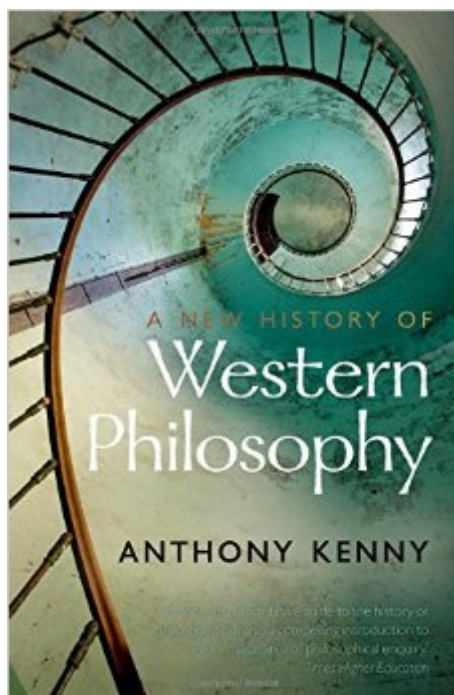


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A New History Of Western Philosophy



Synopsis

The individual volumes of Sir Anthony Kenny's acclaimed History of Western Philosophy have been hailed as "wonderful authoritative hugely rewarding" (Times Higher Education Supplement) and "genial and highly accessible" (London Review of Books). Now these four splendid books have been combined into one magnificent volume, providing a continuous sweeping account of the great thought of the Western world. Here readers will find not only an authoritative guide to the history of philosophy, but also a compelling introduction to every major area of philosophical inquiry. Kenny tells the story of philosophy chronologically, his lively narrative bringing the great philosophers to life and filling in the historical and intellectual background to their work. Kenny also looks closely at each of the main areas of philosophical exploration: knowledge and understanding; science; metaphysics; mind and soul; the nature and content of morality; political philosophy; and God. A New History of Western Philosophy is a stimulating chronicle of the intellectual development of Western civilization, allowing readers to trace the birth and growth of philosophy from antiquity to the present day.

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Customer Reviews

If any person is looking for just one book to give them an overview of every major western philosophical notion of the last 2500 years this is it. It does not go into as much detail on some specifics as other great classics such as Russell's not so new version of the same title, or Durant's

beautiful Story of Philosophy, but it does cover far more ground than any other work in the sense of understanding the big picture of western philosophy. In reading this book one will gain the best initial understanding of how a certain philosopher connects to another, or how a certain school of thought leads to the next. This book, it is true, does not go into great detail on any particular philosopher. But that is not what scaping histories are for. If that is what is being sought after, buy individual books on individual philosophers or philosophies. As far as the authorship goes, it is highly readable. It is not quite as beautiful as Will Durant's prose scholarship (though of course no one's is) but it was about as close as a page-turner comes to non-fiction. I found myself highly fascinated and growing deeper in my understanding of overall philosophy - often going through dozens of pages without even noticing. Each chapter flows logically into the next and makes perfect sense. Kenny certainly mastered the art of high quality scholarship without being pedantic. Basically, if one is anything less than an expert on western philosophy this book holds value. If one has absolutely no, or at least very little, understanding of philosophy then this book will open a whole new world to their mind. Even if said reader is well educated in philosophy this book will increase one's overall understanding so that they may go on to, through other books, better learn of the great many philosophical specifics. I will both gladly and hastily recommend this book as the first for anyone to gain knowledge in philosophy. Surely this will become the standard survey into western philosophy for the next half-century.

I have the highest regard for this history, or I would not have both hardcover and Kindle versions of it. These notes concern the transition to the Kindle format, as experienced on the original Paperwhite. Navigation is mostly excellent, as it should be for a work which will be used as a work of reference as well as one of which substantial portions will be read from beginning to end: there is a table of contents with the major divisions of each of the Four Parts (originally published separately), and at the start of each Part there is its own more detailed contents section. Cross-references and footnotes are hyperlinked. The only improvement to navigation would be if the page references in the Index were hyperlinked too. The smaller typeface used in my printed volumes for whole paragraphs of quotation is missing, except in Part Four. Thankfully, in the other Parts there is extra white space before and (usually) after the quoted passage. This white space, plus the almost inevitable reference to the cited work, ensures that in practice one can work out where the quotation ends. However, the conventional layout is there for a reason, and we should not have to deduce where a quotation begins and ends. Some "tabular" textual layouts (which occur infrequently) are not really satisfactory. So two columns of text (e.g. parallel syllogisms, or the square showing "Intellect,

Will, Sensation, Desire" at about location 4670) get run together in a way that is frankly meaningless. There are some strange and arbitrary changes to the printed text: at one point the transliteration of the Greek for "the now" (an italicised "to nun") loses the italics for the article "to". At another, on motion, there are apostrophes representing the primes in p' and p", which is not pretty but suffices. Then suddenly they disappear and what should read $\hat{\alpha} \hat{\alpha} \ll p' \text{ to } p'' \hat{\alpha} \hat{\alpha}$ now reads on the Kindle $\hat{\alpha} \hat{\alpha} \ll p \text{ to } p \hat{\alpha} \hat{\alpha}$. Again, for some reason on the Kindle a space is introduced into the term "not-p" so that it becomes "not -p" and the reader stumbles briefly over whether the hyphen represents the $\hat{\alpha} \hat{\alpha}$ sign for negation (location about 3138). There are no illustrations in the Kindle version. The map, as usual on my Paperwhite, is useless. The page numbers are continuous, doubtless representing those of the one-volume edition of the work rather than of the separately published volumes. The frequent headings (hyperlinked as already mentioned), rather than the page numbers, allow one quite easily to relate the Kindle text to one of the printed editions. Greek letters get very uneven treatment in the Kindle version: sometimes a proper, scalable Greek letter is used; sometimes a Roman letter equivalent based on the letter's appearance (e.g. Zeta and Zed/Zee); sometimes a Roman letter equivalent based on the letter's position in the respective alphabets (e.g. Zeta and F); and sometimes a non-scalable graphic. (A lower-case Greek Phi given the latter treatment looks rather like a smudge on the screen.) Examples follow - all from Volume One, where there are frequent references to Aristotle's "Metaphysics": Book Delta of the "Metaphysics" is referred to in the print version using the Greek capital letter ($\hat{\alpha} \hat{\alpha}$), but in the Kindle it appears as book "D". You would expect Book Zeta to cause no problems (capital Zeta ($\hat{\alpha} \hat{\alpha}$) and the modern equivalent (Z) being effectively identical) - but sometimes it becomes the capital letter F. In "Aristotle on Science and Illusion", references to book Gamma use a proper Greek letter $\hat{\alpha} \hat{\alpha}$ (capital Gamma). In "Essence and Quiddity", references to Book Zeta are to Book F (e.g. location 4112 approx); those to Delta start out by being to D, which then revert to a genuine scalable character $\hat{\alpha} \hat{\alpha}$ (Delta) for the reference to 7.1017a22. In "Being and Existence", references to book Delta are given as if to book D, and references to book Zeta are to book F. Beta becomes B, and Eta correctly looks like our H. Book Gamma is referred to with mini-picture $\hat{\alpha} \hat{\alpha}$ (capital Gamma) (location 4286 approx). There is a Kindle typo in the Bibliography for Aristotle (Chapter 2), where the edition of what is called "Metaphysics M and H" should refer to "Metaphysics M and N". Readers wanting to follow up references to Aristotle will have to be guided by prior knowledge or by the print edition. As noticed already, footnotes are hyperlinked. The question is whether the links are accurate. A few soundings suggest that mostly they take you perfectly to the required place. In one place (Part 4, Ch 8, n 1) the print version directs you, correctly, to some sections on medieval

ethics, while the Kindle hyperlink takes you to one section earlier (to Abelard rather than Aquinas); in another, (Part 4, Ch 11, n 4), the print version directs you to the starting page of the section on "Aristotle's Political Theory", while the Kindle takes you to a more precise location within that section, a few physical pages on. Reading these pages on the Kindle is generally a delight, but it would be good to see the noticed imperfections corrected.

From the reviews of its individual volumes, there's little I can add here. The biggest complaints are Kenny's cutoff date of 1975 (30 years to the first volume's publication), that "he didn't give enough pages to Philosopher X!," and that he downplayed the contributions of 20th century Continental philosophers. It's easy to think that our favorite (and recent or current) philosopher is not just a fad but so important that his greatness just isn't appreciated! Yet this is the same complaint with EVERY history of philosophy. Yes, with every single one. Better it would be to have added a fifth volume for 20th century philosophy. At least Kenny recognizes that many philosophies do not survive far beyond their own day and looking back, seem faddish. Thus his short-shrift of postmodernism (Have we really learned much beyond the original writings up to 1981?). Kenny does something rare, which is to credit the influence that Marx, Darwin, and Freud had on philosophy, even though they rarely can be counted as philosophers. Intended as an introductory undergraduate text, it's really good as such. Don't ask it to be comprehensive and don't ask Kenny to give your favorite philosopher more pages than another in the same period. As is, it's pretty fantastic and a welcome history.

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