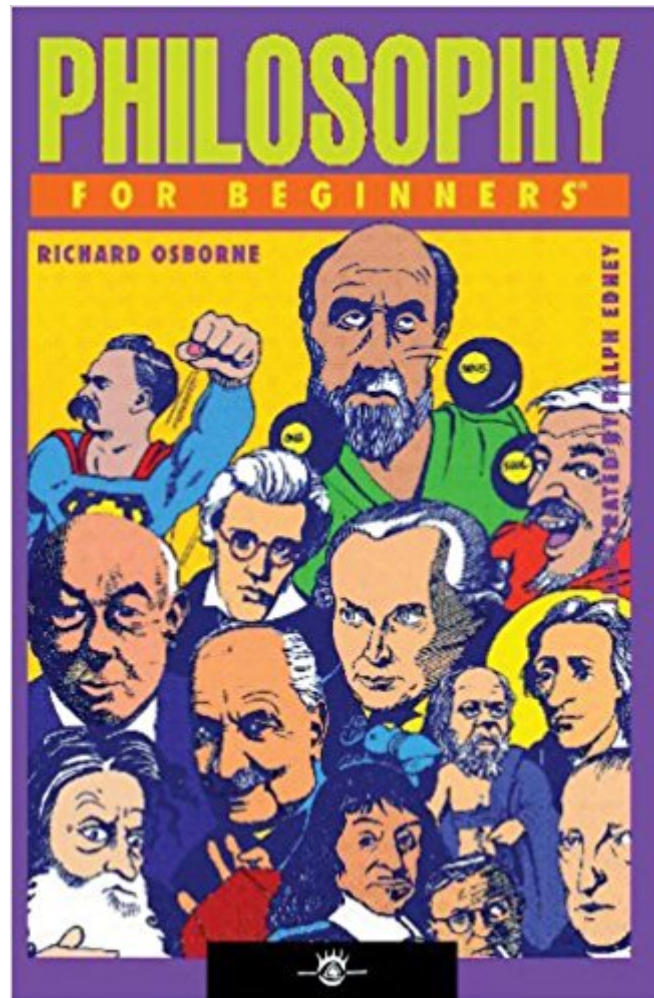




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Philosophy For Beginners



Synopsis

Why does philosophy give some people a headache, others a real buzz, and yet others a feeling that it is subversive and dangerous? Why do a lot of people think philosophy is totally irrelevant? What is philosophy anyway? The ABCs of philosophy - easy to understand but never simplistic. Beginning with basic questions posed by the ancient Greeks - What is the world made of? What is a man? What is knowledge? What is good and evil? - Philosophy For Beginners traces the development of these questions as the key to understanding how Western philosophy developed over the last 2,500 years.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I realise that everyone has their favourite philosophers, and that every attempt to give a history of philosophy is going to be biased in some way, but this book makes no hint of an attempt to be fair. Case in point: Christianity, which is portrayed as pretty much pure evil. I am not a Christian, nor am I a medievalist or theologian, but I have enough education to recognise nonsense when I see it. There is not one intelligent word on Christianity here. That section passes up an opportunity to engage Christianity in a critical manner for utterly unintellectual and vicious mud-throwing. e.g., p. 39: "In the midst of all this Christian argument and religious fervour, Boethius stands out like a Stoic at a chimpanzee's tea party." So all contemporary thinkers are to be compared to chimpanzees? And if Christianity is to be so harshly criticised, why does Islam not also come in for criticism? Of course, I do question many of the author's other judgment calls. Nietzsche gets as many pages (six) as Plato

and Augustine together. Neoplatonism - a millenium of influential philosophy - gets only two pages; the second (p.30) ends with the words "may the force be with you." (I am not making this up.) Marx - and here it becomes clear where the author is coming from - gets EIGHT pages! The author's sympathy for Marx is even able to make him go easy on one of history's greatest genocidal maniacs:(p. 161)"Even Stalin found time to philosophise."(Next panel) "So did the people he locked up or exiled."Really? I might have thought we'd hear a reference to the TENS OF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE HE KILLED! And what do all those deaths tell us about Marxism?

I was also very disappointed with this book. Philosophy is a great subject for "For Beginners" style books, since academic philosophy is ubiquitous (despite misconceptions that it has little relation to the "real world"), important and little understood by non-philosophers. Many people think they know what it is, but that knowing usually involves colloquialisms, maxims and cliches while being unfamiliar with many of the most basic problems in academic philosophy (and consequentially a ignorance of the terms of those problems). So, books of this kind are certainly necessary and invaluable if executed skillfully.Unfortunately, Philosophy for Beginners is not executed skillfully. I agree with a previous reviewer that it is not always easy to pinpoint what is so dissatisfying about this book, but it falls short of your hopes consistently.Specific problems, at least in the edition I reviewed, range from proofreading--there are a number of misspellings--to editing and content. The first few pages are promising. Among the questions proposed are "Why does philosophy give some people a headache, others a real buzz, and yet others a feeling that it is subversive and dangerous?" "Why do a lot of people think philosophy is totally irrelevant?" "What is philosophy anyway?" and the slightly less serious "How can you recognize a philosopher in the street?" It then promises that these questions will try to be answered.

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