

Though ambitious (please do not be put off by the title), there is nothing in the least pretentious or grandiose about this work. Though painstaking in its attention to salient details and sharply focused on the intricacies of meaning, evidence, and argumentation, there is nothing at all scholastic or self-enclosed about the manner in which the author explores topics of fundamental philosophical significance and, more often than not, of deep human import. One of the strengths of this work (and there are many) is that this “theory” exposes and indeed explodes the pretensions of scientism (the thesis that experimental science very narrowly conceived defines the limits in which responsible, fruitful inquiry can be conducted). The author shows with clarity and force just why science, so envisioned, is an inherently and hence invincibly limited domain of discourse. To strive to sojourn beyond the boundaries of this domain does not necessarily ~~land~~ cast one into the abyss of nonsense; it can provide philosophers and others with stunning vistas of the seemingly most familiar terrain. That is, it can provide us with the means for discerning what stares us in the face, though discern in a deeper, fuller, and richer manner than would ever seem possible. This work might be seen as a first-rate contribution to the speculative tradition of philosophical thought. Alas, this tradition is all too often thought to be one in which one simply struggles to move beyond the “rough ground” of human practices in their fateful entanglements. At its best, however, it is an attempt to ascertain just where we stand, who we are, and the enveloping, sustaining, and staggeringly complex world in which we are enmeshed. Whatever the dominant fashions of philosophical discourse, it appears that there will always be philosophers and theorists who conceive their task in the manner of Wilfrid Sellars: “The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term.” Alan White is unquestionably one such philosopher. So, despite his differences from Sellars, the author of this work shares with his predecessor a commitment to taking this aim with the utmost seriousness: the defining drive of speculative thought can be either prematurely arrested (therein marking the death of philosophy) or boldly executive. Even when one disagrees with White (perhaps *especially* when one’s thought drives in a different direction than that in which White’s own is moving), one can learn much from his treatment of specific topics and also his untiring effort to think through in a maximally consistent manner the implications of his commitments and claims.