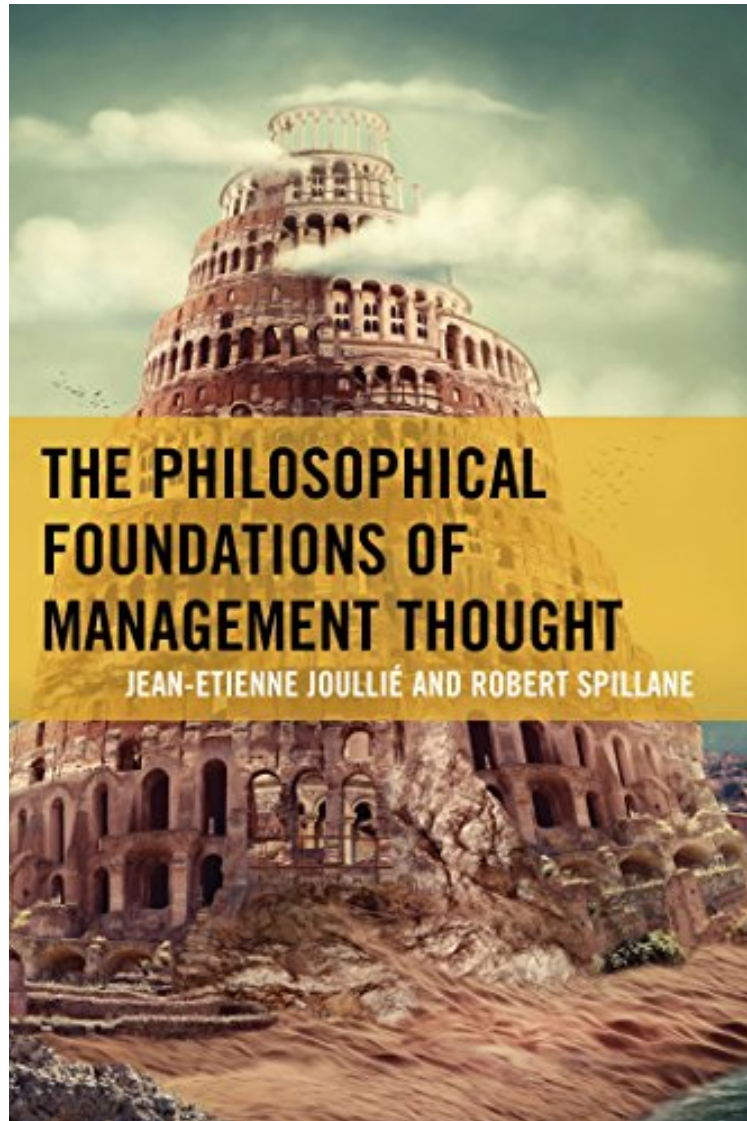


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# The Philosophical Foundations of Management Thought

*Jean-Etienne Joullieacute;, Robert Spillane*  
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**Jean-Etienne Joullieacute;, Robert Spillane : The Philosophical Foundations of Management Thought** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Philosophical Foundations of Management Thought:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Important - In fact indespensible for those who take seriously management educationBy Anthony M. GouldThe Philosophical Foundations of Management Thought is a unique book. It is not an especially easy read. Indeed, between its lines it shouts something that I sort of know but perhaps don`t want to think about: there is no substitute for hard work! On the upside, the book also reminds me ndash; and reminded me as I was finishing it in particular - that hard work pays off. Let me be clear - this is a treatise that

achieves much for its reader and for the practice of management. It is a heavy-hitter. When enough people get to know it exists (and this is a shout-out to make it compulsory reading for graduate management courses), it will be on its way to greatness. The authors of this work not only do their (tough) job well but accomplish a lot that I am not sure even they are aware of. The first, and perhaps most obvious, thing that the book does is provide a comprehensive and critical primer on key influential philosophies of Western civilisation. The authors reveal themselves to be expert communicators about this material. They have a deft and focused way of dealing with their subject matter. They make clean distinctions between what is said by philosophers and orthodox interpretations of such words. Within each chapter, before they get to issues of management application, they disclose implicitly, and through example, the importance of a solid classical education. In talking to us who are interested in management, work and employment, the authors disabuse us. They make us realise, in a polite and respectful way - a way that comes with the confidence generated from being an expert - that we are not as smart as we think we are. The message is possibly the most humbling lesson of all solid exposure of history's great thinkers: our key problem as know-it-alls and self-proclaimed geniuses is that everything we think we have invented or created ourselves has already been done - and done better, a lot better! The word "better" here deserves attention. In our lives, when we come up with a theory, perhaps a seemingly improved way of doing something, we have actually only solved a small piece of a bigger puzzle. This is akin to getting only one of the six sides of a Rubik's cube to be a uniform colour. So "better" - when referring to how the greats have a decided edge over modern geniuses like you and I - is the idea that: first, our solution was never really ground-breaking or innovative; second, that our piece of the solution wasn't optimal; and third, our piece is only a slice of a much larger cake that we have probably forgotten about. Insofar as the book is concerned, we subtly receive this/these message(s) largely before we even get to the issue of application of philosophy to the problem of modern management. It is here, when the rubber of philosophy hits the road of management practice, that the embarrassment intensifies. Having given an overview of the message and contribution(s) of the book, let me go to its structure - which is pretty much uniform for each of its substantive sections. The work has 12 chapters dealing, in the first half of each mostly in chronological order, with key philosophical movements from antiquity to modern times. We start with a review of Homer and heroism and then move to Greek rationalism, the ideas of Nicolo Machiavelli operating in the Italian renaissance, French rationalism, British empiricism, positivism and the birth of the scientific method, critical rationalism, German romanticism, heroic individualism, psychoanalysis, French existentialism and - finally - post-modernism. In the second half of each chapter we are introduced to the hypothesis that key aspects of the practice of management appear to have been influenced by the previously-discussed philosophy but, in general, so impacted unwittingly, naively, partially or without an understanding of context. For example, Peter Drucker's "Management by objectives" is interpreted as largely a bastardisation of heroism, as espoused in Homer's Iliad. Each view embodies the notion that the end justifies the means; dispassionate attainment of goals is the most important measure of a manager's worth and such accomplishment ultimately earns an actor the right to throw his weight around. Later we get to Machiavelli. No particular modern theorist is associated with him but it is made clear that contemporary consulting gurus have largely misunderstood much of his message - delivered mostly in the Prince - but nonetheless been able to create an industry that feeds off it. The book continues in this vein; a critical overview of the source of a modern philosophy and an examination of how it gets partially applied - and therefore misapplied - in different strains of contemporary management thinking. A message I got on my journey of reading was that there is an obdurate disconnect between the real origins of ideas and their modern manifestation. Perhaps more disconcerting, and implied more than said directly, is that management theorists and their acolytes are mostly content for such disconnect to exist. In fact, they probably perpetuate it. After all, the living gurus would never want to relegate themselves to middle men - brokers take a mere commission whereas producers really clean-up. Maybe none of this matters. Who cares if living guys are able to bandy around with authority (and without acknowledgement) the ideas of dead guys and make a little money - right! Such reasoning may hold-up, particularly as there is no real intellectual property involved. It is not as though the descendants of Plato, Socrates, or Aristotle can be identified and sent a royalty cheque each time elements of their worldview are applied with fidelity. But, there is a little problem - the modern guys don't really understand what the greats meant. Indeed, they probably never read their words but rather just have caricatures and abstractions of the key messages passed to them through a hybrid process possibly involving assimilating aspects of contemporary culture and a mechanism described by Karl Jung in his account of how ancestral memories are inherited. In such a state of (at least) partial ignorance, they - the modern experts - intensify an already existing vested interest in keeping consideration of the real study of philosophy off the agenda for us all. We - the real people - can't allow this to happen. When I finished the last page I was convinced that we as teachers and theoreticians must drag our students (and ourselves) kicking and screaming back to the classics. These are some of the messages I got out of this book - alongside a wonderful, albeit at times challenging, revision of the basics. When I started this review I used the expression "heavy-hitter" to describe Joulle and Spillane's latest work. As a boxing fanatic I like this expression. A buddy of mine asked me yesterday what the book was like to read and whether he should use it in his graduate courses. In sticking with the themes of greatness and sparring, I told him "what Mike

Tyson is to prize-fights, this work is to management education. Colleagues, read it! Make your students read it! If you do, you will reinvent our discipline and make it better. Anthony M Gould PhD Laval University

This book proposes a review of important Western philosophies and their significance for managers, management academics, and management consultants. Management theories taught in management schools that managers and consultants are supposed to apply are built upon different perspectives of the world, man, and society that are important not so much for what they lead to, but for what they assume. Although rarely made explicit, these assumptions cannot be reconciled and are at the source of many incompatibilities that management academia has been busy ignoring or obfuscating. The ability to evaluate critically these perspectives is essential to managers if they are to make sense of what experts profess, however. Moreover, since management is primarily an exercise in communication, managing is impossible in the darkness of an imprecise language, in the absence of moral references or in the senseless outline of a world without intellectual bases. Managing is an applied philosophical activity; any attempt at repairing management academia and the practices it has produced must accept this conclusion as its premise.

The Philosophical Foundations of Management Thought is a unique book... [T]his is a treatise that achieves much for its reader and for the practice of management. It is a heavy hitter. When enough people get to know it exists (and this is a shout-out to make it compulsory reading for graduate management courses), it will be on its way to greatness. The authors of this work not only do their (tough) job well, but they accomplish a lot that I am not sure even they are aware of. The first, and perhaps most obvious, thing that the book does is provide a comprehensive and critical primer on key influential philosophies of Western civilisation. The authors reveal themselves to be expert communicators about this material... When I finished the last page I was convinced that we as teachers and theoreticians must drag our students (and ourselves) kicking and screaming back to the classics. These are some of the messages I got out of this book... alongside a wonderful, albeit at times challenging, revision of the basics... Colleagues, read it! Make your students read it! If you do, you will reinvent our discipline and make it better. (Relations Industrielles/Industrial Relations) The Philosophical Foundations of Management Thought is an important resource for anyone in management, teaching management, or who wants to understand the relationship between philosophy and business. (Mark Griffith, University of West Alabama) At a time when science is seen... wrongly... as a universal panacea, the lingua franca of both management studies and evidence-based managerial action, this book makes a tremendous contribution. Basing its analysis largely in European philosophy in a very accessible narrative, the book explores management thought in terms of the historical development of philosophical ideas. As such it makes a perfect reader for those interested in appreciating how philosophical ideas have influenced management, and just exactly what that means. (Mark R. Dibben, University of Tasmania) Jean-Etienne Joullie and Robert Spillane provide a much needed underpinning for management theory and thought. By uncovering the philosophical roots of management, assumptions about human nature and work can be examined more closely and measured against the social values that they represent. This volume is a must-read for graduate students and researchers in public and business management. (William L. Waugh Jr., Georgia State University) About the Author Jean-Etienne Joullie is assistant professor at the Gulf University for Sciences and Technology. Robert Spillane is professor at the Macquarie Graduate School of Management.