



Introduction to

Philosophy



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The screenshot shows a digital book interface on a tablet. At the top, it says 'College Success' and '2.2 The Motivated Learner'. On the left is a table of contents. In the center, there's a section titled 'Resilience and Grit' with a paragraph of text and a photo of a runner. A blue box highlights the word 'resilience' in the text. On the right, there's a note-taking sidebar with a text input field containing 'resilience', a save button, and a cancel button. Below the sidebar is a caption for Figure 2.3. At the bottom, there's a section titled 'Applying Grit' with a paragraph of text.

College Success **2.2 The Motivated Learner**

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Resilience and Grit

While much of this chapter will cover very specific aspects about the act of learning, in this section, we will present different information that may at first seem unrelated. Some people would consider it more of a personal outlook than a learning practice, and yet it has a significant influence on the ability to learn.

What we are talking about here is called grit or resilience. Grit can be defined as personal perseverance toward a task or goal. In learning, it can be thought of as a trait that drives a person to keep trying until they succeed. It is not tied simply to a tendency not to give up until something is finished or accomplished.



Figure 2.3 U.S. Army veteran and captain of the U.S. Invictus team, Will Reynolds, races to the finish line. (Credit: DoD News / Flickr / Attribution 2.0 Generic (CC-BY 2.0))

The study showed that grit and perseverance were better predictors of academic success and achievement than talent or IQ.

This personality trait was defined as "grit" by the psychologist Angela Duckworth.¹ In a 2007 study Duckworth and colleagues found that individuals with high grit were able to maintain motivation in learning tasks despite failures. The study examined a cross section of learning environments, such as GPA scores in Ivy League universities, dropout rates at West Point, rankings in the National Spelling Bee, and general educational attainment for adults. What the results showed was that grit and perseverance were better predictors of academic success and achievement than talent or IQ.

Applying Grit

The concept of grit is an easy one to dismiss as something taken for granted. In our culture, we have a number of sayings and aphorisms that capture the essence of grit: "If at first you do not succeed, try, try again," or the famous quote by Thomas Edison: "Genius is one percent inspiration, ninety-nine percent perspiration."

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Introduction to Philosophy

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FIGURE 1.1 Philosophy begins with dialogue—with friends, with yourself, with other philosophers, and with the past. (credit: "Conversations Time moves slowly when talking with old friends" by Sagar/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- 1.1** What Is Philosophy?
- 1.2** How Do Philosophers Arrive at Truth?
- 1.3** Socrates as a Paradigmatic Historical Philosopher
- 1.4** An Overview of Contemporary Philosophy

INTRODUCTION For most college students, an Introduction to Philosophy course is their first encounter with the study of **philosophy**. Unlike most of your other courses, philosophy is not something usually covered in high school. Yet you are probably familiar with the term _____ philosophy and may have some preconceived notion about what philosophy is and what philosophers do. Perhaps you have stayed up late at night talking with friends or family about topics like free will or the existence of God. Maybe you have a friend who always talks about big ideas or asks tough questions that sound like riddles. Perhaps you think of them as “philosophical”; you might be right.

In this chapter, we will provide a brief introduction to the field of philosophy as a historical and academic discipline. This first chapter should prepare you for your philosophy course and give you a better idea of what it means to be a philosopher. As with all introductions, this one is just a start. Your job is to explore more, think more, read more, and write more like a philosopher. Soon you may even find that you are doing philosophy.

plants, and animals saved by Manu from the flood.



FIGURE 1.2This painting, from the late eighteenth century, depicts the first man, Manu, guiding seven sages through floodwaters, with the aid of the king of serpents. (credit: “Manu and Saptarishi” by unknown author/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

Despite the fact that classical Indian culture is patriarchal, women figures play an important role in the earliest writings of the Vedic tradition (the classical Indian religious and philosophical tradition). These women figures are partly connected to the Indian conception of the fundamental forces of nature—energy, ability, strength, effort, and power—as feminine. This aspect of God was thought to be present at the creation of the world. The Rig Veda, the oldest Vedic writings, contains hymns that tell the story of Ghosha, a daughter of Rishi Kakshivan, who had a debilitating skin condition (probably leprosy) but devoted herself to spiritual practices to learn how to heal herself and eventually marry. Another woman, Maitreyi, is said to have married the Rishi Yajnavalkya (himself a god who was cast into mortality by a rival) for the purpose of continuing her spiritual training. She was a devoted ascetic and is said to have composed 10 of the hymns in the Rig Veda. Additionally, there is a famous dialogue between Maitreyi and Yajnavalkya in the Upanishads (another early, foundational collection of texts in the Vedic tradition) about attachment to material possessions, which cannot give a person happiness, and the achievement of ultimate bliss through knowledge of the Absolute (God).

Another woman sage named Gargi also participates in a celebrated dialogue with Yajnavalkya on natural philosophy and the fundamental elements and forces of the universe. Gargi is characterized as one of the most knowledgeable sages on the topic, though she ultimately concedes that Yajnavalkya has greater knowledge. In these brief episodes, these ancient Indian texts record instances of key women who attained a level of enlightenment and learning similar to their male counterparts. Unfortunately, this early equality between the sexes did not last. Over time Indian culture became more patriarchal, confining women to a dependent and subservient role. Perhaps the most dramatic and cruel example of the effects of Indian patriarchy was the ritual practice of sati, in which a widow would sometimes immolate herself, partly in recognition of the “fact” that following the death of her husband, her current life on Earth served no further purpose (Rout 2016). Neither a widow’s in-laws nor society recognized her value.

In similar fashion to the Indian tradition, the sage (sheng) tradition is important for Chinese philosophy. Confucius, one of the greatest Chinese writers, often refers to ancient sages, emphasizing their importance for their discovery of technical skills essential to human civilization, for their role as rulers and wise leaders, and for their wisdom. This emphasis is in alignment with the Confucian appeal to a well-ordered state under the guidance of a “philosopher-king.” This point of view can be seen in early sage figures identified by one of the greatest classical authors in the Chinese tradition, as the “Nest Builder” and “Fire Maker” or, in another case, the “Flood Controller.” These names identify wise individuals with early technological discoveries.

The Book of

Changes , a classical Chinese text, identifies the Five (mythic) Emperors as sages, including Yao and Shun, who are said to have built canoes and oars, attached carts to oxen, built double gates for defense, and fashioned bows and arrows (Cheng 1983). Emperor Shun is also said to have ruled during the time of a great flood, when all of China was submerged. Yü is credited with having saved civilization by building canals and dams.



FIGURE 1.3The Chinese philosopher and historian Han Feizi identified sages with technological discoveries.
(credit: “Portrait of Han Fei” by unknown author/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

These figures are praised not only for their political wisdom and long rule, but also for their filial piety and devotion to work. For instance, Mencius, a Confucian philosopher, relates a story of Shun’s care for his blind father and wicked stepmother, while Yü is praised for his selfless devotion to work. In these ways, the Chinese philosophical traditions, such as Confucianism and Mohism, associate key values of their philosophical enterprises with the great sages of their history. Whether the sages were, in fact, actual people or, as many scholars have concluded, mythical forebearers, they possessed the essential human virtue of listening and responding to divine voices. This attribute can be inferred from the Chinese script for sheng , which bears the symbol of an ear as a prominent feature. So the sage is one who listens to insight from the heavens and then is capable of sharing that wisdom or acting upon it to the benefit of his society (Cheng 1983). This idea is similar to one found in the Indian tradition, where the most important texts, the Vedas, are known as shruti , or works that were heard through divine revelation and only later written down.

Although Confucianism is a venerable world philosophy, it is also highly patriarchal and resulted in the widespread subordination of women. The position of women in China began to change only after the Communist Revolution (1945–1952). While some accounts of Confucianism characterize men and women as