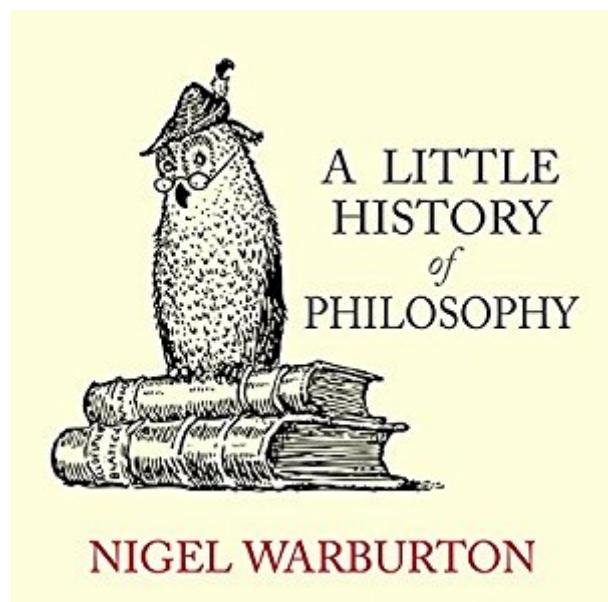


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# A Little History Of Philosophy



## Synopsis

Philosophy begins with questions about the nature of reality and how we should live. These were the concerns of Socrates, who spent his days in the ancient Athenian marketplace asking awkward questions, disconcerting the people he met by showing them how little they genuinely understood. This engaging book introduces the great thinkers in Western philosophy and explores their most compelling ideas about the world and how best to live in it. In forty brief chapters, Nigel Warburton guides us on a chronological tour of the major ideas in the history of philosophy. He provides interesting and often quirky stories of the lives and deaths of thought-provoking philosophers from Socrates, who chose to die by hemlock poisoning rather than live on without the freedom to think for himself, to Peter Singer, who asks the disquieting philosophical and ethical questions that haunt our own times. Warburton not only makes philosophy accessible, he offers inspiration to think, argue, reason, and ask in the tradition of Socrates. *A Little History of Philosophy* presents the grand sweep of humanity's search for philosophical understanding and invites all to join in the discussion.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 7 hours and 35 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Audible Studios

Audible.com Release Date: December 23, 2014

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00RC41LEQ

Best Sellers Rank: #2 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > History & Surveys

#7 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Nonfiction > Philosophy

## Customer Reviews

Reading Nigel Warburton's *A Little History of Philosophy* makes me appreciate even more (if that is possible) EH Gombrich's *A Little History of the World*. In about 300 pages, Gombrich relayed just about every event of significance in world history in an erudite, extraordinarily humane way. His book has been in print for so long and in so many languages, it has inspired an attempt to do the same for philosophy. Unfortunately, Warburton's efforts fall short in many respects, despite providing a delightful entre for true neophytes. *A Little History of Philosophy* tries to accomplish its

task by breaking the development of philosophy up into 40 chapters, each focused on one or two philosophers. Each contains some brief biographical material and a discussion of one or two ideas associated with him or her. After reading *A Little History*, a reader will know the "big names" and become familiar with some of the more interesting questions and ideas raised over the millennia since Socrates hectored his fellow Athenians about what they really understood and believed. Warburton is careful to illustrate philosophical concepts in a manner that assumes no prior knowledge of philosophy. More specifically, he covers both the famous (e.g. Plato, Aristotle, Kant, etc.) and some lesser known figures to the general public (Spinoza, Pierce, Foot, etc.), and includes even the most modern thinkers such as Rawls and Singer. His concept of "philosophy" is broad enough to cover ethics, political philosophy, economic philosophy, theology, ontology, and even some philosophy of science. He generally tries to pair different approaches or variations (e.g., Bentham and Mill on utilitarianism).

I really enjoyed "*A Little History of Philosophy*"! I think the author made a great effort in selecting and summarizing in 5 pages the main idea of each philosopher. I consider it a good option for someone who enjoys philosophy as an amateur (like myself) or just to have an easy to remember summary of what each of these philosophers said. In my opinion that's the great merit of this book. And the daily down-to-earth examples. Well done! Besides this, three ideas got me wondering...1) About Chapter 39 "Can Computers Think?", I believe it'd more suitable here to consider Hubert Dreyfus's work than John Searle's. At least for me, the great relevance of Searle comes from distinguishing families of expressions in "everything we say". By contrast, Dreyfus has dedicated a major part of his work in questioning the traditional approach to Artificial Intelligence. "*Mind Over Machine*" and "*What Computers Can't Do*" are specifically tackling that exact discussion.2) After reading Chapter 40 "A Modern Gafly", my first impression of Peter Singer is that of an Activist rather than a Philosopher. Although I found his stand concerning abortion quite compelling, his argument about animals and helping children in Africa seems not much developed (actually, rather capricious). I suppose it is philosophically well-grounded, but I didn't grab it from the chapter. I wonder why did the author consider his thinking so crucial to have made it into the book.3) I guess this have been written before, but anyway...

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