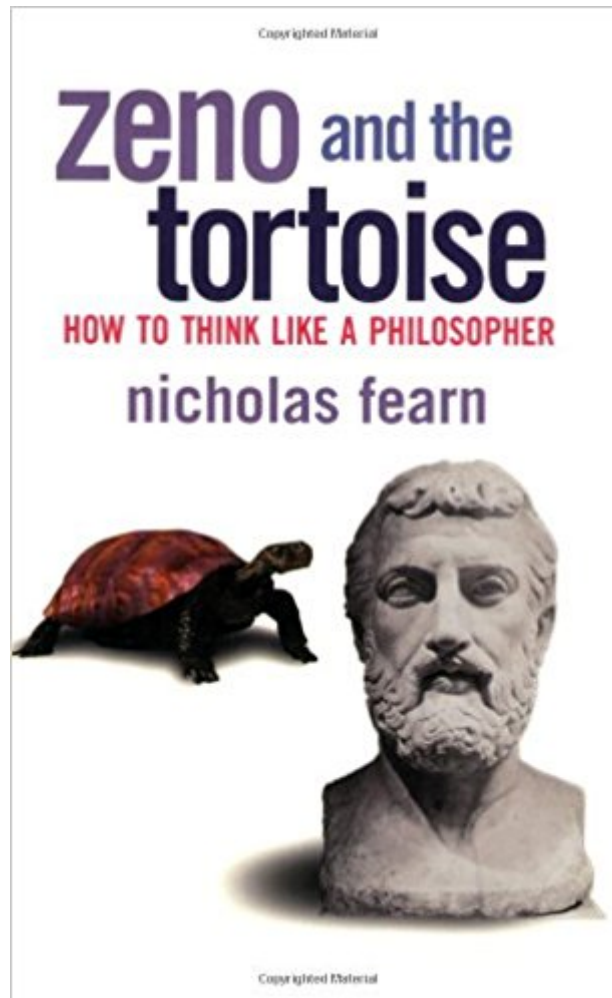




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Zeno And The Tortoise: How To Think Like A Philosopher



Synopsis

For those who don't know the difference between Lucretius's spear and Hume's fork, Zeno and the Tortoise explains not just who each philosopher was and what he thought, but exactly how he came to think in the way he did. Nicholas Fearn presents philosophy as a collection of tools -- the tricks of a trade that, in the end, might just be all tricks, each to be fruitfully applied to a variety of everyday predicaments. In a witty and engaging style that incorporates everything from Sting to cell phones to Bill Gates, Fearn demystifies the ways of thought that have shaped and inspired humanity -- among many others, the Socratic method, Descartes's use of doubt, Bentham's theory of utilitarianism, Rousseau's social contract, and, of course, the concept of common sense. Along the way, there are fascinating biographical snippets about the philosophers themselves: the story of Thales falling down a well while studying the stars, and of Socrates being told by a face-reader that his was the face of a monster who was capable of any crime. Written in twenty-five short chapters, each readable during the journey to work, Zeno and the Tortoise is the ideal course in intellectual self-defense. Acute, often irreverent, but always authoritative, this is a unique introduction to the ideas that have shaped us all. "Entertaining and witty. A smooth, sweet concoction that should tickle the taste buds of the most philosophobic readers." -- Julian Boggini, The Times Educational Supplement (U.K.) "A concise and entertaining attempt to place the skills of philosophy at our fingertips." -- Olivier Burckhardt, The Independent on Sunday (U.K.)

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Customer Reviews

Think of Zeno and the Tortoise as a toolbox for aspiring thinkers. Author Nicholas Fearn aims to

leave readers with an array of handy instruments at their disposal, whether Ockham's razor, Hume's fork, or Nietzsche's hammer. "The object," he writes, "is to show not merely what the great philosophers thought, but to demonstrate how they thought." In addition to supplying readers with the building blocks of philosophical reasoning, Fearn offers a summary history of Western philosophy running from the pre-Socratics through medieval and modern philosophy and up to Derrida. Along the way students will encounter Zeno's reductio ad absurdum, the Socratic method, Cartesian demons, and a number of other elemental concepts drawn from the last 2,500 years of inquiry. The short chapters lack something in depth, but account for it with context and clarity aimed at the nonphilosopher. Zeno and the Tortoise is a sugarcoated introduction to the principal forms of philosophical reasoning that will be especially appreciated by newcomers to philosophy. --Eric de Place --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This slick attempt to make philosophy accessible offers some basic information, but suffers from being either confused or obvious. U.K. journalist Fearn starts from the dubious, undefended premise that the "most enduring contributions of the great philosophers" are "thinking tools, methods and approaches" rather than "theories and systems." This premise becomes weaker as the book gets down to cases, including Fearn's reduction of Plato to someone who developed analogy as a tool, and his treatment of Nietzsche's "hammer" as though it were an identifiable tool at all. These and other selected philosophers from Thales to Derrida are surveyed in chapters that each focus on some "tool" that a particular thinker invented or wielded: the Socratic method, Ockham's razor, Descartes's demon, Hume's fork, etc. Many of these purportedly useful tools are essentially claims (such as Kant's account of noumena or Dawkins's account of memes) that, if false, are not useful, yet their grounds are only spottily examined. Readability is aided through pop references to the likes of Sting, Bill Gates and Batman, but impaired by capsule biographies that sound like encyclopedia excerpts and by philosophical meditations lacking in originality and force (as with some object lessons on how "common sense" varies across cultures and eras) The book may offer instruction for the novice, but is more likely to bore and mislead. Better to get a good philosophical dictionary.

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i was lost in an enlightenment philosophy class, having fallen WAY behind due to some life circumstances, and then I accidentally found this book here, at , while searching for a completely different text. Wow! It presents complex theories and ideas in simple, even humorous and witty ways, and you totally can then grasp the jist of what you needed to learn about a specific thinker,

and much more comfortably move on to the more difficult standard college texts. What an awesome resource, especially for those unfamiliar with philosophy! thanks !

This is a marvelous text. Each chapter focuses on one philosopher and a particular philosophical "tool". For example, Fearn begins at the beginning with Thales and talks about the strengths and weaknesses of reductive explanations (Thales believed that everything was made of water). He proceeds on to Protagoras and relativism and on through Descartes (famous for discovering that he couldn't doubt that he was doubting - i.e., thinking) to Wittgenstein (the best brief introductions I've read to both the "early" and "later" Wittgenstein). Other important philosophers considered are Nietzsche, Kant, Derrida, Ryle, and so on. The aim of the book is to get you to think like a philosopher and not get bogged down in history or arcane debates. It accomplishes this in a splendid fashion and is suitable introduction to philosophy for any thoughtful person.

Good book. Used it in philosophy class.

I really enjoyed reading this book and if the topic of philosophy and thinking is of interest but seems somewhat impenetrable, this could be a book you'd enjoy. The book is divided into 25 brief chapters each covering a major philosopher and their ideas. I was initially attracted by the intriguing title and the accessible format of the book. Each chapter is limited to around half a dozen pages which immediately creates confidence that even if you felt you were drowning, the far bank is close at hand. Add to this Nicholas Fearn's style and approach and you have an entertaining and engaging read and actually learn something of philosophy. The danger with any book on this topic is that philosophy can feel somewhat distant and crusty. To counter this within each chapter the relevance of each idea and the desire to read on is established by setting the idea in a modern situation. For example the chapter on Plato's thinking relates this to the anti-trust law suit brought against Microsoft for including an internet browser within Windows and the thinking of Protagoras is related to the efforts of Sting to help the Kayapo Indians of the . Each chapter provides background to the philosopher's life and those ideas and other thinkers that influenced and sometimes competed with them. The book provides a roughly chronological view of some of the key thinkers who have made a significant contribution to the development of understanding and links their work to the social, technical and other changes that have accompanied the advances. It includes one or two interesting modern names that I hadn't thought of as philosophers which further helps break down the barriers between philosophy as a subject and its application in our everyday lives. For example Alan Turing

the computing pioneer who played a key role in breaking the German Enigma codes is included for his thinking on consciousness. If philosophy is one of those topics that you would like to know a little more about but never quite get around to this could be what you need. It is an educational and fun read and I suspect that can't be said for many books on the topic. Incidentally the book title is taken from the paradox described by Zeno of a race between Achilles and a tortoise. The tortoise is given a 10 yard head start and in the time taken by Achilles to cover these ten yards the tortoise advances a further yard. Achilles advances this further yard and in the time it takes the tortoise advances three inches. Achilles now covers this three inches but in this time the tortoise advances a further inch. As Achilles advances this one inch the tortoise again moves some albeit small distance forwards. Zeno's parable argues that no matter how fast Achilles runs he can never overtake the tortoise as he must first draw level with it. An interesting thought.

I think it was the inclusion of mathematician Alan Turing that prompted me to pick up this book. I should have scanned further. Probably a project like this is doomed from the start: 25 major western philosophers and their grand ideas in 180 pages--oy vay! Sort of like getting the landscape of a majestic city from from a 30,000 foot fly-over. Moreover, Fearn doesn't help the mismatch by crowding in biographical details that usurp even more space, (leave those to a brief appendix). The low points come early, rendering the seminal thoughts of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, and Hegel practically unrecognizable. Clearly the author has either scant interest or background or perhaps both in pre-20th century philosophy. Later thinkers such as Wittgenstein and Ryle fare somewhat better, while the chapter on Turing and linguistic behaviorism possesses genuine merit. All in all, however, this slender work is an object lesson in the hazards of high-altitude flight. If fly you must, my recommendation is to book a lower, slower passage.

I'm only beginning to get into philosophy. Overall I'm finding the book to be a good introduction into a number of philosophers basic ideas; however, there are several passages which are incomprehensible. One occurs on page 13 and I blame the author for this one, he could have rewrote it. The chapter on Descartes is unreadable, but I'll assume Descartes may just be too tough for me. Kenneth Kloby

It has some well-written passages about the philosophers, but reducing them to a tool or condensing them into such a small space is misleading. Philosophy is more of a way of looking at things than reaching into a toolbox. It, in the end, puts philosophy in deceptively simplistic terms. I

would recommend it for someone burnt out on long, involved philosophic tracts or a beginner.

Barely okay book overall, and that is from a purely entertainment basis. If one is looking to learn something new this is not the place to start. The author casts a subjective shadow on many of the philosophers. As to the claim of learning the "tricks of the trade", good luck. A better buy as stated in a previous review is a philosophical dictionary. You will get more use, much more accurate material, and a better read.

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