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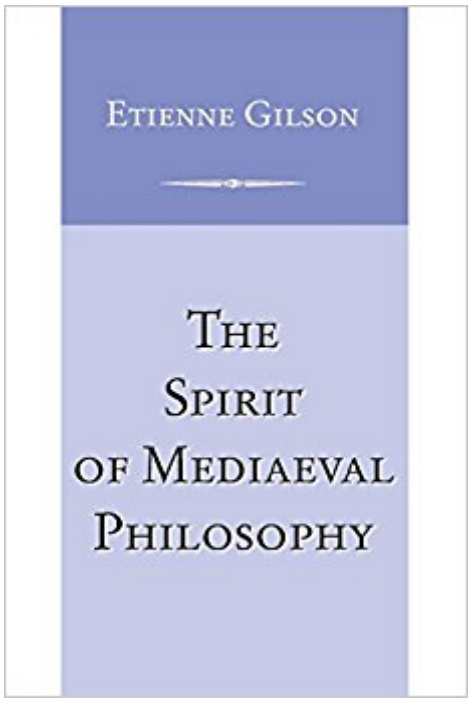
The Spirit Of Mediaeval Philosophy



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Synopsis

In this book (a translation of his well-known work L'esprit de la philosophie medievale), Etienne Gilson undertakes the task of defining the spirit of mediaeval philosophy. Gilson asks whether we can form the concept of a Christian philosophy and whether mediaeval philosophy is not its most adequate historical expression. He maintains that the spirit of mediaeval philosophy is the spirit of Christianity penetrating the Greek tradition, working within it, and drawing out of it a certain view of the world that is specifically Christian. To support his hypothesis, Gilson examines mediaeval thought in its nascent state, at that precise point where the Judeo-Christian graft was inserted into the Hellenic tradition. Gilson's demonstration is primarily historical and occasionally theoretical in suggesting how doctrines that satisfied our predecessors for so many centuries may still be found conceivable today. Ã Â

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Customer Reviews

Ã¢â ¬Å“The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy is a text of tremendous valueÃ¢â ¬â •perhaps most especially so in our own particular period in the history of philosophy. GilsonÃ¢â ¬â„¢s book does more than merely overturn a few erroneous notions about mediaeval thinking; it works to remind its reader what it means to think and live within the structure of a metaphysical world-view.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Faith and Culture Ã Â

Text: English (translation) Original Language: French

This book gives a great overview of the philosophical underpinnings of modern thought, as told from the perspective from a Neo-Thomist. Gilson is a master of his trade, as evinced by the fact that the book is very readable (at least for students of Philosophy!). In my lowly opinion, this is a definitive work that should be on every serious philosophy student's shelf, and it is a shame that no one is reprinting it at this time, so grab up all the available copies while you can!UPDATE: It appears that this book is again (thankfully!) being republished. After a second read-through, I stand by my earlier assessment that this is an excellent text though not exhaustive by any means. It is however an excellent overview nonetheless.

Great product from a reliable seller!

Good

Excelent book.

Really in the weeds. Tough book.

I'm not a philosopher or student of philosophy, but I am continually amazed by this author and this book. I wouldn't have thought that a work of philosophy about a period I hardly know about would provide so much spiritual inspiration and encouragement.It is a work of philosophy, and there is a limited amount of "technical" vocabulary to absorb in the reading, but it's just a few words, really, nothing a good dictionary can't handle. And Gilson's exposition overall is very plain-spoken and common-sensical. I wouldn't say it's an "easy" read, or a quick one; but that's not because of any lack of facility on the author's part.The subject matter itself, the historical development, reality, and import of a truly Christian philosophy, demands full attention, and Gilson takes pains to help us really understand why Judeo-Christian revelation is the necessary basis for Western philosophical development, and why that development is undeniably important to the Catholic Church, and to ordinary Catholics.The author is an eloquent speaker, (the book is drawn from a series of spoken lectures,) and knows how to carry a very lengthy and very complicated topic to a varied audience. Like St. Thomas Aquinas, Gilson repeatedly refers back to supporting material from his earlier chapters.Also, I was surprised by his wonderfully disarming sense of humor, and upheld by his clear appreciation of and respect for ordinary people who may find themselves interested in his topic. The

content, so richly portrayed, is a history that is virtually unknown to the average Catholic or Christian.If, like me, you've heard the names of great thinkers in Catholic history, like St. Thomas Aquinas, or Sts. Bonaventure or Augustine, and if you've heard of great classical thinkers, like Aristotle and Plato, and some modern thinkers, too, like Descartes and Kant, but are unsure just what they said, and how their thought affected the world's understanding of simple things like Who, What, and Where God Is, Etienne Gilson's "The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy" is tremendously worthwhile food for thought.

This is the classic guide to the thoughtworld of the medieval philosopher, based on the Gifford Lectures in the 1930s. It has historic relevance, as it was one of the first books to resuscitate medieval philosophy as an integral part of the history of philosophy in the modern era in a way that captured a broad audience (outside of the neo-Thomist revival within the Catholic Church itself). A substantial part of the book is an argument in favour of this, and deals with the question whether a philosophy that begins with a belief that is essentially being defended throughout has a good claim to being the same as a philosophy that is open-ended. Perhaps that is no longer needed. Still, the book is full of Christian assumptions that (for non-Christians) take a lot of swallowing or accepting temporarily for the purposes of going on with the unfolding arguments.Gilson was a neo-Thomist (follower of St. Thomas Aquinas), and one of the lesser threads of the book is also the ongoing tiff between followers of Aquinas and followers of Augustine. Another thread (much more sardonically fun) is the constant reference to Christian elements in the works of those modern beasts, Descartes and Malebranche, just to show up modernists.The strongest part of the book -- apart from the beautiful, magisterial writing throughout -- is the elucidation of the consequences of a philosophy based on Being as Act (both the original and continuing acts of creation, and the movements from potency to act of creatures), a shift in fundamental assumptions which arrives into philosophy with the biblical God.

Gilson evidently took deep offense at the cliche that Medieval philosophy is merely imitation pagan philosophy. Using all his academic prowess, he radically de-bunks that myth, and presents an intricate system of thought guided by faith and grounded in reason which far surpasses the reach of Aristotle and Plato. For the student of Scholasticism, who most likely is not interested in the historical approach to philosophy to begin with, will happily find this work to be, first-and-foremost, an exposition of Medieval thought in itself, and a historical work secondarily. Gilson is indeed a superb historian, but a formidable philosopher first.

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