

## Thinkers Reading List

I have compiled this “Thinkers Reading List” because I wanted to create a reliable guide to the most important thinkers in human history, at least in the fields of which I am the most interested. What follows is far from exhaustive and it is a work in process; in other words, I expect to update this chart occasionally. Granting these caveats, this chart still provides useful direction for those of us who want to read those thinkers who have done the most to shape the world in which we live, especially the world of Western civilization. For a much fuller listing of influential people in a wider listing of disciplines, check out Charles Murray, *Human Accomplishment: The Pursuit of Excellence in the Arts and Sciences, 800 BC to 1950* (Harper Collins, 2003).

Categories defined: In the chart below, the primary focus is Western civilization with a smattering of thinkers from Eastern civilizations. Also, the names listed are mostly from disciplines in the Humanities, with some notable exceptions in some of the sciences. Moreover, my placement of names in the categories of “Great Thinkers” and “Significant Thinkers” is largely dependent on Murray’s fine work *Human Accomplishment*; I have occasionally added some names based on my own studies, especially in the areas of philosophy, theology, biblical studies, and history. The “Trustworthy Guides” column is my creation, and the names contained in it are strictly my choices.

- Great Thinkers: Under this category are the figures who have had the greatest influence in their respective disciplines and often in many other disciplines. They are the giants in their field. They almost always set forth fresh ideas, new perspectives, and/or different approaches to issues that captured the imaginations, and set the pace and the standard for those who followed in their footsteps for generations to come.
- Significant Thinkers: These figures are quite influential as well, but their work is more derivative from the works of the great thinkers. They tended to draw out the logical and practical consequences of the great ideas.
- Trustworthy Guides: These are some of the people who I think serve as especially helpful guides through the labyrinth of the great thinkers and great ideas that have particularly shaped Western culture. These guides are excellent and important thinkers in their own right, but only more time will tell if their work rises to the level of significant or great.

Abbreviations key:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A = apologist</li> <li>▪ Ac = activist</li> <li>▪ B = biblical writer</li> <li>▪ E = economist</li> <li>▪ Ed = educator</li> <li>▪ H = historian</li> <li>▪ L = literary author</li> <li>▪ M = mathematician</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mh = Messiah</li> <li>▪ P = philosopher</li> <li>▪ Ps = psychologist</li> <li>▪ R = religious leader</li> <li>▪ S = scientist</li> <li>▪ So = sociologist</li> <li>▪ St = statesman</li> <li>▪ T = theologian</li> </ul> |
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Timeframe	Great Thinkers	Significant Thinkers	Trustworthy Guides
21 <sup>st</sup> cent BC	Job (B)		
15 <sup>th</sup> cent BC	Moses (B)		
13 <sup>th</sup> cent BC	Vedic Sages ( <i>Vedas</i> ) (R)		
11 <sup>th</sup> cent BC	King David (B)		
10 <sup>th</sup> cent BC	King Solomon (B)		
8 <sup>th</sup> cent BC	Isaiah (B) Homer (L)		
7 <sup>th</sup> cent BC	Jeremiah (B)	Thales (M)	
6 <sup>th</sup> cent BC	Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha) (R) Confucius (St) Lao-Tzu (P/R)	Pythagoras of Samos (P/M) Heraclitus (P) Parmenides of Elea (P) Anaximander the Elder (P)	
5 <sup>th</sup> cent BC	Socrates (P) Plato (P) Euripides (L)	Anaxagoras (P) Thucydides (P) Sophocles (P/L)	

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	Hebrew Prophets, 21 <sup>st</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> cent. BC (Hebrew Scriptures) (B)	Gorgias (P) Herodotus (P) Democritus (P) Aeschylus (L) Aristophanes (L)	
4 <sup>th</sup> cent BC	Aristotle (P/S) Euclid (P/M/S) Mencius (P)	Epicurus of Samos (P) Zeno of Citium (P)	
3 <sup>rd</sup> cent BC	Archimedes (S)		
1 <sup>st</sup> cent BC	Cicero (St/L) Horace (L) Virgil (L)	Lucretius (P) Livy (H) Julius Caesar (St) Philo (P) Hillel (R) Shammai (R) Ovid (L)	
1 <sup>st</sup> cent AD	Jesus of Nazareth (Mh) Apostle Paul (B) Luke (B) Apostle John (B) Apostle Peter (B) Christian Apostles (Christian Scriptures) (B)	Seneca (P) Flavius Josephus (H) Tacitus (H) Plutarch (L)	
2 <sup>nd</sup> cent AD	Ptolemy (S) Nagarjuna (P)	St. Irenaeus (A) St. Justin Martyr (A) Marcus Aurelius (P)	
3 <sup>rd</sup> cent AD		Plotinus (P) Origen (T) Tertullian (A/T) Eusebius of Caesarea (T/H)	
4 <sup>th</sup> cent AD	St. Augustine of Hippo (A/T/P)	St. Athanasius (A/T) St. Basil the Great (T) John Chrysostom (T) St. Gregory of Nyssa (T) St. Gregory of Nazianzus (T) St. Ambrose (T)	
6 <sup>th</sup> cent AD		Muhammad (R) Pope Gregory I (R)	
9 <sup>th</sup> cent AD	Sankara (P)		
11 <sup>th</sup> cent AD	Ramanuja (P)	St. Anselm (A/T/P) Avicenna (P) Al-Ghazali (P)	
12 <sup>th</sup> cent AD		Moses Maimonides (P) Averroës (P)	
13 <sup>th</sup> cent AD	St. Thomas Aquinas (A/T/P)	Roger Bacon (T/S) John Duns Scotus (P)	
14 <sup>th</sup> cent AD	Alighieri Dante (L) Petrarch (L)	Thomas à Kempis (T) William of Ockham (P)	
15 <sup>th</sup> cent AD		Desiderius Erasmus (L/T) Niccolò Machiavelli (P)	
16 <sup>th</sup> cent	Nicholas Copernicus (S)	Martin Luther (T)	

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AD	Johannes Kepler (S) René Descartes (P) William Herschel (S)	John Calvin (T) Thomas Hobbes (P)	
17 <sup>th</sup> cent AD	Galilei Galileo (S) John Locke (P) Benedict Spinoza (P) Johannes Kepler (S) Sir Isaac Newton (S) Gottfried Leibniz (P) John Milton (L) Jean Molière (L) Jean Racine (L) William Shakespeare (L)	Blaise Pascal (S/A) Francis Bacon (P)	
18 <sup>th</sup> cent AD	David Hume (P) Immanuel Kant (P) Georg Hegel (P) Jonathan Edwards (T/P) Pierre Laplace (S) Jean Baptiste Lamarck (S) Jean-Jacques Rousseau (P/L) Johann Schiller (L) Francois Voltaire (P/L)	George Berkeley (P) John Wesley (T) Benjamin Franklin (S/St) Adam Smith (E) Edmund Burke (P) Thomas Paine (Ac) Thomas Jefferson (St) Johann Fichte (P) Thomas Malthus (E) Friedrich Schleiermacher (P) Gotthold Lessing (L) Alexander Pope (L) Moses Mendelssohn (P)	
19 <sup>th</sup> cent AD	Charles Lyell (S) James Hutton (S) Arthur Schopenhauer (P) Charles Darwin (S) Karl Marx (P) Friedrich Engels (P) Emile Zola (L) Fyodor Dostoyevsky (L) Leo Tolstoy (L) Gregor Mendel (S) Friedrich Nietzsche (P) Sigmund Freud (Ps) Alfred Whitehead (P) Honoré de Balzac (L) Charles Baudelaire (L) George Byron (L) Johann Goethe (L) Victor Hugo (L) Henrik Ibsen (L) Edgar Allen Poe (L) Aleksander Pushkin (L) Michael Faraday (S)	Friedrich Schelling (P) Thomas Reid (P) Henry Thoreau (L) Walt Whitman (L) Oscar Wilde (L) William Wordsworth (L) Herbert Spencer (So) Wilhelm Dilthey (P) John Stuart Mill (P) Ernst Haeckel (S) John Keats (L) Franz Brentano (P) Charles Sanders Pierce (P) Ivan Pavlov (Ps) Henri Bergson (P) Percy Shelley (L) Charles Dickens (L) Max Weber (So) John Henry Newman (T) Soren Kierkegaard (P) Edmund Husserl (P) William James (P/Ps) David Durkheim (So) George Boole (P)	Alexis de Tocqueville (H/So) A. E. Taylor (P) Benjamin B. Warfield (A/T) Charles Hodge (T) William G. T. Shedd (T)

Timeframe	Great Thinkers	Significant Thinkers	Trustworthy Guides
20 <sup>th</sup> cent AD	Carl Jung (Ps) Albert Einstein (S) T. S. Eliot (L) James Joyce (L) Francis Crick (S) Niels Bohr (S) Enrico Fermi (S) Heisenberg (S) Ludwig Wittgenstein (P) Max Planck (S)	Friedrich Frege (P) John B. Watson (Ps) John Dewey (P) Vivekenanda (P) Bertrand Russell (P) Arthur Eddington (S) Edwin Hubble (S) Martin Buber (P) Franz Kafka (L) Maurice Merleau-Ponty (P) Martin Heidegger (P) Rudolph Carnap (P) Karl Popper (P) B. F. Skinner (Ps) Ayn Rand (P) Hannah Arendt (P) Karl Jaspers (P) Jean-Paul Sartre (P) Albert Camus (L/P) Rudolph Carnap (P) John Paul II (R/T/A) John Rawls (P) Michel Foucault (P) Jacques Derrida (P) Richard Rorty (P) John Maynard Keynes (E) Arnold Toynbee (H) Erich Fromm (Ps) George Orwell (L) J. Robert Oppenheimer (S) Etienne Gilson (P) Jacques Maritain (P) F. R. Tennant (P) William Faulkner (L) Willard Quine (P) Milton Friedman (E) Jean-Francois Lyotard (P) Martin Luther King, Jr. (Ac) Karl Barth (T) J. P. Moreland (P) William Lane Craig (P) Alvin Plantinga (P) William A. Dembski (S)	D. Elton Trueblood (P) William Temple (P) Mortimer J. Adler (P) Walter R. Martin (A/T) Robert E. Webber (H/T) Richard Purtill (P) Bernard Ramm (T/A) Hugh Ross (S) Charles B. Thaxton (S) Owen Chadwick (H) Bernard Lonergan (P/T) Paul Ricoeur (P) Paul Helm (P) John Warwick Montgomery (H) Josef Pieper (P) R. C. Sproul (T/A) Dallas Willard (P) N. T. Wright (T) Os Guinness (So) Walker Percy (L) G. K. Chesterton (A/L) Dorothy Sayers (A/L) J. Gresham Machen (T) Frederick C. Copleston (P) Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange (P) George Eldon Ladd (T) D. Bruce Lockerbie (Ed) C. S. Lewis (A/L) Stuart C. Hackett (P/A) E. L. Mascall (P) Richard John Neuhaus (T) David F. Wells (T) John W. Wenham (T) Gleason L. Archer, Jr. (T) D. A. Carson (T) Ronald H. Nash (P) Edwin Yamauchi (T) Winfried Corduan (P) Peter Kreeft (P) Francis Beckwith (P) Thomas V. Morris (P) Charles Colson (A) C. Stephen Evans (P) George Marsden (H) Mark A. Noll (H) Norman L. Geisler (A/T/P) Gary R. Habermas (P/A) Pope Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger) (R) Neil Postman (Ed) Richard M. Weaver Jr. (Ed)