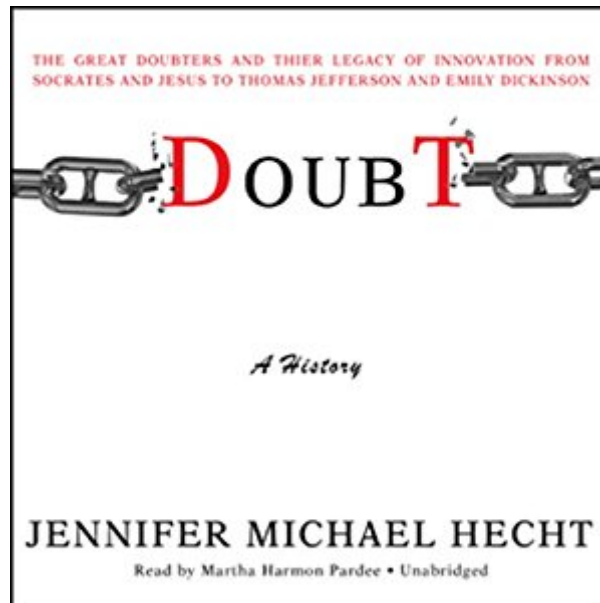


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# Doubt: A History: The Great Doubters And Their Legacy Of Innovation



## Synopsis

In the tradition of grand sweeping histories such as *From Dawn To Decadence*, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, and *A History of God*, Hecht champions doubt and questioning as one of the great and noble, if unheralded, intellectual traditions that distinguish the Western mind especially-from Socrates to Galileo and Darwin to Wittgenstein and Hawking. This is an account of the world's greatest 'intellectual virtuosos,' who are also humanity's greatest doubters and disbelievers, from the ancient Greek philosophers, Jesus, and the Eastern religions, to modern secular equivalents Marx, Freud and Darwin—and their attempts to reconcile the seeming meaninglessness of the universe with the human need for meaning. This remarkable book ranges from the early Greeks, Hebrew figures such as Job and Ecclesiastes, Eastern critical wisdom, Roman stoicism, Jesus as a man of doubt, Gnosticism and Christian mystics, medieval Islamic, Jewish and Christian skeptics, secularism, the rise of science, modern and contemporary critical thinkers such as Schopenhauer, Darwin, Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, the existentialists. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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## Customer Reviews

This book provides a different dynamic view of how philosophy developed. While engaged in studying philosophy decades ago I found that the approaches to this study fell into a couple of categories. Either the view was historical meaning that philosophers were discussed chronologically and tied to each other that way, or they were grouped into disciplines such as ontology, cosmology,

epistemology, metaphysics, ethics and the like or in some cases schools of thought such as existentialism. While all of these approaches were valuable and allowed the student to tie sequential philosophers together they all lacked a clear integration of thought beyond the periods in which they lived. This book uses the concept of "Doubt" as the integrating principle of all of these branches of thought and takes a process view of how our civilization has developed over the millennia. It also factors in Eastern as well as Western thought development, thus providing a flow of the evolution of our knowledge over time. Finally it takes the approach that all of these aspects of philosophical thought are interdependent and evolved together relying upon each other to find a comprehensive view of what life is and how we relate to it. I found the book to be difficult to put down, a quite different experience with philosophical or theological histories than others I have read over the years. Admittedly it helps to have knowledge of these thought disciplines but for the most part the book is written in a very easy to follow format and doesn't require years of study to understand and appreciate how these concepts have developed. It helps to take different views of historical development to further understanding of these principles and this book provides one of the most valuable I have experienced over the past 50 years.

CONTINUES TO AMAZE !!!It's the best primer ever for students and lovers of philosophy, especially in the face of superstitions and their dogmas. Supremely well-researched. The Notes and Bibliography are treasure troves for sources. I've never seen anything so indispensable to a scholar, a thinker, a skeptic, a doubter than this. The new linchpin in my philosophy/science/religion library. A source you can trust.

Ms. Hecht has written a tremendous work (500 pages, small print), so much history from ancient Greek Gods to present. I have always been doubtful of Bible stories, not religious at all, but this book makes it very clear that doubt has been a MAJOR force throughout history. I learned more about Buddhism than I got from "The Teachings of Buddha". Hundreds of thousands of 'doubters' were burned at the stake during the Inquisitions in Europe over 300 years. Starting from Socrates, Plato, Cicero and other Greek doubters; through Buddha, Newton, Galileo, Robespierre, onto Jefferson, Adams, Paine, and Franklin in early America to Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, Susan B. Anthony, Keats, Emily Dickenson, and Mark Twain were major doubters along with many others that came in the Enlightenment Era. She identifies so many poets and writers that tried, and eventually succeeded, to take power away from the church. I love Socrates statement that he knew absolutely nothing about astronomy/theology, but he was still the smartest person around because he knew

that he knew nothing. "Doubt" is such a great title, it means almost the same as 'agnostic' or 'skeptical' but everybody knows the definition of 'doubt'. Some reviewers accuse her of meaning 'atheist', but I don't think they have read this book - an atheist can't conceive of a God. Most people described here are wrestling and debating with the idea of a God and afterlife. The 10th and final chapter (1900-) along with 'Conclusion' is my favorite part of the book and easier to read than the earlier chapters, although the whole book is eye-opening and I appreciate her effort at trying to keep it light throughout. Because so many writers had very lofty, difficult to explain ideas, some a bit over-educated, or just trying to be obtuse in order not to be burned alive, much of the first half of the book was a chore to read; I was still blown away by the sheer amount of information. The section on Mark Twain's writing's (pg. 441) on this subject is amusing and so to-the-point. After riding the fence for decades, this book pushes me off the fence and convinces me that I am not wrong in believing that if there is a God he is not answering prayers and does nothing against evil in the world. The amazing author Ayaan Hirsi Ali is correct- THAT God is not a 'loving all-powerful engaged God' and not worthy of worship.

A marvelous, dense, but readable history of religious doubt, from the earliest writings to the 21st century. I've been working on this for about 10 months, carrying it around on my Kindle and inching along, giving me plenty of time to digest between readings of other books. It's well worth the effort and has a large bibliography I plan to use frequently. Covers Greek, Roman, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, and Muslim doubt, among others, with Buddhism, of course, beginning as a religion of non-theists. There's lengthy discussion of the various schools of doubt, as well as analysis of our America's Founding Fathers, many of whom, especially Jefferson, were doubters or downright non-believers and specifically worded the Bill of Rights to ensure that religion would never again intrude on our politics. If only..... Given the current international situation, with fundamentalism as a core issue, I was delighted to find mention of the modern author Ibn Warraq (a pseudonym), an ex-Muslim who wrote "Why I Am Not a Muslim" and who castigates Western society for not subjecting Islam to the critical method, as Christianity and other religions have been, and instead being afraid to criticize it. Something to think about.

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