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Review of the book World philosophies, R.N. Smart, 1999, 0415184665

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Published in:
Reviews in Religion and Theology

Publication date:
2000

[Link to publication in Tilburg University Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Sarot, M. (2000). Review of the book World philosophies, R.N. Smart, 1999, 0415184665. *Reviews in Religion and Theology*, 7(1), 37-39.

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Preprint

World Philosophies, Ninian Smart, Routledge 1999 (ISBN 0-415-18466-5), pp. vii + 454, \$25.00

Histories of philosophy fall into different categories. Some are textbooks for students, others are narratives to be read by a general public (e.g., Will Durant's *The Story of Philosophy*, Jostein Gaarder's *Sophie's World*), and some are reference works (e.g., Ueberweg, Guthrie). Ninian Smart's *World Philosophies* can, in spite of its author's claim that it is a 'story,' and even a 'thrilling one' (p.11), best be seen as a concise reference work. As such, it fills a major gap, in that it provides a cross-cultural survey 'of the philosophical thinking of the whole world' (p. 7, emphasis added).

Smart distinguishes between philosophy as an activity (philosophizing), and philosophies as the products of that activity. He emphasizes that the activities of philosophers have been wide-ranging, and that the 'professional philosopher' has come into prominence only during the last forty years; at other times and places, philosophers have been sages, specialists in argumentation, dogmaticians, super-scientists, metaphysicians, sceptics and advisers. As to the products of these various activities, philosophies, Smart emphasizes their connections with worldviews and religious doctrines. It is this consistent attention for the religious aspects of philosophy that makes this book especially attractive for the readership of *RRT*. Smart structures his book geographically rather than systematically, devoting each chapter to a geographical area and paying extra attention to the 'great three,' China, South Asia (India) and the West. He begins outside Europe, and arrives in Greece only in the sixth chapter. Fortunately, the regional structure is not applied too strictly; the cross-referencing to parallel ideas and movements in other cultures is one of the most attractive features of the book.

Though the scope of the book is not limited geographically, it is temporally: Smart discusses the history of philosophy only up to shortly after World War II, and concentrates on philosophers whose work is complete because they are dead. Only in the final chapter does he discuss some contemporary developments, though he does not venture into postmodernism. Like a good encyclopaedia, this book lures its readers into reading far beyond the topic they originally wanted to know about. However, few readers will have the perseverance needed to read the whole book. That is not the author's fault. It is difficult to engage the reader's attention for almost 400 pages when one has only half a page to present a character like Socrates, and three pages to describe the philosophy of Aristotle. For a book intended to be read as a whole, it covers too much ground in too few pages. Given the scope and the format of the book, however, it really is eminently insightful, incisive and reliable. Of course, individual readers will sometimes wish that other choices had been made; if Lévy-Strauss, Derrida, Foucault and Althusser are discussed, why is Levinas not mentioned? If Smart takes his history beyond World War II, why do the roots of anti-Semitism, Nazism and fascism (misspelt as facism, p. 273) in certain philosophies and world views receive so little attention? Does it suffice to explain Nazism as nationalism combined with racial theories (p. 273; cf. p. 253)? If we want to understand in what way world philosophies could contribute to a peaceful co-existence of the peoples of the world, we should also be willing to reflect seriously on the intellectual roots of the movements that are most dangerous for that project, like Nazism.

All in all, the book is very reliable. I have been able to detect none but minor errors (e.g., Rabindranath Tagore received the Nobel Prize for *literature*, not for poetry). The extensive bibliographies (pp. 373-418) are useful but not without infelicities (e.g., none of Martha Nussbaum's works are mentioned in the section on Greek philosophy), and there is a detailed and generally reliable index. This is a very useful book, and I would like to see it in the hands of all those with a professional interest in worldviews.

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