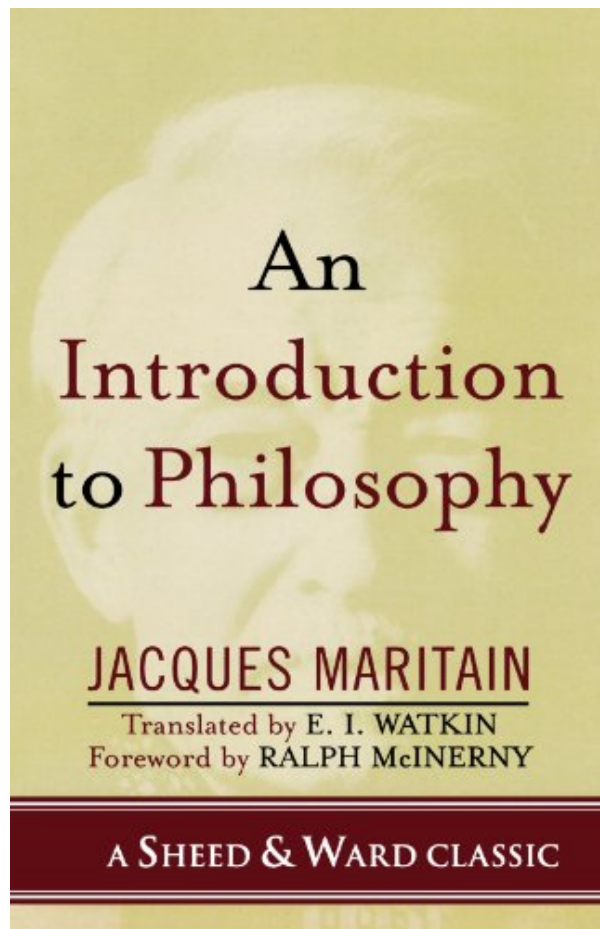
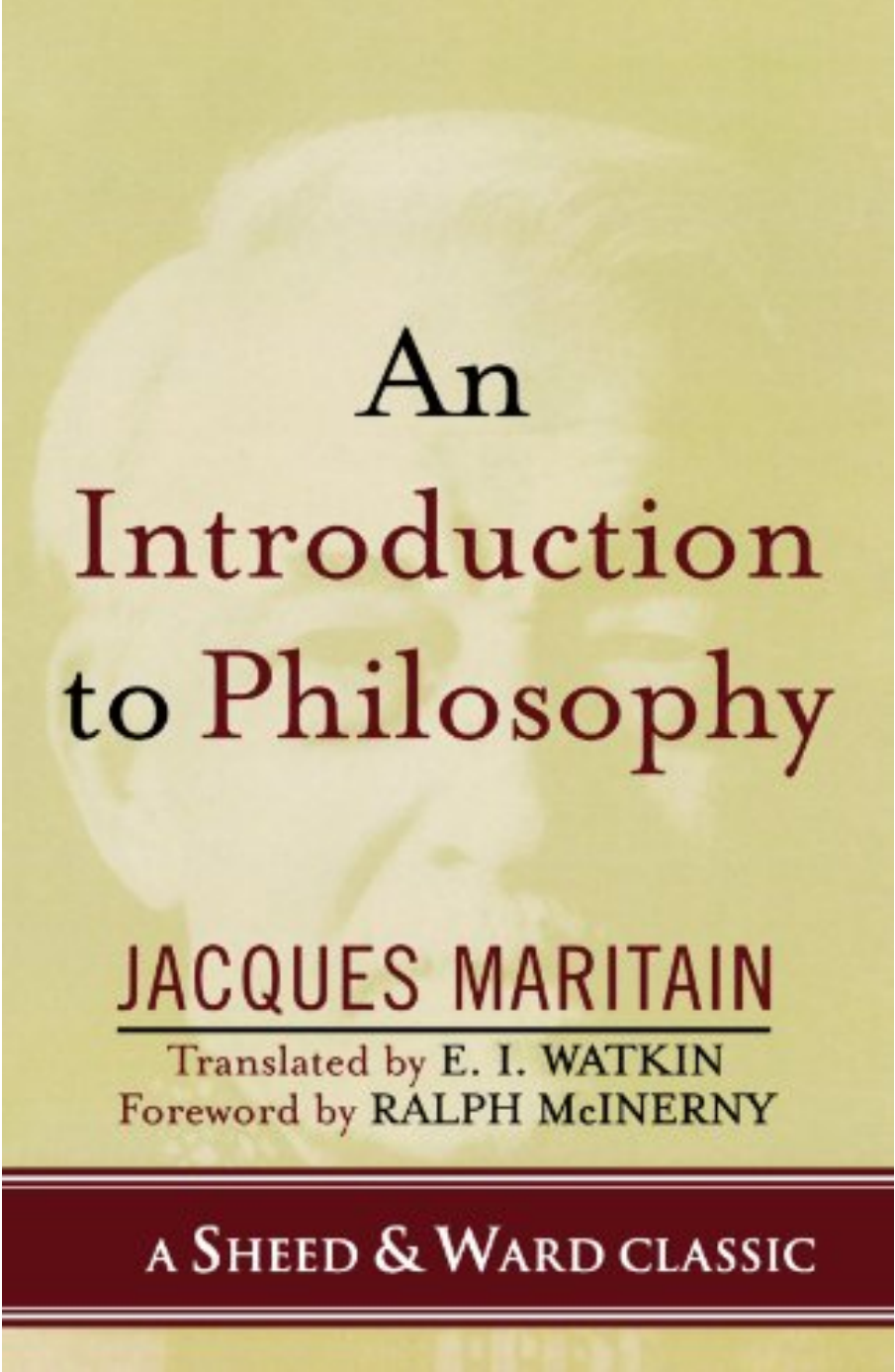


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An
Introduction
to Philosophy

JACQUES MARITAIN

Translated by E. I. WATKIN
Foreword by RALPH McINERNY

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About the Author

Jacques Maritain was one of the most prolific Catholic philosophers of the 20th century.

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Jacques Maritain's *An Introduction to Philosophy* was first published in 1931. Since then, this book has stood the test of time as a clear guide to what philosophy is and how to philosophize. Inspired by the Thomistic Revival called for by Leo XIII, Maritain relies heavily on Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas to shape a philosophy that, far from sectarian theology in disguise, is driven by reason and engages the modern world. Re-released as part of the Sheed & Ward Classic series, *An Introduction to Philosophy* is sure to enliven the minds of students and general readers for years to come.

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About the Author

Jacques Maritain was one of the most prolific Catholic philosophers of the 20th century.

Most helpful customer reviews

83 of 87 people found the following review helpful.

The best intro to philosophy text I have ever seen

By Bryan R. Cross

I have been teaching intro to philosophy for five years, and Maritain's book is the best I have ever seen. In the first four chapters, Maritain lays out the development of philosophical thought from various schools of thought around the world in ancient time, through the pre-Socratics and through Aristotle. Then in the next four chapters he shows what philosophy is, how it is related to the special sciences, to theology, and to common sense. That is all part one of the book. In part two of the book, he examines and explains each of the main divisions of philosophy including: logic, philosophy of mathematics, philosophy of nature, epistemology, ontology (to which he devotes four chapters), and the philosophy of art (i.e. ethics).

The chapter on the relation between philosophy and the special sciences (i.e. physics, chemistry, biology, etc.) is by itself worth the price of the book. Maritain does an excellent job showing that philosophy (per se, not de facto) is a science, and that by its very nature, the science of philosophy should govern the special sciences. Maritain here provides the antidote to the 'scientism' that is so prevalent in academia. Here we learn why ontology is not at the mercy of the special sciences, and thus why we need not be reductionists, physicalists, or eliminativists. This was standard fare many years ago, but has largely been lost in the aftermath of positivism. Ironically, if I had to pick any one book that I think would be most helpful to the Western philosophical community, it would be Maritain's *An Introduction to Philosophy*. So many of the debates in contemporary philosophy are founded on errors that are pointed out in this intro book.

48 of 49 people found the following review helpful.

NB: An excellent intro to Thomist philosophy

By Penn Jacobs

In November 2005 Sheed and Ward reprinted Jacques Maritain's *An Introduction to Philosophy*. This primer, which Maritain first published in 1931, is a bit different from standard introductions to philosophical thought such as Will Durant's *Story of Philosophy*, Bryan Magee's *Story of Philosophy*, or Frederick Copleston's exhaustive multivolume *History of Philosophy*. Maritain's focus is to explicate a particular view of the endeavor of philosophy and to point out the cornerstones of his thought.

To start with, Maritain is a Thomist, following in the intellectual traditions of St. Thomas Aquinas, who in turn draws upon Aristotle. Maritain's approach in this book is to first trace this history of philosophy up to Aristotle. For this, he posits primitive traditions, discernable from both theology and a reasonable induction from historical evidence, which contain wisdom that is common to all mankind globally. He seeks remnants of these traditions in pre-Greek Indo-European civilizations: Persian, Indian, and Chinese. After surveying these, he proceeds to Greek thought: the pre-Socratics, the Sophists, Socrates, Plato, and finally Aristotle. Maritain sees the ancient Persian, Indian, Chinese, and pre-Socratic Greeks as derived from healthy primitive traditions (although in corrupted form). The work of philosophy, in part, is to recover the ancient wisdom and ground it in a system of reason and dialectic.

Upon stating in brief form what he sees as Aristotle's achievements are, Maritain changes his method. He does not follow, as most historical texts would, with a discussion of late antiquity and modern philosophers. For example, do not get a sketch of Descartes in historical context. Rather, Maritain discusses the structure of philosophy as a body of knowledge. That structure is itself determined by Thomist philosophy. Maritain discusses the boundaries of philosophy -- how it is distinct from the empirical sciences, for example, and how it relates to them. He contrasts the Thomist view on philosophy with alternatives in modernity. He then gives an account of the fields of philosophy:

I. Logic (a sort of preamble to philosophy proper)

II. Theoretical philosophy (speculative, related to understanding of the world)

- 1. Philosophy of mathematics and nature
 - 2. Epistemology
 - 3. Ontology and metaphysics
 - 4. Natural theology
- III. Practical philosophy (related to human action)
- 1. Philosophy of art and technology
 - 2. Ethics

Walking through these fields (philosophical categories which themselves follow from his Thomism), Maritain points out both the Thomist and Aristotelian positions, and the modernist positions, which are usually contradictory extremes which the Aristotelian mean reconciles.

It's a very rigorous and systematic book with a good deal of common sense. It explains a lot of Thomism in a very detailed way and makes an excellent reference for those looking to understand this point of view. Thomism can be a bit dry. Maritain goes a long way to guiding the reader to see motivations and connections. For example, one can struggle Aristotle for years and not find as clear an explication of metaphysical terms such as essence (being inasmuch as it can be understood), substance (being inasmuch as it primarily is), and act and potentiality (being inasmuch as it is the subject of change and motion). For anyone interested in Thomism, this book is a find.

15 of 17 people found the following review helpful.

Perfect place to start...

By M. C. Tritle

If one needs an introduction to the field of philosophy, they could no better than to start w/ Maritain's text. Concise, insightful, and clear, it summarizes the aspects of philosophical inquiry in less than 200 pages. As to the Catholic "slant" that a few might find troubling, one must recall the words of Evelyn Waugh when he noted the Catholic Church constituted, "a coherent philosophical system with intransigent historical claims." Here is the doorway into that system; enter a see...

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