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■ **The World Philosophy Made**

Scott Soames

Princeton 2019, 439 pp., £25, h/b.

This book is an erudite riposte to the accusation that philosophy has little practical relevance. In a sweeping narrative beginning with the Greeks, the author shows how philosophy has in fact laid ‘the conceptual foundations for advances in theoretical knowledge and in advancing the systematic study of ethics, political philosophy, and human well-being.’ In this sense, philosophy is a partner in a wide range of disciplines that draw on philosophical ideas, whether they are aware of this or not. In itemising the ancient Greek contribution, he points to various concepts such as truth, proof, definition, matter, mind, motion and causation that form the basis of scientific thinking, along with the importance of basing beliefs on evidence and argument rather than on authority. While explaining these developments, the author introduces the reader into some of the necessary technicalities involved. The book proceeds with mediaeval philosophy - the truce between faith and reason - before examining the origins of modern science and the emergence in the 18th-century of ‘free societies, free markets and free people.’ He points out that many leading figures were scientists as well as philosophers, such as Newton and Leibniz, while Adam Smith, best known for his contributions to economics, was in fact a professor of moral philosophy. The remaining chapters analyse in detail the contributions of philosophers to a wide range of disciplines: logic, mathematics, computation, language, cognitive science, physics, justice, law and morality. The ideas of leading thinkers are critically exposed in relation to the various disciplines covered. There is a particularly good discussion of John Rawls’ theory of justice and the lesser-known work of Gerald Gaus on the tyranny of the ideal. The final chapter returns to the themes of virtue, happiness and meaning in the face of death, which the author defines as the one of the twin aims of Western philosophy along with rational enquiry. The challenge here is to ‘reconceptualise traditional understandings of virtue and happiness to accommodate our growing scientific knowledge of human nature’ - here the author accepts the naturalistic assumption that death is extinction, and therefore confines his perspective accordingly while nobly promoting the broadening and deepening of our commitment to people and things we most value. Continental philosophy is notably absent from the author’s coverage, including existentialism, but this is not unusual in the American and British empirical tradition. The work of Frederick Copleston is referenced, but not Russell’s History of Western Philosophy nor, unsurprisingly, Richard Tarnas’ Passion of the Western Mind. And although there is a chapter on philosophy and physics, there is scant reference to David Bohm and the important work of Eddington, Schrödinger, Jeans and Whitehead. Having said this, the work is nonetheless magisterial in its scope and depth, as such constituting an important addition to the literature on the history of philosophy. ■