

Simon Blackburn What Is Philosophy

Our self-image as moral, well-behaved creatures is dogged by scepticism, relativism, hypocrisy, and nihilism, by the fear that in a Godless world science has unmasked us as creatures fated by our genes to be selfish and tribalistic, or competitive and aggressive. In this 'sparklingly clear' (Guardian) introduction to ethics Simon Blackburn tackles the major moral questions surrounding birth, death, happiness, desire and freedom, showing us how we should think about the meaning of life, and how we should mistrust the soundbite-sized absolutes that often dominate moral debates. ABOUT THE SERIES: The Very Short Introductions series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

Through a close reading of Sophocles' *Ajax*, Descartes' *Discourse on Method*, and Plato's *Meno*, Davis argues that ancient tragedy and modern science are alternative responses to the human longing for autonomy or striving to be a god. Tragic heroes assume that through politics they can exert more control over the world than the world will allow. To them the whole world is politics, or polis. Scientists seek to control by mastering nature, which, in essence, means to transform the whole of the world into a Polis. Thus the issues and motivations in modern science were already present in ancient tragedy.

This volume collects together the author's pioneering essays on "quasi-realism", a philosophical position he first introduced

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in 1980 which has become a distinctive and much discussed option in metaphysics and ethics.

First published in 1976, the Dictionary of Philosophy has established itself as the best available text of its kind, explaining often unfamiliar, complicated and diverse terminology. Thoroughly revised and expanded, this fourth edition provides authoritative and rigorous definitions of a broad range of philosophical concepts. Concentrating on the Western philosophical tradition, The Routledge Dictionary of Philosophy offers an illuminating and informed introduction to the central issues, ideas and perspectives in core fields such as metaphysics, epistemology, and logic. It includes concise biographical entries for more than one hundred major philosophers, from Plato and Aristotle through to contemporary figures such as Dummett, McDowell, Parfit and Singer. All major entries are followed by helpful suggestions for further reading, including web links, and contain extensive cross-referencing to aid access and comprehension. This edition also features a brand new guide to the most useful philosophy sites on the internet. The Routledge Dictionary of Philosophy is an invaluable and up-to-date resource for all students of philosophy.

This bestselling dictionary is written by one of the leading philosophers of our time, and it is widely recognized as the best dictionary of its kind. Comprehensive and authoritative, it covers every aspect of philosophy from Aristotle to Zen. With clear and concise definitions, it provides lively and accessible coverage of not only Western philosophical traditions, but also themes from Chinese, Indian, Islamic, and Jewish philosophy. Entries include over 400 biographies of famous and influential philosophers, in-depth analysis of philosophical terms and concepts, and a chronology of philosophical events stretching from 10,000 BC to the present day. New entries on philosophy of economics, social theory, neuroscience,

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philosophy of the mind, and moral conceptions bring the third edition of this dictionary fully up to date. Fully cross-referenced and containing over 3,300 alphabetical entries, it is the ideal introduction to philosophy for anyone with an interest in the subject, and it is an indispensable work of reference for students and teachers.

Truth is not just a recent topic of contention. Arguments about it have gone on for centuries. Why is the truth important? Who decides what the truth is? Is there such a thing as objective, eternal truth, or is truth simply a matter of perspective, of linguistic or cultural vantage point? In this concise book Simon Blackburn provides an accessible explanation of what truth is and how we might think about it. The first half of the book details several main approaches to how we should think about, and decide, what is true. These are philosophical theories of truth such as the correspondence theory, the coherence theory, deflationism, and others. He then examines how those approaches relate to truth in several contentious domains: art, ethics, reasoning, religion, and the interpretation of texts. Blackburn's overall message is that truth is often best thought of not as a product or an end point that is 'finally' achieved, but--as the American pragmatist thinkers thought of it--as an ongoing process of inquiry. The result is an accessible and tour through some of the deepest and thorniest questions philosophy has ever tackled

Lust, says Simon Blackburn, is furtive, headlong, always sizing up opportunities. It is a trail of clothing in the hallway, the trashy cousin of love. But be that as it may, the aim of this delightful book is to rescue lust "from the denunciations of old men of the deserts, to deliver it from the pallid and envious confessor and the stocks and pillories of the Puritans, to drag it from the category of sin to that of virtue." Blackburn, author of such popular philosophy books as *Think and Being Good*,

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here offers a sharp-edged probe into the heart of lust, blending together insight from some of the world's greatest thinkers on sex, human nature, and our common cultural foibles. Blackburn takes a wide ranging, historical approach, discussing lust as viewed by Aristophanes and Plato, lust in the light of the Stoic mistrust of emotion, and the Christian fear of the flesh that catapulted lust to the level of deadly sin. He describes how philosophical pessimists like Schopenhauer and Sartre contributed to our thinking about lust and explores the false starts in understanding lust represented by Freud, Kinsey, and modern "evolutionary psychology." But most important, Blackburn reminds us that lust is also life-affirming, invigorating, fun. He points to the work of David Hume (Blackburn's favorite philosopher) who saw lust not only as a sensual delight but also "a joy of the mind." Written by one of the most eminent living philosophers, attractively illustrated and colorfully packaged, Lust is a book that anyone would lust over.

A distinguished philosopher illuminates the age-old war over truth between one side that believes in plain, unvarnished facts and the other side that believes that judgment is clouded with false notions of absolute truth, in an exploration of the long-standing philosophical battle.

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Provides a comprehensive introduction to the major philosophical theories attempting to explain the workings of language

The author of the world wide best-seller, *Small Is Beautiful*, now tackles the subject of *Man, the World, and the Meaning of Living*. Schumacher writes about man's relation to the world. man has obligations -- to other men, to the earth, to progress and technology, but most importantly himself. If man can fulfill these obligations,

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then and only then can he enjoy a real relationship with the world, then and only then can he know the meaning of living. Schumacher says we need maps: a "map of knowledge" and a "map of living." The concern of the mapmaker--in this instance, Schumacher--is to find for everything its proper place. Things out of place tend to get lost; they become invisible and their proper places end to be filled by other things that ought not be there at all and therefore serve to mislead. *A Guide for the Perplexed* teaches us to be our own map makers. This constantly surprising, always stimulating book will be welcomed by a large audience, including the many new fans who believe strongly in what Schumacher has to say.

An original study of the philosophical problems associated with inductive reasoning. Like most of the main questions in epistemology, the classical problem of induction arises from doubts about a mode of inference used to justify some of our most familiar and pervasive beliefs. The experience of each individual is limited and fragmentary, yet the scope of our beliefs is much wider; and it is the relation between belief and experience, in particular the belief that the future will in some respects resemble the past and the unobserved the observed, which forms the subject of this book. Dr Blackburn's first aim is to state the problem of induction properly, to show that there does exist a genuine problem immune to the solutions in vogue at present, yet no tin principle insoluble. He gives an extended and original account of the concept of a reason and goes on to discuss prediction. In the end Dr Blackburn produces a rationale

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for belief in certain short-term predictions based on his reinterpretation of the classical principle of indifference. He claims that a justification for induction can be found along the lines he has suggested and must indeed be found there if anywhere.

What is the difference between judging someone to be good and judging them to be kind? Both judgements are typically positive, but the latter seems to offer more description of the person: we get a more specific sense of what they are like. Very general evaluative concepts (such as good, bad, right and wrong) are referred to as thin concepts, whilst more specific ones (including brave, rude, gracious, wicked, sympathetic, and mean) are termed thick concepts. In this volume, an international team of experts addresses the questions that this distinction opens up. How do the descriptive and evaluative functions or elements of thick concepts combine with each other? Are these functions or elements separable in the first place? Is there a sharp division between thin and thick concepts? Can we mark interesting further distinctions between how thick ethical concepts work and how other thick concepts work, such as those found in aesthetics and epistemology? How, if at all, are thick concepts related to reasons and action? These questions, and others, touch on some of the deepest philosophical issues about the evaluative and normative. They force us to think hard about the place of the evaluative in a (seemingly) nonevaluative world, and raise fascinating issues about how language works. This accessible introduction to ethics continues the trend of Blackburn's best-selling *Think*. His rare combination of

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depth, rigor and sparking prose, and his distinguished ranking among contemporary philosophers, mark *Being Good* as an important statement on our current disenchantment with ethics.

In *What Do We Really Know?* Simon Blackburn addresses the twenty most-asked philosophical questions, including 'Can machines think?', 'What is the meaning of life?', 'Is death to be feared?', 'Why be good?', 'What am I?' and 'What do we really know?' Each 3000-word essay examines a question that has eternally perplexed enquiring minds, and provides answers from history's great thinkers.

From the author of *Think*, an enlightening and entertaining exploration of narcissism and self-esteem. Everyone deplores narcissism, especially in others. The vain are by turns annoying or absurd, offending us whether they are blissfully oblivious or proudly aware of their behavior. But are narcissism and vanity really as bad as they seem? Can we avoid them even if we try? In *Mirror, Mirror*, Simon Blackburn, the author of such best-selling philosophy books as *Think*, *Being Good*, and *Lust*, says that narcissism, vanity, pride, and self-esteem are more complex than they first appear and have innumerable good and bad forms. Drawing on philosophy, psychology, literature, history, and popular culture, Blackburn offers an enlightening and entertaining exploration of self-love, from the myth of Narcissus and the Christian story of the Fall to today's self-esteem industry. A sparkling mixture of learning, humor, and style, *Mirror, Mirror* examines what great thinkers have said about self-love—from Aristotle, Cicero, and Erasmus

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to Rousseau, Adam Smith, Kant, and Iris Murdoch. It considers today's "me"-related obsessions, such as the "selfie," plastic surgery, and cosmetic enhancements, and reflects on connected phenomena such as the fatal commodification of social life and the tragic overconfidence of George W. Bush and Tony Blair. Ultimately, *Mirror, Mirror* shows why self-regard is a necessary and healthy part of life. But it also suggests that we have lost the ability to distinguish—let alone strike a balance—between good and bad forms of self-concern. The author of the highly popular book *Think*, which *Time* magazine hailed as "the one book every smart person should read to understand, and even enjoy, the key questions of philosophy," Simon Blackburn is that *rara avis*--an eminent thinker who is able to explain philosophy to the general reader. Now Blackburn offers a tour de force exploration of what he calls "the most exciting and engaging issue in the whole of philosophy"--the age-old war over truth. The front lines of this war are well defined. On one side are those who believe in plain, unvarnished facts, rock-solid truths that can be found through reason and objectivity--that science leads to truth, for instance. Their opponents mock this idea. They see the dark forces of language, culture, power, gender, class, ideology and desire--all subverting our perceptions of the world, and clouding our judgement with false notions of absolute truth. Beginning with an early skirmish in the war--when

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Socrates confronted the sophists in ancient Athens--Blackburn offers a penetrating look at the longstanding battle these two groups have waged, examining the philosophical battles fought by Plato, Protagoras, William James, David Hume, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Richard Rorty, and many others, with a particularly fascinating look at Nietzsche. Among the questions Blackburn considers are: is science mere opinion, can historians understand another historical period, and indeed can one culture ever truly understand another. Blackburn concludes that both sides have merit, and that neither has exclusive ownership of truth. What is important is that, whichever side we embrace, we should know where we stand and what is to be said for our opponents.

ThinkA Compelling Introduction to PhilosophyOxford Paperbacks

Simon Blackburn presents a selection of his philosophical essays from 1995 to 2010. He offers engaging and illuminating discussions of various problems which arise when such familiar notions as representation, truth, reason, and assertion are applied in the sphere of practical thought. It is puzzling how our thinking gets to grip with such things as values and norms. Blackburn explores how we can try to understand what we say in terms of what we are doing when we say it. He investigates how propositions interact with linguistic expressions

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whose primary function is identified in terms of actions performed in expressing commitments with them, when those commitments are thought of in practical rather than descriptive terms. He broadens his investigation from semantic questions to wider issues of pluralism, pragmatism, philosophy of mind, and the nature of practical reasoning.

Best known to the general public for his attempts to make philosophy accessible to those with little or no formal training, Simon Blackburn's reputation in academic circles is based on a lifetime pursuit of a projectivist and anti-realist research programme in the spirit of the great David Hume. This volume of critical essays by some of the most influential philosophers working today documents the whole range and influence of Blackburn's work, and poses some novel challenges for him.

'Be a philosopher; but, amidst all your philosophy, be still a man.' David Hume David Hume is generally recognized as the United Kingdom's greatest philosopher, as well as a notable historian and essayist and a central figure of the Enlightenment.

Yet his work is delicately poised between scepticism and naturalism, between despair at the limited powers of the mind and optimism at the progress we can make by understanding it. This difficult balancing act has given rise to a multitude of different interpretations: reading Hume has never been free of controversy. In this new approach to his writings,

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Simon Blackburn describes how Hume can be considered one of the earliest, and most successful, evolutionary psychologists, weaving plausible natural accounts of the way we should think of ourselves and of how we have come to be what we are.

Simon Blackburn puts forward a compelling original philosophy of human motivation and morality. He maintains that we cannot get clear about ethics until we get clear about human nature. So these are the sorts of questions he addresses: Why do we behave as we do? Can we improve? Is our ethics at war with our passions, or is it an upshot of those passions?

Blackburn seeks the answers in an exploration of guilt, shame, disgust, and other moral emotions; he draws also on game theory and cognitive science in his account of the structures of human motivation.

Many philosophers have wanted a naturalistic ethics a theory that integrates our understanding of human morality with the rest of our understanding of the world we live in. What is special about Blackburn's naturalistic ethics is that it does not debunk the ethical by reducing it to the non-ethical. At the same time he banishes the spectres of scepticism and relativism that have haunted recent moral philosophy. *Ruling Passions* sets ethics in the context of human nature: it offers a solution to the puzzle of how ethics can maintain its authority even though it is rooted in the very emotions and motivations that it exists to control.

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Bestselling author Simon Blackburn tackles the key questions in philosophy--and provides easy-to-understand and enlightening answers. In *Big Questions: Philosophy*, bestselling author Simon Blackburn addresses the 20 essential questions: What is the meaning of life? Am I free? Why is there something and not nothing? What do we really know? Is there such a thing as society? Can machines think? What is time? How can I deceive myself? Why be good? What fills up space? Can we truly understand each other? Why do things keep on keeping on? Are we rational? What am I? What are my rights? Is truth relative? Do we need God? What is human nature? What is beauty? Is death to be feared?

In recent years philosophers have produced important books on nearly all the major arts: the novel and painting, music and theatre, dance and architecture, conceptual art and even gardening. Poetry is the sole exception. This is an astonishing omission, one this collection of original essays will correct. If contemporary philosophy still regards metaphors such as 'Juliet is the sun' as a serious problem, one has an acute sense of how prepared it is to make philosophical and aesthetic sense of poems such as W. B. Yeats's 'The Second Coming', Sylvia Plath's 'Daddy', or Paul Celan's 'Todesfuge'. *The Philosophy of Poetry* brings together philosophers of art, language, and mind to expose

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and address the array of problems poetry raises for philosophy. In doing so it lays the foundation for a proper philosophy of poetry, setting out the various puzzles and paradoxes that future work in the field will have to address. Given its breadth of approach, the volume is relevant not only to aesthetics but to all areas of philosophy concerned with meaning, truth, and the communicative and expressive powers of language more generally. Poetry is the last unexplored frontier in contemporary analytic aesthetics, and this volume offers a powerful demonstration of how central poetry should be to philosophy.

From Confucius and Plato to Karl Marx and Noam Chomsky, this ebook brings together more than 100 illustrated biographies of the world's great philosophers. Introduced with a stunning portrait of each featured philosopher, each profile traces the ideas, friendships, loves, and rivalries that inspired the world's greatest thinkers and influenced their work, offering revealing insights into what drove them to question the meaning of life, and come up with new ways of understanding the world and the history of ideas. Lavishly illustrated with photographs and paintings of philosophers, their homes, friends, studies, and their personal belongings, together with pages from original manuscripts, first editions, and correspondence, this ebook introduces the key ideas, themes, and working methods of each

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featured individual, setting their ideas within a wider historical and cultural context. Charting the development of ideas across the centuries in both the East and West, from ancient Chinese philosophy to the work of contemporary thinkers, *Philosophers* provides a compelling glimpse into the personal lives, loves, and influences of the great philosophers as they probed into life's "big ideas".

In this new accessible philosophy of friendship, Mark Vernon links the resources of the philosophical tradition with numerous illustrations from modern culture to ask what friendship is, how it relates to sex, work, politics and spirituality. Unusually, he argues that Plato and Nietzsche, as much as Aristotle and Aelred, should be put centre stage. Their penetrating and occasionally tough insights are invaluable if friendship is to be a full, not merely sentimental, way of life for today.

This volume presents fourteen original essays which explore the philosophy of Simon Blackburn, one of the UK's most influential contemporary philosophers. Blackburn is best known to the general public for his attempts to make philosophy accessible to those with little or no formal training, but in professional circles his reputation is based on a lifetime pursuit of his distinctive version of a projectivist and anti-realist research program. As he sees things, we must always try first to understand and explain what we are doing when we think and talk as we do. This

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research program reaches into nearly all of the main areas of philosophy: metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, moral philosophy, and moral psychology. The books and articles he has written provide us with perhaps the most comprehensive statement and defense of projectivism and anti-realism since Hume. The essays collected here document the range and influence of Blackburn's work. They reveal, among other things, the resourcefulness of his distinctive brand of philosophical pragmatism.

The Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) is widely regarded as the greatest and most significant English-speaking philosopher and often seen as having had the most influence on the way philosophy is practiced today in the West. His reputation is based not only on the quality of his philosophical thought but also on the breadth and scope of his writings, which ranged over metaphysics, epistemology, morals, politics, religion, and aesthetics. The Handbook's 38 newly commissioned chapters are divided into six parts: Central Themes; Metaphysics and Epistemology; Passion, Morality and Politics; Aesthetics, History, and Economics; Religion; Hume and the Enlightenment; and After Hume. The volume also features an introduction from editor Paul Russell and a chapter on Hume's biography.

Creativity pervades human life. It is the mark of

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individuality, the vehicle of self-expression, and the engine of progress in every human endeavor. It also raises a wealth of neglected and yet evocative philosophical questions. The Philosophy of Creativity takes up these questions and, in doing so, illustrates the value of interdisciplinary exchange.

Simon Blackburn presents a selection of his philosophical essays from 1995 to 2010. He offers engaging and illuminating discussions of a wide range of topics, including moral philosophy, the theory of meaning, pragmatism, and the theory of reason and reasoning.

British imperial encounters with indigenous cultures created perceptions and stereotypes that still persist today. The initial creation of racial images in relation to violence had particular consequences for land ownership. Standfield examines these differences and how they occurred.

This important book is about truth, and the enemies of truth, and the wars that are fought between them. As Simon Blackburn says in his introduction, "the ground is complicated, strewn with abandoned fortresses and trenches, fought over by shifting alliances". Truth is an essential sure-footed guide through the territory, from classical to modern times. It looks at relativism and absolutism, toleration and belief, objectivity and knowledge, science and pseudo-science, and the moral and political implications, as well as the nuances, of all these.

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A volume of studies in philosophical logic by a group of younger philosophers in the UK. There is a core of problems in the theory of meaning which have been accorded a central importance by philosophers, logicians and theoretical linguists, and which have stimulated some of the most powerful and original work in these subjects. The contributors to the volume have a common interest in these topics, insist on their continuing and fundamental importance, and offer here a distinctive and original contribution to them.

The modern materialist approach to life has conspicuously failed to explain such central mind-related features of our world as consciousness, intentionality, meaning, and value. This failure to account for something so integral to nature as mind, argues philosopher Thomas Nagel, is a major problem, threatening to unravel the entire naturalistic world picture, extending to biology, evolutionary theory, and cosmology. Since minds are features of biological systems that have developed through evolution, the standard materialist version of evolutionary biology is fundamentally incomplete. And the cosmological history that led to the origin of life and the coming into existence of the conditions for evolution cannot be a merely materialist history, either. An adequate conception of nature would have to explain the appearance in the universe of materially irreducible conscious minds, as such. Nagel's skepticism is not based on religious belief or on a belief in any definite alternative. In *Mind and Cosmos*, he does suggest that if the materialist account is wrong, then principles of a different kind may also be at work in the history of nature, principles of the growth of order that are in their logical form teleological rather than mechanistic. In spite of the great achievements of the physical sciences, reductive materialism is a world view ripe for displacement. Nagel shows that to recognize its limits is the first step in looking for alternatives, or at least in being open to their possibility.

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This is a book about the big questions in life: knowledge, consciousness, fate, God, truth, goodness, justice. It is for anyone who thinks there are big questions lurking out there, but does not know how to approach them. Written by the author of the bestselling Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy, *Think* sets out to explain what they are and why they are important.

First published in 2002. Routledge is an imprint of Taylor & Francis, an informa company.

This is a book about the big questions in life: knowledge, consciousness, fate, God, truth, goodness, justice. It is for anyone who believes there are big questions out there, but does not know how to approach them. *Think* sets out to explain what they are and why they are important. Simon Blackburn begins by putting forward a convincing case for the study of philosophy and goes on to give the reader a sense of how the great historical figures such as Descartes, Hume, Kant, and Wittgenstein have approached its central themes. Each chapter explains a major issue, and gives the reader a self-contained guide through the problems that philosophers have studied. The large scope of topics covered range from scepticism, the self, mind and body, and freedom to ethics and the arguments surrounding the existence of God. Lively and approachable, this book is ideal for all those who want to learn how the basic techniques of thinking shape our existence.

“A clear and accessible introduction to philosophy’s first superstar” by the author of *On Truth and Think*, one of our great contemporary philosophers (Kirkus Reviews). Plato is perhaps the most significant philosopher who ever lived and *The Republic*, composed in Athens in about 375 BC, is widely regarded as his most famous dialogue. Its discussion of the perfect city—and the perfect mind—laid the foundations for Western culture and has been the cornerstone of Western

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philosophy. As the distinguished Cambridge professor Simon Blackburn points out, it has probably sustained more commentary, and been subject to more radical and impassioned disagreement, than almost any other text in the modern world. “A provocative companion to an essential text” (Publishers Weekly), Plato’s Republic explores the judicial, moral, and political ideas in The Republic with dazzling insight. Blackburn also examines The Republic’s influence and staying power, and shows why, from St. Augustine to twentieth-century philosophers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein, Western thought is still conditioned by this most important, and contemporary, of books. “Plato’s Republic . . . which Blackburn rightly suggests is the first book to shake the world, is loaded with perennial questions that every generation must struggle with. How are we to live our lives? What is virtue and can it be taught? Are pleasure and good the same?”—The Independent “Philosopher Simon Blackburn has written a new book about The Republic, gently reminding those of us who have forgotten it why it remains so important. The book unquestionably belongs on anybody’s list of Books That Changed the World.”—NPR

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