

2003

Book Review of Philosophy of Meaning, Knowledge and Value in the Twentieth Century (Routledge History of Philosophy, Vol. 10) ed. by John V. Canfield, Routledge, 2003

K.C. O'Rourke

Technological University Dublin, kevin.orourke@tudublin.ie

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/level3>

Recommended Citation

O'Rourke, K.C. (2003) "Book Review of Philosophy of Meaning, Knowledge and Value in the Twentieth Century (Routledge History of Philosophy, Vol. 10) ed. by John V. Canfield, Routledge, 2003," *Level 3*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 12.

doi:10.21427/D7TX5V

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/level3/vol1/iss1/12>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Current Publications at ARROW@TU Dublin. It has been accepted for inclusion in Level 3 by an authorized administrator of ARROW@TU Dublin. For more information, please contact arrow.admin@tudublin.ie, aisling.coyne@tudublin.ie.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/)

Book review

Philosophy of Meaning, Knowledge and Value in the Twentieth Century (Routledge History of Philosophy, Volume 10), ed. *John V. Canfield*, London and New York, Routledge, 1997 (first paperback edition, 2003)

Kevin O' Rourke

Now that the twentieth century is complete, historians can begin to confine its events and ideas to the tidy units of textbooks. The paperback edition of volume 10 of the Routledge History of Philosophy (hardback originally published in 1997) is one contribution to that process. As with all histories, however, its value must be judged equally by what it omits as by what it includes. The general editors begin with a statement that it is not their intention to take sides in the dispute between analytic and continental philosophy. Similarly in his introduction, John V. Canfield insists that 'The presupposed geographic and linguistic contrast between Anglo-American and continental philosophy is a bit misleading' (p. 9, n.1). However, those expecting an overview of all twentieth-century philosophy of meaning, value and knowledge will be disappointed to find only the views of Anglo-American academics: the near-total absence from the index of any names save those of analytic philosophers speaks volumes about the current state of the discipline styled as the 'love of wisdom'.

And yet, this is anything but a book to be dismissed. The editor has assembled a comprehensive account of twentieth-century Anglo-American philosophy, complete with useful bibliographies. Drawing on some of the best academic writers in the field, the volume includes chapters on all the traditional areas of analytic philosophy: philosophy of language, epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and so on. The drive for clarity, associated especially with the 'linguistic turn' in analytic philosophy, is evident throughout. Wittgenstein – both early and later – appears and reappears in many guises (Canfield himself provides a useful chapter on the *Philosophical Investigations*). Not surprisingly, therefore, references to Bertrand Russell occur almost everywhere, one exception being Arthur Ripstein's short chapter 9 on political philosophy: although political upheaval was a major reality of the twentieth century (and Russell himself was imprisoned on two occasions for political activism), analytic philosophy was not much bothered by such practicalities. That is not to say, however, that the ideas of John Rawls and Robert Nozick are not influential beyond Harvard where they both worked (both men died in 2002).

The inclusion of chapters on applied ethics and feminist philosophy give balance to a tradition otherwise heavily weighted in favour of the theoretical. But there is a sense in which these and other contributions towards the end of the volume (philosophy of law/aesthetics/philosophy of religion) are included merely as a balance to the 'hard' philosophy of the first two-thirds of the volume. Those interested in the philosophy of education (undoubtedly many readers within DIT) will be disappointed to find little beyond a mention in the introduction to the effect that 'it has almost wholly abandoned an until recently dominant analytic focus in favour of various post-modern and continental ideas'. (Such an acknowledgement is certainly kinder than that recently published in the Routledge *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* which claims that 'one might reasonably judge that philosophy of education had lost its identity as a distinct sub-discipline and been reabsorbed into the parent discipline and its sturdier progeny. In any case it has been relatively inconspicuous in an era when other domains of practical philosophy have enjoyed spectacular growth and development'.)

In places a heavier editorial hand could have been employed: Robert L. Arrington's chapter 6 on ethics since 1945 runs to 30 pages without any subheadings; chapter 10 on feminist philosophy, although a mere 19 pages of text, is similarly unbroken and presents a bibliography almost as long again. But these are minor enough quibbles regarding what is undoubtedly a significant work. The volume's title, however, is another matter: just as *Continental Philosophy in the 20th Century* is the title of volume 8 of the series, similarly *Analytic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* would be a more accurate choice by far for

volume 10. After all, the need for clarity and accuracy is not solely the prerogative of analytic philosophers.