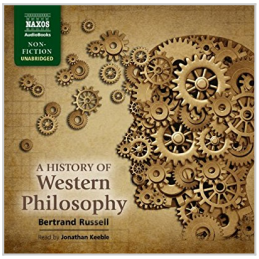

A History of Western Philosophy (Naxos Audiobooks Non-Fiction)

By Bertrand Russell

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Bertrand Russells A History of Western Philosophy serves as the perfect introduction to its subject; it remains unchallenged as the greatest account of the history of Western thought. Charting philosophys course from the pre-Socratics up to the early twentieth century, Russell relates each philosopher and school to their respective historical and cultural contexts, providing erudite commentary throughout his invaluable survey. This engaging and comprehensive work has done much to educate and inform generations of general readers; it is written in accessible and elegantly crafted prose and allows for an easy grasp of complex ideas.

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Editorial Review

Review

‘A precious book….a work that is in the highest degree pedagogical which stands above the conflicts of parties and opinion’ *– Albert Einstein*

'Remains unchallenged as the perfect introduction to its subject ... exactly the kind of philosophy that most people would like to read, but which only Russell could possibly have written.' - *Ray Monk, University of Southampton, UK*

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About the Author
Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) was born in England and educated at Trinity College, Cambridge. His long career established him as one of the most influential philosophers, mathematicians, and social reformers of the twentieth century.

Jonathan Keeble combines his audio work with a busy theater and television career. He has been featured in over six hundred radio plays for the BBC, appearing in everything from Shakespeare and "Sherlock Holmes" to "Doctor Who "and "The Archers", in which he played the evil Owen. An award-winning reader, Jonathan s voice work is much in demand, and he has recorded over two hundred audiobooks.

CHAPTER I

The Rise of Greek Civilization

In all history, nothing is so surprising or so difficult to account for as the sudden rise of civilization in Greece. Much of what makes civilization had already existed for thousands of years in Egypt and in Mesopotamia, and had spread thence to neighbouring countries. But certain elements had been lacking until the Greeks supplied them. What they achieved in art and literature is familiar to everybody, but what they did in the purely intellectual realm is even more exceptional. They invented mathematics and science and philosophy; they first wrote history as opposed to mere annals; they speculated freely about the nature of the world and the ends of life, without being bound in the fetters of any inherited orthodoxy. What occurred was so astonishing that, until very recent times, men were content to gape and talk mystically about the Greek genius. It is possible, however, to understand the development of Greece in scientific terms, and it is well worth while to do so.

Philosophy begins with Thales, who, fortunately, can be dated by the fact that he predicted an eclipse which,

according to the astronomers, occurred in the year 585 B.C. Philosophy and science -- which were not originally separate -- were therefore born together at the beginning of the sixth century. What had been happening in Greece and neighbouring countries before this time? Any answer must be in part conjectural, but archeology, during the present century, has given us much more knowledge than was possessed by our grandfathers.

The art of writing was invented in Egypt about the year 4000 B.C., and in Babylonia not much later. In each country writing began with pictures of the objects intended. These pictures quickly became conventionalized, so that words were represented by ideograms, as they still are in China. In the course of thousands of years, this cumbrous system developed into alphabetic writing.

The early development of civilization in Egypt and Mesopotamia was due to the Nile, the Tigris, and the Euphrates, which made agriculture very easy and very productive. The civilization was in many ways similar to that which the Spaniards found in Mexico and Peru. There was a divine king, with despotic powers; in Egypt, he owned all the land. There was a polytheistic religion, with a supreme god to whom the king had a specially intimate relation. There was a military aristocracy, and also a priestly aristocracy. The latter was often able to encroach on the royal power, if the king was weak or if he was engaged in a difficult war. The cultivators of the soil were serfs, belonging to the king, the aristocracy, or the priesthood.

There was a considerable difference between Egyptian and Babylonian theology. The Egyptians were preoccupied with death, and believed that the souls of the dead descend into the underworld, where they are judged by Osiris according to the manner of their life on earth. They thought that the soul would ultimately return to the body; this led to mummification and to the construction of splendid tombs. The pyramids were built by various kings at the end of the fourth millennium B.C. and the beginning of the third. After this time, Egyptian civilization became more and more stereotyped, and religious conservatism made progress impossible. About 1800 B.C. Egypt was conquered by Semites named Hyksos, who ruled the country for about two centuries. They left no permanent mark on Egypt, but their presence there must have helped to spread Egyptian civilization in Syria and Palestine.

Babylonia had a more warlike development than Egypt. At first, the ruling race were not Semites, but "Sumerians," whose origin is unknown. They invented cuneiform writing, which the conquering Semites took over from them. There was a period when there were various independent cities which fought with each other, but in the end Babylon became supreme and established an empire. The gods of other cities became subordinate, and Marduk, the god of Babylon, acquired a position like that later held by Zeus in the Greek pantheon. The same sort of thing had happened in Egypt, but at a much earlier time.

The religions of Egypt and Babylonia, like other ancient religions, were originally fertility cults. The earth was female, the sun male. The bull was usually regarded as an embodiment of male fertility, and bull-gods were common. In Babylon, Ishtar, the earth-goddess, was supreme among female divinities. Throughout western Asia, the Great Mother was worshipped under various names. When Greek colonists in Asia Minor found temples to her, they named her Artemis and took over the existing cult. This is the origin of "Diana of the Ephesians." Christianity transformed her into the Virgin Mary, and it was a Council at Ephesus that legitimated the title "Mother of God" as applied to Our Lady.

Where a religion was bound up with the government of an empire, political motives did much to transform its primitive features. A god or goddess became associated with the State, and had to give, not only an abundant harvest, but victory in war. A rich priestly caste elaborated the ritual and the theology, and fitted together into a pantheon the several divinities of the component parts of the empire.

Through association with government, the gods also became associated with morality. Lawgivers received

their codes from a god; thus a breach of the law became an impiety. The oldest legal code still known is that of Hammurabi, king of Babylon, about 2100 B.C.; this code was asserted by the king to have been delivered to him by Marduk. The connection between religion and morality became continually closer throughout ancient times.

Babylonian religion, unlike that of Egypt, was more concerned with prosperity in this world than with happiness in the next. Magic, divination, and astrology, though not peculiar to Babylonia, were more developed there than elsewhere, and it was chiefly through Babylon that they acquired their hold on later antiquity. From Babylon come some things that belong to science: the division of the day into twenty-four hours, and of the circle into 360 degrees; also the discovery of a cycle in eclipses, which enabled lunar eclipses to be predicted with certainty, and solar eclipses with some probability. This Babylonian knowledge, as we shall see, was acquired by Thales.

The civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia were agricultural, and those of surrounding nations, at first, were pastoral. A new element came with the development of commerce, which was at first almost entirely maritime. Weapons, until about 1000 B.C., were made of bronze, and nations which did not have the necessary metals on their own territory were obliged to obtain them by trade or piracy. Piracy was a temporary expedient, and where social and political conditions were fairly stable, commerce was found to be more profitable. In commerce, the island of Crete seems to have been the pioneer. For about eleven centuries, say from 2500 B.C. to 1400 B.C., an artistically advanced culture, called the Minoan, existed in Crete. What survives of Cretan art gives an impression of cheerfulness and almost decadent luxury, very different from the terrifying gloom of Egyptian temples.

Of this important civilization almost nothing was known until the excavations of Sir Arthur Evans and others. It was a maritime civilization, in close touch with Egypt (except during the time of the Hyksos). From Egyptian pictures it is evident that the very considerable commerce between Egypt and Crete was carried on by Cretan sailors; this commerce reached its maximum about 1500 B.C. The Cretan religion appears to have had many affinities with the religions of Syria and Asia Minor, but in art there was more affinity with Egypt, though Cretan art was very original and amazingly full of life. The centre of the Cretan civilization was the so-called "palace of Minos" at Knossos, of which memories lingered in the traditions of classical Greece. The palaces of Crete were very magnificent, but were destroyed about the end of the fourteenth century B.C., probably by invaders from Greece. The chronology of Cretan history is derived from Egyptian objects found in Crete, and Cretan objects found in Egypt; throughout, our knowledge is dependent on archeological evidence.

The Cretans worshipped a goddess, or perhaps several goddesses. The most indubitable goddess was the "Mistress of Animals," who was a huntress, and probably the source of the classical Artemis. She or another was also a mother; the only male deity, apart from the "Master of Animals," is her young son. There is some evidence of belief in an after life, in which, as in Egyptian belief, deeds on earth receive reward or retribution. But on the whole the Cretans appear, from their art, to have been cheerful people, not much oppressed by gloomy superstitions. They were fond of bull-fights, at which female as well as male toreadors performed amazing acrobatic feats. The bull-fights were religious celebrations, and Sir Arthur Evans thinks that the performers belonged to the highest nobility. The surviving pictures are full of movement and realism.

The Cretans had a linear script, but it has not been deciphered. At home they were peaceful, and their cities were unwalled; no doubt they were defended by sea power.

Before the destruction of the Minoan culture, it spread, about 1600 B.C., to the mainland of Greece, where it survived, through gradual stages of degeneration, until about 900 B.C. This mainland civilization is called

the Mycenaean; it is known through the tombs of kings, and also through fortresses on hill- tops, which show more fear of war than had existed in Crete. Both tombs and fortresses remained to impress the imagination of classical Greece. The older art products in the palaces are either actually of Cretan workmanship, or closely akin to those of Crete. The Mycenaean civilization, seen through a haze of legend, is that which is depicted in Homer.

There is much uncertainty concerning the Mycenaeans. Did they owe their civilization to being conquered by the ...

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