



Zeno and the Tortoise: How to Think Like a Philosopher

By Nicholas Fearn

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Zeno and the Tortoise: How to Think Like a Philosopher By Nicholas Fearn

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 philosophic 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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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

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

From Publishers Weekly

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 now "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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