



The Consequences of Ideas: Understanding the Concepts That Shaped Our World

R.C. Sproul

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Readers will be challenged to take the consequences of ideas seriously through this expert survey of history's most influential philosophies-philosophies that continue to shape our lives for better or for worse today.

The Consequences of Ideas: Understanding the Concepts That Shaped Our World Details

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From Reader Review The Consequences of Ideas: Understanding the Concepts That Shaped Our World for online ebook

Arizonagirl says

I wanted this book to be Philosophy 101 but I failed to realize that it was written by a Christian creationist clergyman. I like the idea of discussing how philosophers' ideas through time have shaped our understanding of the world and our values, but I feel that reducing the conversation to Western philosophers and Christian ideas and values is limiting and biased. Sproul does a pretty good job of describing the philosophical concepts in lay terms, but he does assume you have some prior knowledge. I feel like the title of the book was a misnomer since he failed to discuss explicitly how these concepts have influenced our world. What consequence does the idea of 'just war' have? How has Marx's views on capitalism shaped our economy? How has Augustine's discussion of original sin influenced misogynistic viewpoints? How would our behavior change if we believed in Kant's views that God cannot be perceived but we must live as if He exists for ethics and society to be possible as opposed to Heidegger's view that we have a choice to live an authentic or inauthentic existence? These types of questions are not discussed. The conclusion is only five pages long in which Sproul finishes by agreeing with the philosopher Etienne Gilson that our only option is to choose between Aquinas and Kant.

For my own edification, I have listed the main ideas of each philosopher as I go through the book.

Pre-Socrates:

Thales of Miletus - Water is the essence of all matter.

Pythagoras - Mystical significance of numbers and music. Pythagorean theorem.

Heraclitus - All things are in flux. You cannot step in the same river twice. Fire is the basic element. Unity of opposites (the path up and down are one and the same).

Parmenides - Whatever is, is. Change is an illusion.

Zeno of Elea - Our senses do not prove reality. Zeno's Paradoxes. The runner can never reach the end of the race since first he would have to go halfway, then another halfway, to infinity.

Empedocles - Objects are composed of particles. The particles do not change, but the objects can change. Four basic elements: fire, water, earth, and air. Two opposing and equal forces: love and hate.

Anaxagoras - Reality is composed of matter and mind.

Sophism - Taught the art of rhetoric. Man is the measure of all thing. Objective truth is not possible.

Socrates - Socratic method of discerning truth by asking questions.

Plato - Analogy of the cave. Knowledge comes through reason, not experience. Ideas are real entities. Knowledge of the material world is mere opinion.

Aristotle - Defined logic, categories. Believed everything is composed of form and matter. Four causes that produce change. The unmoved mover. Was Alexander the Great's mentor.

Stoics - Man cannot control his own fate but can control his reactions and inner response. By being imperturbable, one can attain a peace of mind.

Epicureans - Pursuit of happiness through refined hedonism. Believed religion engenders a superstitious, debilitating fear.

The Skeptics - Truth cannot be known with certainty.

Neoplatonists - Heavily influenced by Plato. All of reality comes from The One in layers of materiality. The One is ineffable.

Augustine - Believed in divine revelation. The goals of philosophy are knowledge of God and knowledge of self. Faith: "I believe in order to understand". God created all things out of nothing. God created man with free will. Original sin.

Thomas Aquinas - Some truths can only be known through Scripture, but some truths can be discovered in nature. Proofs of God's existence: 1) motion-the first mover must be God. 2) efficient cause-every effect must have an antecedent cause. 3) necessary being-God's existence is not merely possible, but necessary since He did not receive His existence from something else. 4) degrees of perfection-the perfection and good in all beings must be derived from something. 5) evidence of order in the universe-the design of the universe demands a designer.

Copernicus - The planets move in circular orbits and the Earth is not the center of God's universe.

Martin Luther - Just a passing sentence on how his challenging views fragmented the church.

Rene Descartes - Mathematician. Deductive reasoning. Rules for the Direction of the Mind. Process of systematic doubt. "I think, therefore I am". God is the perfect cause of the idea of perfection.

Baruch Spinoza - God is the only substance.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz - Monads. The universe is composed of individual monads, each of which acts independently. Since we live in an universe, not a multiverse, there must be a God to unite all of the monads.

John Locke - Tabula rasa: all knowledge is gained through experience. The existence of God is inferred through demonstration. All law is grounded in natural law and natural law is rooted in divine law.

George Berkeley - To be is to be perceived. God is the great perceiver.

David Hume - Since we cannot directly perceive the cause of anything, we can never know with certainty what is causing it.

Immanuel Kant - God can never be perceived but for practical purposes we must live as if He exists for ethics and society to be possible.

G.W.F. Hegel - What is rational is real, and what is real is rational.

Karl Marx - Labor is the primary catalyst for human self-realization. Predicted that the rich would get richer and the poor poorer until there was a revolt. Society's economic platform shapes its reason or theology.

Religion is the opiate of the masses.

Soren Kierkegaard - Three stages of life: 1) aesthetic, pursuing a life of sensuousness 2) ethical, moral responsibilities and guilt 3) religious, belief in God through a leap of faith. The believer finds truth only when he experiences the tension between himself and God. The father of religious existentialism.

Friedrich Nietzsche - God is dead. Nietzsche was delusional and ended up in an asylum for a brain infection. The father of atheistic existentialism. The will to power. Übermensch.

Edmund Husserl - The father of modern phenomenology. The world derives meaning from the self's experience of phenomena.

Martin Heidegger - Man is thrown in his particular existence and he is responsible for discovering the meaning of his existence. He can choose to live an authentic or inauthentic existence.

Jean-Paul Sartre - Existence precedes essence. Man simply is. There is no God to design a purpose for man. Man is what he makes of himself. There is no human nature. Human existence is freedom. Lifelong partner to Simone de Beauvoir.

Charles Darwin - The theory of evolution. 1) Each individual member of a given species is different. 2) All creatures produce more offspring than the environment can support. 3) Differences among individuals combined with environmental pressures affect the probability that a given individual will survive long enough to pass onto its genetic traits.

Sigmund Freud - Founder of psychoanalysis. Freud explains that every culture is religious because the only way that a civilization can defend against natural disasters is to humanize them, thereby submitting to their authority, befriending them with praise, begging for mercy, and offering bribes and sacrifices. Religion has a threefold task: 1) to exorcise the terrors of nature; 2) to reconcile us to the cruelty of fate; 3) to compensate us for the sufferings civilization has imposed. Freud predicted a sexual revolution.

Ontology - the study of being

Epistemology - the study of knowledge

Eschatology - the study of the ultimate destiny of humanity

Andy says

Good (brief) overview of the history of philosophy and philosophical thought.

Lydia Redwine says

I read this for school. It is excellent if you want to learn more about philosophy.

Jessica says

Does anything begin without first being an idea? A thought? How have ideas shaped the world we know today? That's what R. C. Sproul sets out to explain in this book.

Going back to the days of Pythagoras, Sproul gives us an introduction to the ideas and theories of many of the greatest thinkers, including Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, Nietzsche, and others. We watch as a world where theology and philosophy are the chief sciences gives way to thinkers who seek to remove theology from all thought. As these ideas shift, we can see how they have changed the way societies behave.

R. C. Sproul is a noted theologian, and in the introduction of this book he explains that he was a philosophy major at twenty years old. So, he is more than knowledgeable enough in both areas. It's a great introduction to several of the most notable philosophers throughout history. While Sproul takes the time to explain both philosophical and theological terms, the subject matter can be a bit difficult. Sproul says in the introduction, "This book is written not for philosophy scholars but for laypersons—albeit educated laypersons." It explains, but never talks down. If the words "I think, therefore I am" have never caused you to stop and ponder, then this book may not be for you. However, if you're interested in the basics of the history of philosophical thought, this is an excellent start.

I received a free electronic copy of this book for review purposes from Crossway.

Jonathan says

In *The Consequences of Ideas*, R.C. Sproul presents a brief history of philosophical thought, examined from a biblical perspective. Although the breadth of the subject matter does not permit much time to be devoted to any particular school of thought, on the whole the book provides an excellent introduction to the ways in which philosophy as a science has developed over time, as well as beginning to outline some of the more important implications of each new (or not-so-new) way of thinking.

From Aristotelian logic to Descartes' maxim *cogito ergo sum* to Nietzsche's declaration that "God is dead," Sproul touches on all the watershed moments in Western philosophical history by focusing on the most influential of the thinkers. Brevity of course prevents a full treatment of each man's work, but the general thrust of their ideas, as they reacted to those who came before and inspired those who came after, is presented in a lucid summary. Important epistemological concepts – the law of non-contradiction, the dialectic of thesis and antithesis resolved in synthesis – are also discussed at appropriate moments.

Though Sproul writes from the perspective of Reformed theology, the book, happily, is not simply a critique of ideas or philosophers he finds objectionable. Rather than rail against the evils of wrong thinking, Sproul attempts to provide a fair and accurate account of the ideas of each philosopher he discusses. He does occasionally point out divergences between the subject matter at hand and biblical theology, but even these insertions are illustrative rather than didactic. This is not to say that Sproul embraces any notions of subjectivism or relativism, far from it, but his main goal is to relate historical thought and discuss the resulting implications, not to provide commentary. The reader is thus challenged to delve further into the issues presented in order to draw his own conclusions.

Though far from comprehensive, Sproul's book provides a solid foundation for a more structured study of this broad topic. As each of the trees in this dense forest is more than capable of absorbing one's whole attention, having an encompassing overview of the whole to refer back to seems a helpful proposition. As the questions addressed by the realm of philosophy, questions of existence, of how knowledge is obtained, are foundational to any other study one might undertake, finding satisfactory answers is perhaps the most important task one can set about. This book will serve as a helpful tool towards that end.

Jimmy says

Good work that presents a historical survey of western philosophy beginning with the Pre-Socratic Greek philosophers all the way up to the Deconstructionists of the 20th Century. R.C. Sproul does a good job overall. This work is largely an exposition of the various philosophies rather than a Christian refutation of them per se. The author's Evangelical perspective does come out though in the book (not a bad thing). It might be a little known fact but Sproul considers among the top five influential books he has read include Gordon Clark's "Thales to Dewey." This work overall seems to be a popular adaptation of Clark's work. The book overall does not have much footnote for a much lighter read. Good book to read for a broad survey.

Adam Calvert says

I was a little disappointed with this book. I was told that Sproul was famous for taking hard concepts and putting them into easy-to-read/easy-to-understand words. So, after reading the description and especially after reading through the table of contents, I was expecting this to be a pretty decent work on the history of philosophy.

Instead, I got more of an introduction to 'some' of the 'names' in the history of philosophy, but barely an adequate concept of what they contributed to western knowledge and how their ideas have "shaped our world." There was very little education on what these guys actually articulated and how that changed the course of western thought. Moreover, with the exception of his chapter on Marx, there was very little interaction with these "ideas" and their "consequences," especially as they pertain to a Biblical worldview.

I enjoy Sproul's style, and I anticipate keeping this book as a quick reference to remember simple things, like: Descartes=cognito ergo sum and Locke=tabula rasa. But to get even a little bit deeper understanding of what all this means, I'll have to turn to a different source. (In this book he frequently references, "Thales to Dewey" by Gordon Clark. I'm thinking I'd get a lot more use out of that.)

Luke Miller says

This book provides an accessible and selective overview of the history of philosophical thought (specifically Western thought). Of course, as a Christian pastor, Sproul is particularly interested in how these ideologies line up with the Scriptures, so there is a definite theological focus throughout the book.

On this second read-through, I noticed some definite departures from a presuppositional approach to apologetics. This led to the discovery that Sproul is indeed aligned with classical apologetics.

Very good, and again, very accessible.

Jeremy says

Listened to 35 lectures on CD. Wonderful overview of philosophical movements from the pre-Socratics forward. Sproul is a such a good teacher—one of my favorites. So I benefited from his rhetorical skill, as well as his intellectual mine. Finished again Oct. 24, 2012.

Kris says

Good for a junior high / high school student studying a basic history of philosophy. There's a couple spots where it's easy to get tangled up in his explanations of logic, but it's a good overall introduction. Still, I wish Sproul would have included a few more explicitly Christian philosophers, and therefore used his time for more direct comparisons between atheist thinking and Christian theology,

Wendy Rabe says

We watched this video series with another homeschool family and it has provided a startlingly clear foundation for understanding our culture. The set includes 36 lectures by R.C. Sproul tracing the history of philosophy from Thales to the modern thinkers. Sproul delivers his messages without notes and without clutter outlining the lives of the philosophers and the ideas that have shaped Western civilization. History reveals the gradual shift in thinking from the assumption that God exists to Kant's assertion that God is dead. The presuppositions that go along with this cultural belief are deadly -- and they affect our own thinking more than we know. Even as Christians, we breathe the air infected with Kant's ideas, and often we are fooled into accepting presuppositions that are not based on reality. (Christians are as prone as anyone to being man-centered, materialistic, interested in "our best life now.") Being aware of this goes a long way in building discernment. I pray that the Lord uses this series to make my children discerning and wise enough to engage the world on these issues, to be true warriors extending God's Kingdom, not just criticizing or hiding from the culture.

Susan Weiner says

A nice introduction to Western philosophy from Aristotle and Plato to Freud.

E says

This book falls in a weird spot. It is too complicated for beginners but too simplistic for those with some philosophical background. He assumes knowledge that the layman might not have, but doesn't elevate his discussion to a level that will interest the learned reader. Some of his assumptions make the book jumpy-- he'll switch gears or topics with little warning or explanation, let alone logical connection. I really wanted to

like this book more, considering its author, but I can't see who it would help, or how. His discussions center mostly on epistemology and theology, with very little ethics, political thought, or anything else.

What is REALLY missing, ironically, is found in the title of the work: the consequences of all these philosophers (primarily Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant, Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sarte, Darwin, and Freud) and their thought. Sproul rarely gets to this level. He clearly knows his stuff, but I wish he had done a better job of communicating it to the type of reader who looks to get philosophical understanding from a publisher like Crossway.

Rachel says

Read:

August 2012

May 2013

Dr. Sproul does an excellent job of laying out the philosophies, and in many cases the epistemologies of some of the most influential thinkers of modern civilization. From Socrates to Plato, Descartes to Freud, Dr. Sproul uses enough layman's terms to be understandable, but enough of the philosophical terms so that one can learn what they mean and how to use them. Though Sproul does not come from a Presuppositional mindset, I appreciate the newfound appreciation of philosophy (the need for Christians to understand it, take it captive to Christ, and use it) I have gained. This is a great read if you have ever wondered why men like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle are still talked about today.

Mark says

If you've ever heard names like Plato, Aristotle, Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche or Jean-Paul Sarte and kind of known their contributions to society but not exactly known the ins and outs of their arguments or how they shaped western thought, this book does a good job explaining not only their ground-breaking works but also how it shaped society and philosophical thought. For each philosopher, Sproul provides a helpful philosophical critique/endorsement from a Christian perspective.

Sproul's conclusion is clear and convicting--saying that the philosophical thought of our day is steadily moving towards nihilism. He outlines the need for the new "Moses" of the philosophical world to step up and lead us back into the philosophical camp of theism. While each of us might not be the Moses of our society, we each have a philosophical responsibility for the future of our world. Enjoy!
