



Philosophy in the Modern World

Anthony Kenny

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Here is the concluding volume of Sir Anthony Kenny's monumental four-volume history of philosophy, the first major single-author narrative history to appear for several decades.

In this volume, Kenny tells the fascinating story of the development of philosophy in the modern world, from the early nineteenth century to the end of the millennium. Alongside (and intertwined with) extraordinary scientific advances, cultural changes, and political upheavals, the last two centuries have seen some of the most intriguing and original developments in philosophical thinking, which have transformed our understanding of ourselves and our world. In the first part of the book, Kenny offers a lively narrative introducing the major thinkers in their historical context. Among those we meet are the great figures of continental European philosophy, from Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche to Heidegger, Sartre, and Derrida; the Pragmatists such as C.S. Pierce and William James, who first developed a distinctively American philosophical tradition; Marx, Darwin, and Freud, the non-philosophers whose influence on philosophy was immense; and Wittgenstein and Russell, friends and colleagues who set the agenda for analytic philosophy in the twentieth century. Kenny then proceeds to guide the reader lucidly through the nine main areas of philosophical work in the period, offering a serious engagement with ideas and arguments about logic, language, epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics, politics, and the existence of God. Graced with many beautiful illustrations, *Philosophy in the Modern World* concludes Kenny's stimulating history of the intellectual development of Western civilization, allowing readers to trace the birth and growth of philosophy from antiquity to the present day.

Philosophy in the Modern World Details

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From Reader Review Philosophy in the Modern World for online ebook

Paul JB says

I honestly wouldn't know to begin with a project like this, which seems to make life doubly difficult for itself by electing to treat the continental and analytic schools in conjunction rather than in isolation. I probably wouldn't *end* with a philosopher I so disdained as much as Anthony Kenny clearly disdains Derrida, though perhaps this is his way of communicating a certain pessimism about the future of philosophy. I recall a (possibly apocryphal) story about Derrida's selection for an honorary degree at the University of Cambridge, only for the proposal to be nixed by its own philosophy department, who were so incensed that Derrida should even be considered a proper philosopher, much less one recognised outside his own circle. It is easier to believe after after read Kenny's account.

His best section is, understandably, on Wittgenstein, a philosopher whom Kenny has focused the bulk of his study. But the chronological half of the book is usually lucid by the standards of the genre, and where this lucidity breaks down I'm inclined to place the blame at the feet of Hegel et al for coming up with the theories in the first place. The thematic chapters (or those that I read) I found harder to follow, and some were predominantly focused on questions I hadn't considered - the chapter on Philosophy of Mind had much to say on intentionality (for me difficult to distinguish from a problem of semantics) and little on the renewed materialism of neuroscience, but possibly those with more philosophical training than I (that is to say, anyone with any philosophical training at all) may agree with Kenny's approach.

Jeffrey Backlin says

The final volume in this four volume set: the decline of modernity and the rise of post-modernity.

????? says

Who are the greatest philosophers of the past two centuries? I'd say that Wittgenstein no doubt holds the first place but then after that it becomes difficult to decide the ranking. Frege is definitely up there though, and so are Marx and Hegel (who wasn't covered in this volume but is technically a 19th century philosopher). Maybe Nietzsche and Heidegger come after them. Other honorable mentions: Pierce, John Stuart Mill, Schopenhauer, Russel, Kierkegaard, Freud (although he wouldn't call himself a philosopher), Husserl, Derrida, and Quine. I'm probably missing a few who deserves to be listed here too but hey no list is perfect.

Betawolf says

Not a resounding finish to Kenny's series, but nonetheless maintains the valuable rate of compression which I was looking for in reading this history of philosophy. Here, more than in his earlier sections, I think it can be said that Kenny's survey feels incomplete. The major characters discussed in the first three chapters are not by themselves enough to cover the cast of the 20th century, and we see Kenny reaching out in the topical

chapters to reference important modern commentators who are otherwise unacknowledged. The author admitted to uncertainty about where to draw the line for inclusion, and I think some of that uncertainty shows.

This final title changes the tense of the discussion from historical to current, but the tone of the book itself makes no such shift. We do not see any real movement in Kenny for the discussion of what is current in philosophy, or how the field operates -- a few footnotes and allusions here and there are all he spares for truly 'modern' philosophy. I can appreciate keeping the focus on what is historical in 'modern' philosophy, but then the title change is a puzzle. Presumably unrelatedly, in this volume I encountered for the first time some arguments from Kenny himself which seemed highly flawed.
