

# Arthur Oncken Lovejoy Biography

## Arthur Oncken Lovejoy

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# Biography

Arthur Oncken Lovejoy (1873-1962), American philosopher, helped establish the history of ideas as a separate scholarly field.

Born in Berlin, Germany, on Oct. 10, 1873, Arthur Lovejoy emigrated to the United States. He received a bachelor of arts degree from the University of California in 1895. In 1897 Harvard awarded him a master of arts degree. After studying at the Sorbonne in Paris, he organized a department of philosophy at Stanford University in California. However, he resigned to protest what he felt was an unfair dismissal of a colleague. From 1901 to 1908 Lovejoy taught at Washington University in St. Louis. After 2 years at the University of Missouri, he moved to Johns Hopkins University, where he spent the rest of his teaching career, with occasional trips to Harvard as visiting lecturer.

For many years Lovejoy's primary influence came through his teaching and short articles, as well as through the History of Ideas Club he helped organize at Johns Hopkins. Not until relatively late in life did he publish book-length expositions. *The Revolt against Dualisms* (1930) reflected his desire to establish a philosophical position somewhere between the popular extremes of "idealism" (which made the universe dependent upon consciousness) and "realism" (which argued for an objective existence independent of consciousness). His philosophical focus on the transitional dimension of being and knowledge coincided with his interest in intellectual history.

In numerous essays and two books, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (1935) and *The Great Chain of Being* (1936), his most important work, Lovejoy elaborated a scholarly discipline best described as the study of the history of ideas. Whereas most intellectual historians had emphasized the external relationship of thought to environment, Lovejoy stressed internal analysis to demonstrate how the meaning of ideas changes through the ages and how "unit-ideas" manifest themselves in the thought of men outside the philosophical profession. Essentially, his was a philosopher's method, which may explain why historians and literary experts in the field did not often attempt to duplicate his approach. *The Great Chain of Being* evoked much admiration but little imitation; the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, which Lovejoy helped found and edit, maintained his high standards of philosophical analysis. He died on Oct. 30, 1962.