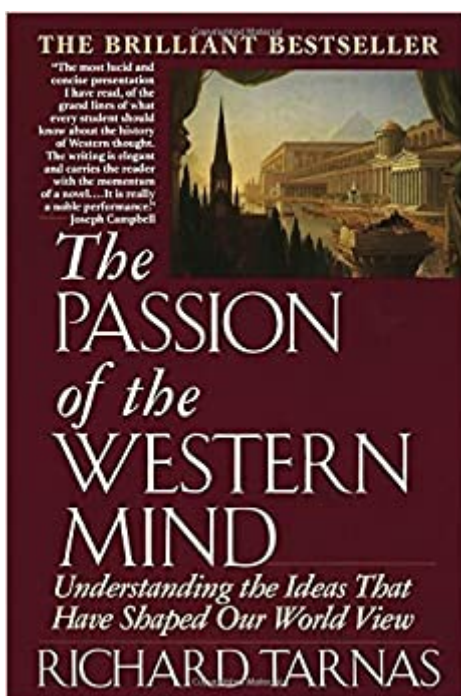


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# The Passion Of The Western Mind: Understanding The Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View



## Synopsis

"The most lucid and concise presentation I have read, of the grand lines of what every student should know about the history of Western thought. The writing is elegant and carries the reader with the momentum of a novel... It is really a noble performance."--Joseph Campbell, *Author of The Hero with a Thousand Faces* Here are the great minds of Western civilization and their pivotal ideas, from Plato to Hegel, from Augustine to Nietzsche, from Copernicus to Freud. Richard Tarnas performs the near-miracle of describing profound philosophical concepts simply but without simplifying them. Ten years in the making and already hailed as a classic, *THE PASSION OF THE WESTERN MIND* is truly a complete liberal education in a single volume.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Tarnas charts the development of Western thought from the ancient Greeks, throwing a sharp light on ideas central to the modern outlook. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc.

"It is a superb, enthralling book--a masterpiece: as gripping as a detective story; as moving as a poem. Tarnas writes lucidly, brilliantly, passionately, unfolding the great drama of the evolution of the Western mind act by act, scene by scene in precise and scholarly detail."--Anne Baring, *Resurgence* "One of the most illuminating, satisfying, beautifully written, lucidly argued--and important--books I have ever read."--Keith Thompson, *Utne Reader* "This brilliant classic is essential reading."--David Lorimer *The Scientific and Medical Network Review* "The most thrilling narrative of the West's 3,000-year odyssey in pursuit of truth accessible to a broad public of

which this reviewer is aware. . . . A work of genius."--Harrison Sheppard, *Ã Â The Hellenic Journal*"[This] magnificent critical survey . . . allows readers to grasp the big picture of Western culture as if for the first time."--Patricia Holt, *Ã Â San Francisco Chronicle*"It is stunning; it is brilliant; it is the single best book of intellectual history--in any field--that I have ever read."--William Tanksley Professor of English, Fordham University"[This] magnificent critical survey, with its inherent respect for both the 'West's mainstream high culture' and the 'radically changing world' of the 1990s, offers a new breakthrough for lay and scholarly readers alike....Allows readers to grasp the big picture of Western culture for the first time." - San Francisco Chronicle "The Passion of the Western Mind is as fine an account of the story of the Western mind, in all of its complexity and tensions, as I believe exists anywhere."--Dale Cannon Professor of Philosophy, *Ã Â Western Oregon State College*"No other such overview provides, in equal compass, as clear and cogent a survey. Its scholarship is impeccable....For its length it is the best intellectual history of the West I have ever seen." --Huston Smith, Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley "The most lucid and concise presentation I have read of the grand lines of what every student should know about the history of Western thought."--Joseph Campbell

I bought this book as a requirement for one of my classes. At first reading about the book and skimming through it before school started I was very hesitant and already hated it. It seemed difficult to read and I could not imagine reading the whole thing in a semester. Once I got into my class however, my teacher took the book very slow and discussed everything in detail. He had such a passion for this book that it was hard not to fall in love with it as well. It was difficult to get into at first. Even after I got into it I still had some trouble following. But I have never been more involved in any book I've read before. When first starting I had to have a dictionary beside me and look up a lot of words. Towards the middle I had caught on to most of the language Tarnas used. I filled the pages with notes in the margins, and thoughts about what was discussed. None of my other text books look like that. I unfortunately did not get time to finish this in class, but with how excellent it has been so far I do not intend to ever sell this and continue reading it over the summer. A word of advice for anyone else having to read this for school: take it slow, reread everything until you understand it, and have a dictionary ready. Or if you have a kindle get the kindle version and use the dictionary on there. But don't give up on the book so quickly. It really is a gem that I am glad I had the opportunity to read.

This Herculean book is an important and valuable effort of the collective Western mind over the last

2,500. The immense amount of material is manageable because of Tarnas' superb writing. His summary of different philosophical views from Socrates to post-modernism is excellent, similar in a sense to Will Durant's book "The Story of Philosophy," where the reader feels like she gets an unbiased summary. He has strong views about what happens after the current postmodern crisis and one may find his Epilogue to be a bit much. I was left wondering about the Eastern Mind - does it go through the same the evolutionary stages toward archetypal awareness, and, if not, why not? My copy has underlines on nearly every page and I have gone back and written summary notes. I recommend this book. Professor Tarnas, nice work

The author makes no claims of being unbiased. Critics should examine their own reference frame. The book is more a philosophical perspective of history, than a historical perspective of philosophy. It represents not group think of the masses but the thinking put forth by the intellectual elite of every age--those individuals who make ideas their business, and ride the crest of the evolutionary wave of meme development. The book is clearly (to me) influenced by the human potential movement. After all, Tarnas was director of programs at Esalen Institute. Had I not read extensively in theology (BA in Religion), philosophy, psychology, and physical science (MD), I would have perhaps had a different reaction to this book. For me, it was the right book at the right time (right in the midst of writing my own critique of my profession of medicine and psychiatry). Just as some have walked out on Eckart Tolle muttering, "What a load of rubbish!", while others have found a soul-resonating truth, we all bring our own biases and perspectives to every experience. For me, "The Passion of the Western Mind" is perhaps the most enlightening book I have ever read from the perspective of "putting it all together" in a grand synthesis. I disagree with several of the 1 and 2 star criticisms. I read Groff's work years ago and personally dialogued with him in person. I didn't appreciate his insights at the time. Anyone familiar with the work of Margaret Mahler on the Psychological Birth of the Human Infant will immediately see the extension of those concepts into the gestational and perinatal periods. Tarnas's perspective is not the retro-mythological regression called "New Age." Anyone who thinks that, missed the whole point. Tarnas attempts to move beyond the existential alienation of a completely objectified, meaningless, mechanized world, to a higher synthesis--an integration, where the split between subject and object is ultimately overcome, as revealed in statements such as, "Nature becomes intelligible to itself through the human mind," and "The evolution of human knowledge is the evolution of the world's self-revelation." Similar statements are made by contemporary physicists, biologists, and other scientists, who have gone beyond the reductionist program that has ruled modern science since its inception, and embraced a systems

perspective that includes the observer as part of the data to be analyzed. Tarnas insightfully exposes the myth of the unbiased, objective mind so idealized in modern science: "The great irony...is that it is just when the modern mind believes it has most fully purified itself from any anthropomorphic projections, when it actively construes the world as unconscious, mechanistic, and impersonal, it is just then that the world is most completely a selective construct of the human mind...From this perspective, it is the modern mind's own impersonal soullessness that has been projected from within onto the world--or, to be more precise, that has been projectively elicited from the world." (Page 432). My sense is that Tarnas has suggested a viable solution to the dilemma facing post-modern man. It seems to be a psychologically and spiritually adaptive way to embrace uncertainty and ambiguity as opposed to the rise of regressive and militant fundamentalism/tribalism that seems to be ensnaring our planet. I cast my vote for "The Passion of the Western Mind" for our next book club selection.

Many readers that find disagreement with Jungian psychoanalysis and various things falling under the rubric of "New Age" have been turned off by this wonderful book. The diligent author really did do such an "excellent job gathering information, seasoning it with something mystical and cooking it with humanism"(as one reviewer below comically and aptly puts it)! And it is also from my perspective unfortunate he served as the final entree "the half-backed idea of a 'feminist rebirth'". This book might be spoiled for many thoughtful readers due to author Richard Tarnas bringing anti-enlightenment views to bare on our passionate intellectual history. But this book is so delightfully well written the prose goes down like a crÃ©me brÃ©le prepared by a master chef. So granted the author's spin is in the wrong direction, I still enjoyed this trip through intellectual history very much even if it may be cause for possible indigestion. I'd advise the prospective reader that you don't have to savor every taste, much less swallow everything you are served, to still enjoy such a well prepared feast for the intellect. I devoured most of this meaty, content stuffed book-especially savoring the portions on "postmodernism" and Existentialism. And Romanticism. One blurb among the several thousand included in the first pages of the book is correct in it's claim that the summary of postmodernism is worth the price alone. The dish on the Greeks was superb and latter in the evening I still even had room for Hegel which went down surprisingly well. 4.5 star meal for the mind, using the rating system, not a mere 1.

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