In this book Robert Piercey asks how it is possible to do philosophy by studying the thinkers of the past. He develops his answer through readings of Martin Heidegger, Richard Rorty, Paul Ricoeur, Alasdair MacIntyre, and other historically minded philosophers. Piercey shows that what is distinctive about these figures is a concern with philosophical pictures – extremely general conceptions of what the world is like – rather than specific theories. He offers a comprehensive and illuminating exploration of the way in which these thinkers use narrative to evaluate and criticize these pictures. The result is a powerful and original account of how philosophers use the past.

ROBERT PIERCEY is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at Campion College, University of Regina.
THE USES OF THE PAST FROM HEIDEGGER TO RORTY

Doing Philosophy Historically

ROBERT PIERCEY
Campion College, University of Regina
For Anna, of course
# Contents

**Acknowledgments**  
ix  
**List of abbreviations**  
x  

## Introduction: The uses of the past  
1  
The history of a label  
2  
The plan of the book  
5  

### 1. Doing philosophy historically  
9  
Current views  
9  
Randall and the genetic method  
15  
The evolution of philosophical pictures  
19  
More on pictures  
25  

### 2. The role of narrative  
31  
Rorty, narrative, and “seeing as”  
31  
Argument  
42  
Rationality  
47  
Truth  
53  

### 3. Defending the historical thesis  
58  
The “historical thesis about philosophy”  
59  
The historical thesis reconsidered  
65  
A different strategy  
73  
A simple taxonomy  
78  

### 4. The critical approach: MacIntyre  
82  
History in MacIntyre’s early work  
82  
Criticism as repudiation: *After Virtue*  
87  
97  
Criticism as vindication: *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*  
115  
The bigger picture  
124  

© Cambridge University Press  
www.cambridge.org
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>5</strong> The diagnostic approach: Heidegger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heidegger’s project and the forgetfulness of being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgetfulness as Platonism: <em>The Essence of Truth</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgetfulness as metaphysics: The Nietzsche lectures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgetfulness as onto-theology: <em>Identity and Difference</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The bigger picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6</strong> The synthetic approach: Ricoeur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s in a name?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The bigger picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*References* 212

*Index* 219
Acknowledgments

Parts of this book were originally published elsewhere. An early version of Chapter 1 appeared in Review of Metaphysics 56. Part of Chapter 6 was first published, in somewhat different form, in Philosophy Today 51. Another article based on Chapter 6 will appear in a forthcoming issue of American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly. I’m grateful to all of these journals for letting me reuse this material. In addition, early versions of some parts of the book were presented as lectures to the Canadian Philosophical Association, the Memorial University Philosophy Colloquium, and the Philosophical Association of Religiously Affiliated Colleges. Thanks to all who attended these sessions for their stimulating comments.

My work on this book was funded by grants from Campion College, from the University of Regina, and from the Humanities Research Institute. I’d like to thank the people who helped me take advantage of this assistance: Benjamin Fiore, S.J., Samira McCarthy, and Nicholas Ruddick. I’m grateful to several other people at Campion who helped this project along in a variety of ways: Suzanne Hunter, Chris Riegel, Katherine Robinson, and Stacey Sallenback. Special thanks to Sarah Gray, my tireless research assistant and a true débrouillard.

I’m indebted to all those who commented on drafts of the book, or who discussed the ideas in it with me. They include: Michael Bowler, Scott Cameron, Gary Foster, Morny Joy, Christopher Lawn, David Pellauer, David Scott, John Scott, Michael Tilley, and Henry Venema. I’m particularly grateful to Hilary Gaskin and two anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press for their many helpful suggestions. And as always, I’d like to extend a very special thanks to Gary Gutting and Steve Watson – not just for their insights into the philosophical issues discussed in this book, but for sharing their time, their energy, and their immense practical wisdom.

Most of all, I’m grateful to Anna. She knows why.
Abbreviations

The following abbreviations will be used for frequently cited titles:

\( AV \quad \text{Alasdair MacIntyre, } After \text{ Virtue, } 2\text{nd edn. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984.} \)


\( CI \quad \text{Paul Ricoeur, } The \text{ Conflict of Interpretations, ed. Don Ihde. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974.} \)

\( ET \quad \text{Martin Heidegger, } The \text{ Essence of Truth, } \text{trans. Ted Sadler. New York: Continuum, 2002.} \)

\( FS \quad \text{Paul Ricoeur, } Figuring \text{ the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination, } \text{trans. David Pellauer, ed. Mark Wallace. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.} \)

\( ID \quad \text{Martin Heidegger, } Identity \text{ and Difference, } \text{trans. Joan Stambaugh. New York: Harper and Row, 1969.} \)

\( KRV \quad \text{Immanuel Kant, } Critique \text{ of Pure Reason, } \text{trans. Norman Kemp Smith. London: Macmillan, 1927.} \)

\( N1 \quad \text{Martin Heidegger, } Nietzsche, \text{ Volume I: The Will to Power as Art, } \text{trans. David Farrell Krell. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991.} \)

\( N2 \quad \text{Martin Heidegger, } Nietzsche, \text{ Volume II: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same, } \text{trans. David Farrell Krell. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991.} \)

\( N3 \quad \text{Martin Heidegger, } Nietzsche, \text{ Volume III: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics, } \text{trans. David Farrell Krell. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991.} \)

\( N4 \quad \text{Martin Heidegger, } Nietzsche, \text{ Volume IV: Nihilism, } \text{trans. David Farrell Krell. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991.} \)

\( OAA \quad \text{Paul Ricoeur, } Oneself \text{ as Another, } \text{trans. Kathleen Blamey. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.} \)
List of abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>