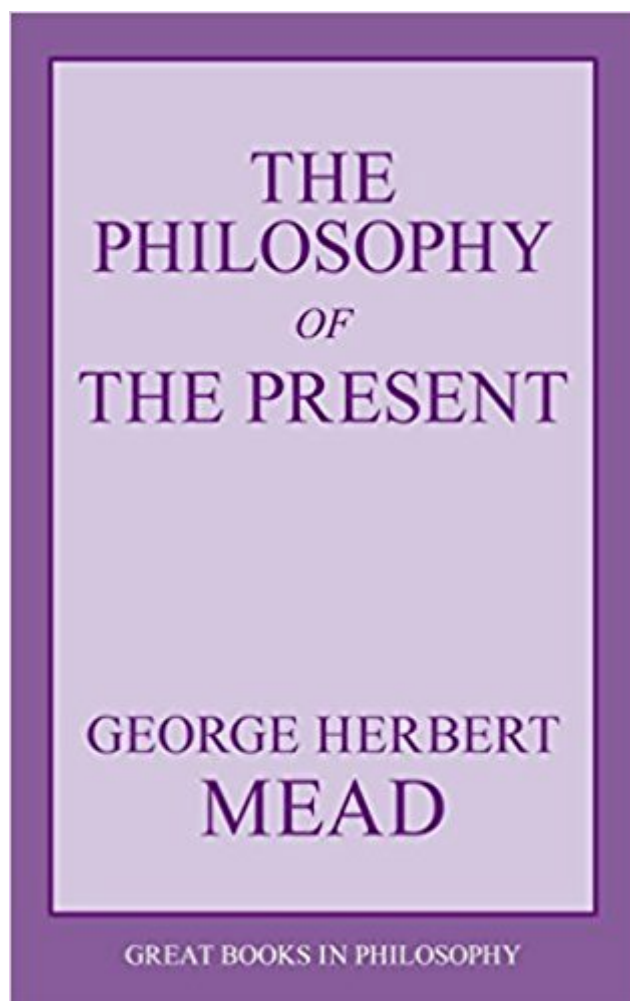


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The Philosophy Of The Present (Great Books In Philosophy)



Synopsis

George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) had a powerful influence on the development of American pragmatism in the twentieth century. He also had a strong impact on the social sciences. This classic book represents Mead's philosophy of experience, so central to his outlook. The present as a unique experience is the focus of this deep analysis of the basic structure of temporality and consciousness. Mead emphasizes the novel character of both the present and the past. Though science is predicated on the assumption that the present is predictable based on a thorough knowledge of the past, the experience of the present, says Mead, is an utterly unique moment comparable to no other, and when it is past the novel character of that unique experience is irrevocable. The emergence of novelty within the perceived rational order of reality is the crux of the problem that Mead explores. The present, in his words, is "the emergent event . . . something which is more than the processes that have led up to it and which by its change, continuance, or disappearance, adds to later passages a content they would not otherwise have possessed." The present as "the seat of reality" heavily conditions our retrospective view of the past as much as it helps to shape the future. The novelty of every present experience causes us to reconstruct our preceding experiences to make sense of the past, which is naturally assumed to be the main cause of what we presently experience. Our perspective on reality is thus relative to the conditioning of each new event and it changes continuously as the effects of the present shift our view of the past and future. This emphasis on the integrative, holistic nature of reality, in which everything past, present, and future is a condition of everything else, makes Mead's philosophy highly relevant to today's scientific picture of a quantum universe, where chance and probability play a role in the emergence of reality. Also of great interest is the way in which he extends his basic analysis of temporal-spatial reality to the emergence of mind and consciousness as a natural development of the evolutionary process. This stimulating and provocative work attests to John Dewey's praise of Mead as "the most original mind in philosophy in America" of his generation.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

American philosopher and social psychologist George Herbert Mead was born on February 27, 1863, in South Hadley, Massachusetts, the second child of Hiram Mead, a Congregationalist minister, and Elizabeth Storrs Billings. After graduating from Oberlin College in 1883, he enrolled at Harvard University, where he earned a master's degree in philosophy in 1888. Mead continued his study of philosophy at the University of Leipzig (1888–1889), where he became quite interested in Darwinism, and at the University of Berlin (1889). During 1891–1894 he was an instructor in philosophy and psychology at the University of Michigan. It was at Michigan that Mead and philosopher John Dewey (b. 1859–d. 1952), who chaired both the psychology and philosophy departments, became close personal and intellectual friends. In 1894 he joined Dewey at the University of Chicago, where Dewey chaired the philosophy department. Mead and Dewey, along with James Hayden Tufts (b. 1862–d. 1942), were known as the "Chicago Pragmatists." Mead spent the rest of his life in Chicago, as assistant professor of philosophy 1894–1902, associate professor 1902–1907, and full professor 1907–1931. Influenced by evolutionary theory and the social nature of experience and behavior, Mead emphasized the natural emergence of the self and mind within the social order. Within this biosocial structure the gap between reason and impulse is bridged by the use of language. Mead called his position social behaviorism, using both social and biological conduct as an approach to all experience. During his lifetime Mead published only articles. His books, published posthumously from manuscripts and students' notes, include *The Philosophy of the Present* (1932); *Mind, Self, and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (1934); *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (1936); and *The Philosophy of the Act* (1938). Mead died on April 26, 1931, in Chicago.

Mead is one of the key American pragmatists, and this book is his most important philosophical

essay. The subject is primarily metaphysics: a relativist theory of time and space and the objective character of perspectives. So the book is for the most part quite abstract and therefore difficult, but Mead is thorough and repeats his points, so with a little patience a nonphilosopher can follow his reasoning. Mead's more familiar "sociology" about the social self and the collective other are discussed but not extensively.

I have little to add to the previous review as far as the content of the book is concerned - but the quality of the actual copy is awful. The book completely fell apart during the first read. Try to get a second hand copy of an older edition!

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