

An Introduction: Making Sense of this Stuff



CHRISTIAN Americans have a tremendous conflict within their hearts because two different traditions are opposing each other and are vying for supremacy. One tradition is Greek, or western; the other is Hebrew. Because of their origin, Americans are thoroughly immersed in western ideas and thought. However, after being redeemed by God, the Christian American experiences a different way of thinking. Since Christianity has its roots in Judaism and uses a Jewish book for its guide, Christians have an intellectual foundation that is adopted from the Hebrews. This tradition does not rely on human reason and logic. Instead, the Hebrew tradition emphasizes *obedience and adherence to strict*

principles that have been revealed. Therefore, knowing how to live correctly is not a matter of “discovering” these principles through reason because they are easily learned by reading the “lively” oracles of God, which were given only to the Jews (Romans 3.1–2). With the Bible in hand, anyone is able to learn about the most important theme in the scriptures: the reconciliation of man with God.

On the other hand, Christian Americans are still participants in their national history and heritage, which are based on the Greek tradition. Most western theories about philosophy, ethics, politics, metaphysics, jurisprudence, and aesthetics come from the ancient Greeks and Romans, who based their beliefs on *human reason*. When Socrates stated the wisest man is the one who knows he knows nothing or when Sartre believed existence precedes the essence of who we become, the emphasis is no longer about obeying an authoritative rule, but rather about breaking away from the conventional in order to exercise freedom of thought. This individualism was important to the ancients as well as to the humanists of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Indeed, the early American Republic was the result of the political philosophy popularly held during the 17th century, tempered by liberty of conscience promulgated by the Baptists.

In short, while the Hebrews seek salvation through God, the western tradition seeks salvation through man. Since the emphasis of western thought is upon man and his works, this tradition is *humanism* and its subject matter is the *humanities*. Also as a contrast, while the Hebrew tradition shows a cooperative spirit with nature by working with nature, the western tradition through science has an increasing hostility towards nature and the environment, which are to be conquered by and controlled with more advanced technology.

Do not expect this course to reconcile these two opposing traditions. As you should see already, no reconciliation is possible. The Hebrew tradition assumes there is a Creator-God without any attempt to prove his existence logically. On the other hand, the Greek tradition assumes there is no Creator-God because such a belief cannot be proven logically. Therefore, the purpose of this course is two-fold. First, the student will be afforded the opportunity to study the major ideas of the western philosophers. Please note that this course is not intended to be a smorgasbord of western ideas where you can pick and choose “what works for you.” Yet, this study will have value because many of these ideas are prevalent in our social, political, and religious institutions today. You will need to understand the origin of these ideas to combat them. Since these ideas are products of human reason, the systems of thought will have flaws because of the human heart being corrupted by sin, and important decisions about life and living should not be guided by “wishful thinking” or unsupported opinions.

But, second and more importantly, you will learn the proper role of reason, and where reason fits into the Christian worldview. An important point to remember is that philosophy is the use of human logic without any external aids to help it in order to understand questions about our existence and purpose in life. God did give you a profound thing called the brain in order to help you to think deeply about life. Indeed, to fail to use your reason would make you less than human. However, reason is only a part of what makes you a complete human being. As a human being, you are much more than just “a thinking thing.” You also possess a body and a soul. To neglect any of these facilities in favor of just one is folly.

Therefore, the desired outcome of this course in philosophy is to have you answer this very important question, which is essential for your life: WHAT WILL BE YOUR FINAL AUTHORITY? When it comes to living your life to the fullest, the epitome of stupidity would be to hazard guesses about what you should believe and do. Every question, every thought, and every action ought to be compared with and weighed by an authority with a proven record of reliable information and guidance. The choice is really quite simple: either you will rely on the subjective opinions of men, or you will rely on an objective authority, which is not the product of human thinking.

Regarding the text, *Sophie's World*, the book is both a novel and a textbook. As the creator of *Sophie's World*, Jostein Gaarder is a Norwegian, who became a full-time writer after the success of this particular book. However, as a warning, Gaarder supports three views, which receive a very favorable bias: evolution, globalism, and feminism. Even though he is an obviously brilliant and creative thinker, Gaarder accepts these notions as good things, which is unfortunate because none of these positions has any logical foundation and is quite irrational as further material in this course will show. In addition to their failing to be philosophically sound, all three views are manifestations of rebellion against a holy and righteous God. Nevertheless, Gaarder does a fine job when summarizing the major players

and ideas in western philosophy, and *Sophie's World* is an excellent primer for an introduction to this field of study.

I attempted my best to make this course challenging, yet not so comprehensive as to bore the student silly. While I have tried to be careful, I am certain flaws exist. If you find errors of any sort, especially in logic or explanations, I solicit your thoughts. Also, if you believe that some topic is missing or needs more information, I request that you give me your suggestions as well. I shall admit that my feeble understanding has struggled over the years with many of the ideas presented here, and I am still learning. My intent is to be a blessing particularly to young Christians, and not to be the last word about anything presented in these pages. With your insight and valuable input, *Ever Learning* can become a great tool for those in the body of Christ.

ROBERT W. WATSON
High Falls, Georgia on New Year's Day, 2008

Objectives for this course

Text: *Sophie's World* by Jostein Gaarder

Study Guide: *Ever Learning: The Fundamentals and History of Western Philosophy*

- To develop and understand the terms used in western philosophy.
- To have a cursory knowledge about the major figures who developed western philosophy.
- To understand and analyze the major theories found in western philosophy.
- To appreciate the proper role of reason and to understand its place for creating human culture.
- To compare philosophical ideas with the objective standard, the Holy Bible, and more specifically, the Authorized Version for English-speaking people.
- To understand that western philosophy and Hebrew thought cannot be reconciled.
- To establish the Holy Bible as the final authority to be the guide for all human thought, action, and life.