign language texts typically do) at the beginning of each chapter and relates them to the overall "culture" of philosophy as well as to the specific instructional content of a given chapter. The Method section helps students think of logic as a useful tool for life as well as philosophy class and uses real-life illustrations as examples. Study Suggestions are intended to deepen students'

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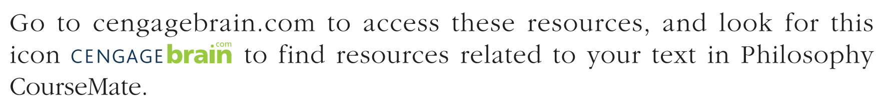
understanding by nudging them beyond rote learning to a real application of the course content. Objective practice questions include 25 multiple choice, 15 matching (statements/works to philosophers), and 10 true/false; there are also 5 essay practice questions. The questions are all unique. In some cases, student questions are reworkings of those in the Instructor's Manual, asking the same information in a different form.

Philosophy CourseMate

Roots of Wisdom: A Tapestry of Philosophical Traditions includes Philosophy CourseMate, which helps students make the grade.

Philosophy CourseMate includes:

- An interactive eBook, with highlighting, note-taking, and search capabilities
- Interactive learning tools including:
  - Quizzes
  - Flashcards
  - Videos
  - And more!

Go to cengagebrain.com to access these resources, and look for this icon  to find resources related to your text in Philosophy CourseMate.

Telecourse

Roots of Wisdom: A Tapestry of Philosophical Traditions and the accompanying reader, *Readings from the Roots of Wisdom,* inspired a telecourse, "For the Love of Wisdom," produced by Howard Community College and distributed nationally by Dallas TeleLearning. For information on leasing or purchasing the telecourse, call (toll free) 866-347-8576.

Acknowledgments

When Valerie Lash sent two Wadsworth representatives to my office in December 1992, she probably had no idea she was launching me on a new adventure. Jason Mitchell and Jeannie Jeffrey read every chapter of the first edition, making helpful suggestions and reminding me of what matters to twenty-somethings. Jason took my words and turned them into computer graphics (in addition to supplying a stunning photograph); Jeannie took my ideas and turned them into visually striking concept sketches. Shannon Tenney provided a similar and equally valuable perspective for the second edition. In addition to reading and reflecting critically on every chapter, she went into the bowels of both the Library of Congress and the Catholic University Library and came back with the treasures I requested. Joe Mitchell cooked delicious meals, took wonderful photographs on short notice, and helped me remember the real world outside my office. Jean Moon, Mary

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Margaret Kamerman, Mary Young, Janis Cripe, Barbara Whorton, Marie Siracusa, Donna Canfield, Carol Galbraith, JoAnn Hawkins, Diana Marinich, Judy Thomas, Peggy Armitage, Dawn Barnes, Virginia Kirk, Dee Weir, and Betty Caldwell helped me remember how important the voices of women are—in philosophy textbooks and in life. To all of you, and to my other friends and family who provided support and encouragement when I needed it most, I offer my deep and heartfelt thanks.

Between Fall 2013 and Fall 2016, students in the Honors Seminar in World Philosophy showed me through their seminar presentations and discussions what was crystal clear and what needed further clarification. I thank Charles, Gaby, Oji, Lena, Rebecca, Kelsey, Susana, Ben, Rosemary, Andrew, and Steven from Fall 2013; Andrea, Kristen, Kayla, Adam, Reema, Julie, Samantha, Christine, Jonathan, Henry, Vincent, Joshua, Pooja, and Nadia from Fall 2014; Sarah, Melody, Margaret, Trishna, Jaena, Kaitlyn, Catherine, Matthew, Meiling, Nathan, Tyler, Heather, and Collin from Fall 2015; and Jordyn, Brittany, Deanna, Nicholas, Eleanor, Kathleen, Andy, Farihah, Shane, Matthew, Madison, Amy, Jared, and Katiana from Fall 2016. I also wish to acknowledge the students in the Applied Healing Arts Masters Program at the Tai Sophia Institute, who read *Roots of Wisdom: A Tapestry of Philosophical Traditions* and wrote illuminating papers about it, as well as all the students who wondered aloud whether there were any women philosophers. I am deeply indebted to Dorothy Haecker for suggesting the Chávez/Gonzales pairing; to Kevin who recommended the Sufi concept of *nafs;* to Jose Fonseco Altamirano Henaro for the perspective of a Mexican physician who has read this book in Spanish and English and for suggesting I include Ernest Renan and Secular Humanism; to James Maffie who generously made his synthesis of Nahua thought available to me; to Paul Mehl who invited me to join the Whitehead seminar and made the expanded section on "Process Thought" possible; to John Greenfelder Sullivan, my Tai Sophia teaching partner, who lives large and brings the world's wisdom into everyday life; to my son Jason and others who suggested philosophical movies; to Vince who gave me a tutorial on massively multiplayer games; and to my colleagues at Howard Community College, especially Rich' Walter and David Mellott, and around the country, especially Amy Hannon and Christian de Quincey, who have shared their classroom experiences with me.

Whatever one does, one always rebuilds the monument in his own way. But it is already something gained to have used only the original stones.

MARGUERITE YOURCENAR
Memoirs of Hadrian

Doris Ligon opened the treasures of the African Art Museum of Maryland to me and Dianne Connolly, Julia Measures, Mary Ellen Zorbaugh, and Edna Brandt shared their knowledge of Chinese medicine and health. Rich' Walter taught me wonderfully simple ways to think and speak about Zen, the brain, and life. Phil Reitzel and Phillis Knill made special arrangements for me to photograph Civil War artifacts in the Howard County Historical Society. Yifei Gan painted "Early Spring" especially for this book. Jean Soto, Susan Myers, Sharon Frey, and Ela Ciborowski of the Howard Community College Library helped me borrow hard-to-locate books and find citations and references. Lt. Jay Zumbrun obtained a police warrant for Chapter 6. John Hernandez and Jose Lopez-Gonzalez made many valuable suggestions, pointing me toward Spanish-language philosophers, through whom some of students might find a more familiar path to the world's wisdom. Phil Ruge-Jones and Mark Gilbertson introduced me to Seyyed Hossein Nasr. I appreciate the generosity with which all of you have shared your time and your resources to help me craft this book. My special thanks to Cengage Learning Latin

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America for dazzling translations of the first and fourth editions of *Roots of Wisdom* into Spanish.

When I took my first philosophy course at Hood College, it was love at first sight. Paul Mehl showed me how easy it is to fall in love with wisdom and what a thrilling ride it offers. Tom Scheye and Frank Cunningham from Loyola College opened my eyes to the possibilities that emerge when literature and philosophy meet, and Frank Haig, S.J. helped me see the philosophical implications of modern physics. Kimpei Munei introduced me to the thought systems of Africa while he was an AFS student in our home. From my colleagues at Howard Community College—especially Valerie Lash, Yifei Gan, Ron Roberson, and Jane Winer—I have learned how art illuminates the philosophical quest.

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Finally, I would like to thank Julia Giannotti, Sharon Poore, Matt Gervais, and Hemalatha Loganathan for their technical expertise and guidance, as well as their enthusiasm for the new and revised material in this edition.

To my readers…

Please send your responses to *Roots of Wisdom: A Tapestry of Philosophical Traditions* to me electronically: hmitchell@howardcc.edu. I am especially interested in what works for you and what doesn't, as well as your suggestions for augmenting and improving the text.

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PART 1

What Is Everything Really Like?

Questions of Metaphysics

HISTORICAL INTERLUDE A

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HISTORICAL INTERLUDE B

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HISTORICAL INTERLUDE A

A Worldwide Context for Western Philosophy

Philosophy—literally "the love of wisdom"—is a very ancient enterprise. People have probably been asking the "big questions"—Why am I here? How can I decide what's true and what isn't? What is everything made of? What's the right thing to do?—since the beginning of spoken language. We come into the world filled with questions. Children can't seem to stop asking them as they begin to wonder why things are the way they are. Why is the sky blue? Why does fire go up? Where is my dead goldfish now? How do you know it's time for me to go to bed? Why do I have to share my toys?

Philosophy assumes we never stop caring about the answers to those questions. What happens, for most of us, is that we get vague, unsatisfactory answers from grown-ups. At first we think they know better answers and are too busy to share the secrets with us. Later, we learn that they may not know either. Some people try to shut off the questions at this point, to concentrate on other things like making friends and money, seeking pleasure, popularity, and love. And, it works—for a while. But, the big questions have a way of coming back, especially during those moments when life gets our attention by stopping the ordinary flow of events with something startling and unexpected. A parent or friend dies young; a loved one betrays us; a cherished dream goes unfulfilled. At times like these, the questions come surging back. What is the purpose of life anyway? Does anything really matter? Are we on a short, unpleasant march toward death?

This book introduces some classical and some modern ways of thinking about those eternal questions. We begin with issues we all face at the beginning of a new millennium and link them with the roots of wisdom found in civilizations from ancient times to the present. There is wisdom in every culture, and no one culture has a monopoly on it. Although the principal thread running through this book is the story of Western philosophy, which began with the Greeks in the sixth century B.C.E. (before the common era), we will also be tracing lines of thought from other parts of the world, particularly China and Africa, but also India, Japan, and the Americas. Along the way we will be looking at often-neglected women philosophers as their arguments support or counter the classic conversation of Western philosophy and as they break new ground in engaging the big questions of life.

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Before we begin looking at the Greeks, it is important to survey briefly what was going on in other parts of the world. The Greeks had an enormous influence on the Western philosophical tradition, but they were neither the first nor the only culture to "do" philosophy. Actually, the centuries during which Greek culture flowered were a time of extraordinary spiritual and philosophical awakening in many parts of the world. To put Greek thought in context, we will look first at several near contemporaries of Thales, the first Greek philosopher, whom we meet in Chapter 1. They include Siddhārtha Gautama, known as the Buddha, who lived in India; K'ung Fu-tzu, or Master K'ung, known to the West as Confucius; and Lao-tzu, the Old Master, who began the tradition of Taoism. Both Master K'ung and Master Lao were Chinese, and all three of these men (Buddha, Confucius, and Lao-tzu) lived around the sixth century B.C.E. We then expand our initial exploration of the quest for wisdom by touching on Zen Buddhism, Native American and African thought, and finally the Hebrews, whose story will appear in more detail in the next Historical Interlude.

As you may have done, people living in other times and places looked into the vastness of the night sky and wondered about the importance of human life. Like you, they asked themselves, "How should we live our lives?" "Why is happiness so difficult to find and keep?" "What can I be sure of?" "Where did everything come from?" When they posed these questions, they were doing philosophy. We could just as accurately say they were doing science or religion. The love of wisdom and the search for answers to the eternal questions led our distant ancestors to wonder, and wondering is the root of science and religion as well as of philosophy. Today, these are three separate disciplines with separate focuses and methods, but at the time when the Buddha (the Enlightened One) began asking himself about the meaning of life, there were only those persistent questions and the human need to find answers.

Buddhism

Siddhārtha of the Gautama clan was born around 560 B.C.E. in what is today Nepal, just below the foothills of the Himalayan Mountains. According to legend, the young Siddhārtha grew up in a palace, surrounded by pleasures and protected from the harsh realities of everyday life. He was married to a lovely woman and, in his late twenties, fathered a son, but he had grown restless and discontented. Escaping from the secure but artificial world created by his loving father, Siddhārtha saw for the first time people who were old and diseased—even dead. How, he wondered, could anyone live in peace and happiness if this was what life had in store.

Renouncing his wife, child, father, and life of pleasure, he became a wandering beggar in search of answers. He spent some time with monks who lived in extreme **asceticism**, fasting and disciplining their bodies while they practiced yogic meditation. Although he fasted to the point that the texts claim he could feel his backbone when he sucked in his stomach and touched his navel, Siddhārtha did not find what he was looking for. According to tradition, enlightenment came when he sat beneath a bodhi (wisdom) tree on the night of the full Moon, resolving not to get up until he found the answer to life's riddles.

asceticism *the view that the body requires the discipline of mind or spirit, resulting in self-denial and even self-torture as a way of renouncing worldly longings in preparation for a happier existence after death*

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During this experience he realized that life is characterized by change and that change is the clue to our suffering. We suffer because we desire and are attached to things that we want to fix in place and hold onto. We want to remain young and healthy; we want those we love never to die; we want to keep things just the way they are. All existence is characterized by constant change, so this is impossible. By accepting the reality of impermanence and detaching ourselves from the desire to capture life and hold it fast, we, too, can become enlightened—we can see things as they are.

The only way to avoid the terror of aging, sickness, and death is by withdrawing our anxieties about them, and this is accomplished by seeing

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that sensual pleasures, money, and power do not bring lasting joy. If we give up searching and yearning for youth, health, and wealth, we break the hold of the world and "blow out" the desire that binds us to it. This blowing out is ***nirvana***, the state of enlightenment that, once attained, frees us from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Once we become enlightened, there is no need to live additional lives—we will have learned all we need to know, all this world can teach us.

nirvana *a state in which individuality is extinguished or the state of enlightenment in which all pain, suffering, mental anguish, and the need for successive rebirths disappear*

Buddhism spread through India but had its real success in China, where it became established by the second century C.E. (common era) and incorporated many elements of Chinese culture. In China, Buddhism also blended with Taoism to form Ch'an, or, as it is known in Japan, Zen Buddhism.

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Taoism

The dynasties of China stretch back before 2000 B.C.E. when the Sage Kings of the Hsia dynasty, including the semilegendary Yellow Emperor (Huang Ti), ruled China. Silk and ceramics, writing, painting and music, the use of a calendar, and the art of healing all date from this period. By 1000 B.C.E., leaders of the Chou dynasty were praised as model rulers, but the time of Lao-tzu is known as the Warring States period. The classic Taoist (pronounced "dowist") text, the *Tao Te Ching,* was supposedly written at the request of the gatekeeper as Lao-tzu left the strife-ridden city during the sixth century B.C.E. for the quiet life of a hermit.

Tao *the Way, the fundamental principle of the world, the cosmic order, nature in Taoism*

Tao Te Ching means, roughly, the "book of the power, or virtue, of the Way." Reading from right to left, we arrive at the chief word in the title, ***Tao*** (pronounced "dow"). Lao-tzu and his disciple Chuang-tzu saw nature and the natural system as the heart of what is. To understand the *Tao,* which directs the natural system, is to understand everything. The *Tao* is the Way of nature that moves by perfect, effortless efficiency to fulfill its purposes. Summer turns to fall, which gives way to winter and then to spring. Night turns to day and day to night. We are born, grow up, grow old, and die. Only the foolish would attempt to oppose this system—to stand in the ocean and command a wave not to break. The wise person recognizes that—with a simple, egoless recognition of the way things are—all things can be accomplished.

yang *the active, male principle associated with action and doing*

yin *the receptive, female principle associated with quiet and being*

Wisdom lies in *letting* things happen rather than in trying to *make* things happen. Just as nature is sometimes ***yang***, full of the light, rising energy, and activity of the day, it is also ***yin***, full of the dark, falling energy, and receptivity of the evening. If one can let the *Tao* direct, things will always turn out right. As Lao-tzu puts it: "The *Tao* never does anything, yet through it all things are done."[1] Nature doesn't have to huff and puff to turn night into day; it just happens. Water, the softest and most yielding of elements, finds the lowliest places but can crack concrete with its power when it freezes. "Governing a large country," Lao-tzu says, "is like frying a small fish. You can ruin it with too much poking."[2] As the martial arts of T'ai Chi Ch'uan and Aikido recognize, the best way to oppose force is to yield to it: "When pushed, pull; when pulled, push."

Confucianism

Taoism urged withdrawal from the stress and conflict of city life in favor of quiet contemplation of nature. Confucianism, by contrast, was more worldly; it advocated embracing a common cultural heritage, with emphasis on observing the proper rituals. In the *Analects,* Confucius gave advice of a practical nature about how to live as a large-minded rather than as a small-minded person. The goal was living nobly and compassionately in the world, observing the appropriate dynamics of relationships. Subjects, for example, should obey their rulers who bear the Mandate of Heaven. Children should obey and respect their parents. Friends, however, have a more mutual relationship in which considerable give and take appropriately exists. As one of Confucius's students observed, "The Master is good at leading one on step by step. He broadens me with culture and brings me back to essentials by means of the rites."[3]

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All three of these great teachers recognized that life is not always in harmony with the ideal; yet, each of them had a different response to the situation, according to Benjamin Hoff's analysis in his best-selling book *The Tao of Pooh*. These variations are captured in an ancient Chinese scroll painting called "The Vinegar Tasters." The three masters, who represent the three great teachings of China—Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism—have each dipped a finger in the vat of vinegar and tasted it. Confucius's expression is sour, Buddha's is bitter, but Lao-tzu's is sweet.[4]

For Confucius, the present was out of step with the past and government on Earth was out of harmony with the Way of Heaven; life for him was sour and in need of sweetening. The Buddha saw life as a generator of illusions and a setter of traps. Because life was filled with attachments and desires that lead to suffering, his reaction to it was bitter. Only Lao-tzu viewed the world as a teacher of valuable lessons and a reflection of the harmony between Heaven and Earth. He taught that everything has its own nature and, if the laws of nature are followed, life, even with its vinegary moments, can be sweet. Winnie the Pooh who is neither smart nor obviously wise is the one for whom things always work out. He can always find his way home because he knows who he is, and that kind of wisdom is what makes a Taoist Master. When you finish reading this text, decide whether or not you agree with Hoff's analysis of "The Vinegar Tasters."

Native Americans

In the West, philosophers have tended to follow the Greeks in seeing themselves as objective observers of nature, but Native Americans, the people called "Indians" because Columbus thought he had landed in India, share with the Taoists of the Far East a profound respect for nature. In Native American thought, however, nature is more than a perfect teacher; nature is holy. Everything in nature possesses a life or spirit of its own—the earth, the sky, the trees, animals, and people. Before killing a deer or a rabbit, it was customary to ask the animal's spirit for permission to kill in order to eat. There is no sense of people as masters of creation, entitled to subdue the natural world, including other animals, as we find, for example, in the Western Judaic and Christian traditions.

According to a Cherokee creation story, in the beginning the white man was given a stone and the Cherokee a piece of silver; each threw away the gift, considering it worthless. Later the white man found and pocketed the silver as a source of material power, whereas the Cherokee found and revered the stone as a source of sacred power. Reflecting a similar attitude, Sioux author Luther Standing Bear has written, "The old people came literally to love the soil. They sat on the ground with the feeling of being close to a mothering power."[5] The worship of stones reflects this deep sense of the sacredness that pervades all nature.

Many legends recall a kind of Golden Age when humans and animals lived and talked together, each learning the other's wisdom. Native peoples revered the earth, the heavens, and the directions of North, South, East, and West as supernatural forces. The idea that all being is alive or animate is called ***animism***—from the Latin word for "spirit" ***anima***. We will find a similar belief that everything is alive when we look at the first Greek philosophers.

animism *the philosophical theory that all being is animate, living, contains spirit*

anima *Latin word meaning "spirit"*

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The wealthy and high born pictured themselves in the afterlife surrounded by the pleasures of the world.
Egyptian musician, papyrus detail from tomb of Nakht, Sheikh Abd El Qurna/Courtesy of and Photo by Quentin Kardos

If the holy was everywhere around you, the first Americans assumed that was the place to look for divine power. In the Guardian Spirit Quest, common to several native traditions, a young brave would go off alone, then fast and wait. After many days and nights, he might be rewarded by meeting a strong animal spirit in human form, perhaps in a dream, who would teach him his family and tribal duties, as well as give him his own sacred song and a special gift to become a leader or even a healer.[6]

Many archaeologists believe the people we call Native Americans migrated to North America from Asia by walking over a land bridge from Siberia to Alaska, crossing what is now called the Bering Strait. During the last Ice Age, the water levels in the oceans were much lower, and the theory is that the land bridge is now submerged. This migration may have occurred from 10,000 to 50,000 years ago. There are some similarities between the physical appearance, myths, and rituals of Siberian tribes and those of Native Americans. Some myths from the Americas, however, speak of an island "where the star of day is born" from which all humans came. The "star of day," or the Sun, rises in the east, and Sioux tradition speaks of an island toward the sunrise "where all the tribes were formerly one." These stories tell of people coming to their new home in canoes. Apparently, there are no myths about walking over a land bridge.[7]

We may never know for certain the origin of the many, varied peoples who came to populate the Americas before the arrival of European explorers. What we can be sure of are their enduring beliefs in the sacredness of nature and the infusion of supernatural power into the natural world. It may be useful to keep this in mind as you read of the beginnings of Western philosophy. The Greek notion of standing apart from nature to study it and understand its mysteries has split people from nature and made humans observers of rather than participants in the natural system. Some critics say the Greek emphasis on objectivity has meant the loss of wonder and reverence for the natural world; they urge Westerners to reenchant the world by recovering a sense of wonder and rediscovering the value of imagination.

African Philosophy: Egypt

One of the world's most long-lived and fascinating civilizations developed in the land of Egypt on the continent of Africa. The Egyptian civilization was already ancient when the Greeks began their philosophical speculation. As we discuss shortly, the roots of Western thought may actually extend to this extraordinary culture. Like the Native Americans, early Egyptians believed the great powers of nature—including the Sky, the Sun, the Earth, and the Nile River—to be gods. There was intense focus in Egyptian culture on the afterlife. The magnificent pyramids that awe tourists today were built as burial places for pharaohs, or kings, and bodies were mummified to prevent their decomposition. Although at first only the Pharaoh and the royal family were believed to be immortal, gradually even commoners had prayers recited over their bodies by the powerful priests of Egypt. The Pharaoh, however, was thought to be divine, a god-king ruling by divine right. Through him, the gods made known their wishes for the human family. There was no need for a code of laws because the word of the Pharaoh was the word of Heaven.

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The life of Egypt was controlled by the Nile River whose periodic overflowing and depositing of silt enriched the soil and made agriculture possible. Seeking to predict the annual flood, the Egyptians found a method in astronomy. Noting that the flood occurred after the star Sirius appeared in the sky, they developed a calendar based on this event. The Egyptian calendar divided the year into twelve thirty-day months and added five days at the end. Although this is not quite as accurate as present-day calendars, the Egyptian scheme was a major advance over the older calendar developed by the Babylonians of the Near East, which was based on phases of the Moon.

From ancient Egypt comes what may be the oldest surviving book in human history. Here are some "Instructions," or advice, for living in the world, written by Ptahhotep of Memphis between 3400 and 2150 B.C.E.:

> Don't be proud of your knowledge
> Consult the ignorant and the wise;
> The limits of art are not reached,
> No artist's skills are perfect;
> Good speech is more hidden than greenstone,
> Yet may be found among the maids at the grindstones…
> Follow your heart as long as you live…
> Don't waste time on daily cares
> Beyond providing for your household;
> When wealth has come, follow your heart,
> Wealth does no good if one is glum!…
> Be generous as long as you live…
> Kindness is a man's memorial…
> If you listen to my sayings
> All your affairs will go forward…[8]

This timeless advice, with its oddly modern sound, is as relevant now as it was in Old Kingdom Egypt. It also seems closely related to the attitudes expressed by Confucius and his disciples.

From a later period, about 600 B.C.E. (roughly the time of Buddha, Confucius, and Lao-tzu), comes this plea from the *Book of the Dead:*

> *The Address to the Gods*
>
> Behold me, I have come to you,
> Without sin, without guilt, without evil,
> Without a witness against me,
> Without one whom I have wronged…
> I have given bread to the hungry,
> Water to the thirsty,
> Clothes to the naked,
> A ferryboat to the boatless.
> I have given divine offerings to the gods,
> Invocation-offerings to the dead.
> Rescue me, protect me,
> Do not accuse me before the great god![9]

These excerpts give us some insight into cultural ideals for behavior in Egypt. Ptahhotep's lengthy instruction attempts to cover all circumstances in which a person might find himself, whereas "The Address to the Gods" lists the good works the dead hope will be pleasing to the gods in the afterlife.

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