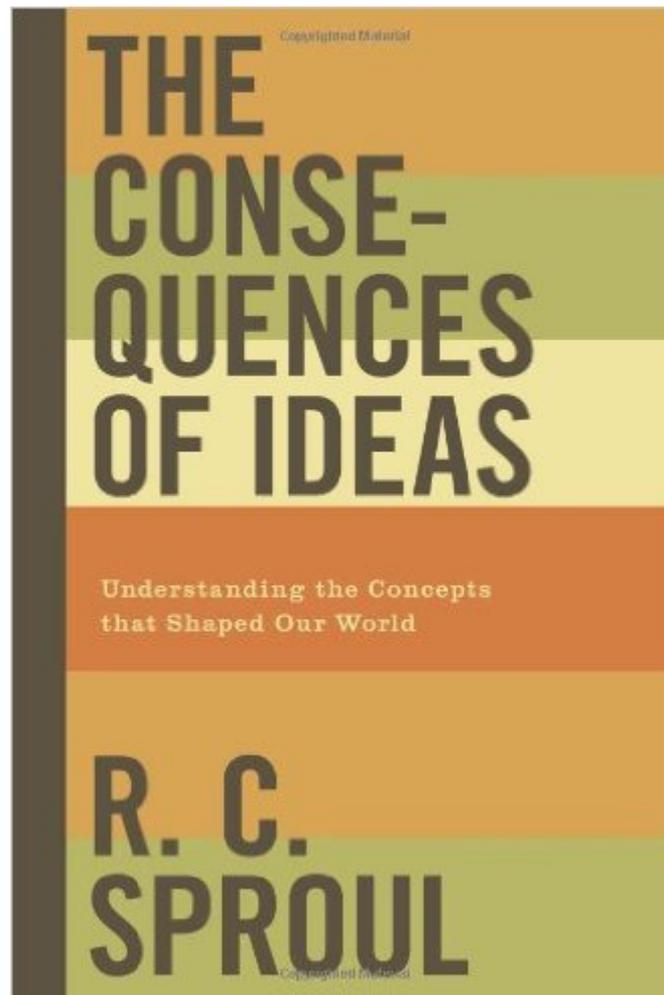


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The Consequences Of Ideas: Understanding The Concepts That Shaped Our World



Synopsis

Sproul's survey of the ongoing impact of history's most influential philosophies urges readers to take prevailing cultural mind-sets seriously because ideas do have consequences. The greatest thinkers of all time are impacting us still. From public-policy decisions and current laws to world events, theology, the arts, education, and even conversations between friends, history's most influential philosophies have wrought massive consequences on nearly everything we see, think, and do. Thus it is critical for Christians to understand the ideas that are shaping them. The greater their familiarity with the streams of thought that have saturated Western culture through the ages, the greater their ability to influence this culture for Christ. With *The Consequences of Ideas*, now in paperback, R. C. Sproul expertly leads the way for thoughtful readers. Tracing the contours of Western philosophy from the ancients to the molders of modern and postmodern thought—including Plato, Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, and Freud—Sproul proves that ideas are not just passing fads; they endure for generations to come and demand our serious attention.

Book Information

Paperback: 224 pages

Publisher: Crossway (June 8, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 143350314X

ISBN-13: 978-1433503146

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.6 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars See all reviews (71 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #106,046 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #162 in Books > History > World > Religious > Religion, Politics & State #166 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Church & State #174 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Philosophy

Customer Reviews

This book covers roughly 2,500 years of Western philosophy from Plato to Jean-Paul Sartre. Sproul's sections on Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche and the section on the influence of Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud (even though they cannot properly be called philosophers) were the most insightful sections in the book. The conclusion was excellent as well. Sproul opens the book with an introduction to what philosophy is and why he is interested in it. I think his definition that philosophy is foundational thinking is simple and very accurate. His attention to epistemology (The

branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge, its presuppositions and foundations, and its extent and validity) throughout the book was a good choice. Sproul's explanation of the various philosophers was accessible; the use of diagrams (e.g. his illustration of Kierkegaard and Hegel's synthesis) will help those who are totally unfamiliar with philosophy. Many readers will probably say that the book is far too short (at 203 pages), but I think Sproul's objective was to provide a concise introduction. I think the book could be twice the length and still be concise (then he could have included Pragmatism and perhaps even an Eastern philosopher or two). I think that the book failed to do accomplish its title. What do I mean? I think except for a few places (e.g. Marx), he failed to show the consequences of these ideas. Examples of how these ideas have impacted society would make philosophy more relevant. At the same time, I recognize that perhaps Sproul wanted to reader to reflect on these ideas and then realize when these ideas have influenced the arts, politics etc but I think he failed to show how these ideas have worked themselves out (again, there are a few exceptions) in our world.

Consequences covers great philosophers from Thales of Miletus, to the philosophers of modernism. The penultimate chapter before the conclusion covers Darwin and Freud. Sproul discussed how these 19th century thinkers have had great influence on the current secular worldview. As others have noted, the book ends rather abruptly after 200 pages. Throughout this book R. C. Sproul does not hide his biases. He clearly states he is a Christian and a dedicated supporter of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. He agrees with Roman Catholic philosopher Etienne Gilson, and concludes, "our choice is not between Immanuel Kant and René Descartes or between G. W. F. Hegel and Søren Kierkegaard. We must choose instead between Kant and Thomas Aquinas. Gilson insists that all other positions are mere halfway houses on the road to either absolute religious agnosticism or the natural theology of Christian metaphysics." R. C. Sproul is a very good writer. He is both easy to read, and communicates many ideas in a few words. I gave Consequences four stars because it is a very good introduction to ancient, medieval, and modern philosophy. Some of the discussions of how philosophies interacted with each other were very nice. Sproul also has an excellent skill in explaining such concepts as epistemology (knowledge), ontology (being), and teleology (purpose). This book includes the best short introduction to the medieval scholastics I have ever read. The inclusion of proofs for the existence of God was very nicely done. Kierkegaard is also very good, although Sproul does not seem to go as far as he might to meet him on his own terms. As a fideist Kierkegaard has a different philosophical emphasis than Sproul.

As I have suggested in the title, this book appears to me to be a "brief introduction to an introduction." The book is not to be confused with Richard Weaver's classic, "Ideas Have Consequences", in which he (Weaver) provides the reader with a pellucid introduction and overview of Western philosophy and how the Age of Reason gave birth to the decline of true philosophy (the study of wisdom, i.e., sophia/logos), and the birth of rationalism (the exaltation of man's reason over revelation) and the granddaughter, postmodernism, which teaches subjective irrationalism ("What I believe is true, IS True"). Unfortunately, for my money, R.C. Sproul, who is a fine theologian and writer, indeed (I have most of his works) misses the mark in what he propounds to be a basic introduction for the non-philosopher. My reasons are twofold: First, the book barely introduces key concepts and then quickly moves on to the next topic or philosopher; and second, what is explained is not clear enough because of my first point. For example, Sproul points out that Plato was an idealist and that Aristotle was a realist, doing this in one single paragraph, and then moves on. His definition of idealism and realism is incomplete. As I have taught my philosophy students, the two schools are indeed simple enough to understand, but more detail is required. Plato's reality was absorbed in the mind; the reality of truth, justice and aesthetics is found in the reality of the mind, for behind all corporeal things, behind the physical appearances we see each day, exists in a metaphysical sphere the reality of such appearances.

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