

# Preface 1976

It is a bold man who sets out to fit into one small volume the entire history of philosophy. I feel, however, that despite inevitable shortcomings, the attempt is worthwhile in that it helps to give us a bird's-eye view. Having grasped the outline of the whole, we are in a better position to understand the parts that make it up. To put this another way, essential features and the significance of philosophy as a whole emerge much more clearly in a condensed treatment than in a detailed one. May I therefore warn the reader beforehand: if he is looking for a reference book of individual philosophers and details of philosophical themes, this work is not for him. It offers no more than an introduction to the spirit of philosophy. The reader of German who wishes to have a more detailed account is referred to my two-volume *History of Philosophy* (8th German edition, Herder 1965).

Johannes Hirschberger

# Preface 2008

Hirschberger's *Short History* is, as he says, a condensed treatment of major Western philosophical movements from the Pre-Socratics through to the middle of the twentieth century. But there are some surprises for the twenty-first century reader. Hirschberger's background is in theology as well as philosophy, and this lends his views a certain edge.

It is common nowadays to see Descartes as the founder of modern philosophy, with his work constituting a significant break with Medieval and Scholastic philosophy. This is not where Hirschberger locates the fault-line between the two; rather he locates it in empiricism, espoused by Hobbes, Locke, and Hume. The theologian can assimilate the high-minded rationalism of Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz, but chokes on the empiricist elevation of the material and the sensational.

This is of a piece with Hirschberger's emphasis on the spiritual and the divine. For better or for worse empiricism is distinctive of the last two hundred years. It emphasises practical engagement with the world around us, and the "disenchanted" nature that underlies our science and technology. Hirschberger's discomfort with, in particular, twentieth century logical/analytical philosophy, is clear, and it pushes the reader into examining their own responses.

Hirschberger's text remains virtually unaltered from its 1976 form. I have added a glossary of technical terms and amended a few dates. The principal addition is Part V, on the subject of recent logical/analytical philosophy. This is written in part as a response to Hirschberger and in part to show why this work is of value. Dialogue, discussion and argument are the life-blood of philosophy, and I certainly hope that in this reissued form Hirschberger's book will continue to engage and stimulate readers.

Clare Hay

# Introduction

A study of the historical development of philosophy both requires and stimulates intellectual detachment. The person who limits himself to the present can easily fall a prey to passing fashions; he becomes a slave of the latest -ism. Intellectually rootless and inexperienced, he succumbs to something that may exercise considerable attraction at this particular moment, but that soon withers and passes. For example, Ernst Haeckel's theories once exercised an enormous fascination on all sorts of people; they were even hailed as the definitive word in philosophy. Nowadays they are more likely to cause amusement than anything else. The same may be said of Nietzsche's philosophy, or materialism, or vitalism, or idealism.

Before we can come to a balanced judgement in our search for truth, we have to take a broad view. We need opportunities for comparison; we need to see things not just from one angle but from many; in short, we need to see the wood, not just the trees. And above all we need a deeper understanding of our own ideas, which means tracing them back to their roots. All intellectual life is the result of a growth reaching back into the distant past and there adopting the lines of development which fix our thoughts in set patterns. This is not, of course, to advocate a return to the past for the sake of it. We want to free ourselves from the past. But we also want to free ourselves from slavery to the present, and the only way we can do that is to give ourselves an idea of the relativity of much that passes for novelty. Only a thorough study of history can reveal the present as it really is.

We can usefully divide the history of philosophy into four periods: Antiquity, the Fathers and the Middle Ages, Modern Times, and the Present.