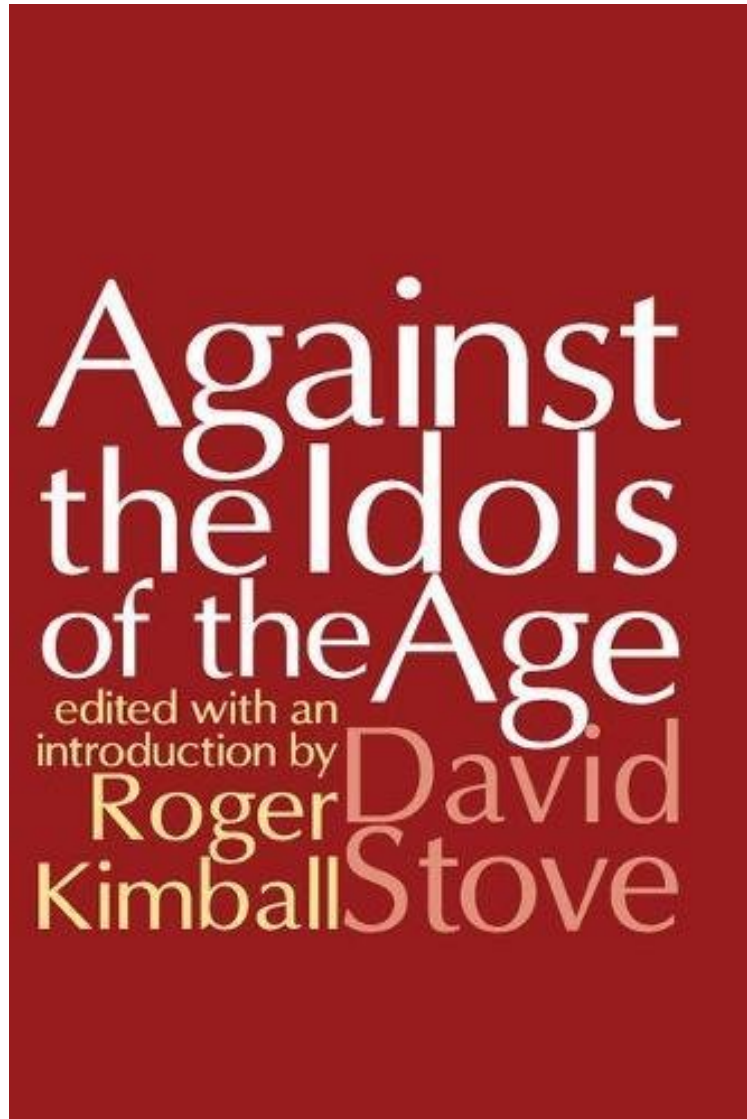


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Against the Idols of the Age

David Stove

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David Stove : Against the Idols of the Age before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Against the Idols of the Age:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Sawn off, pump action, logic gunBy Eric HollowayDavid Stove's concise, witty and precise prose cuts to the heart of the many fallacies masquerading as philosophy today, especially Darwinism. If you enjoy his writings, check out the many free resources also available on his website:[...]Even if you do not agree with his arguments, your mind will be the sharper for having dealt with his criticism.3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. An excellent philosophical workoutBy Geoff PuterbaughIf you scan the reviews of this

book, you'll quickly discover that a lot of people hate it. They seem to be a mix of convinced pomos, the devout, and "professional philosophers" who have a Ph.D. but no teaching job. (This is one of the real risks of going for a Ph.D. in philosophy: winding up waiting tables or writing computer software.) I especially admired the review which tried to imply that Stove was a CIA tool. :-) But a lot of other people admire David Stove, including Roger Kimball, who is nobody's fool. A lot of people get worked up over his essay on the intellectual inferiority of women, which is of course historically accurate (as Camille Paglia would agree). I think Stove misses the main reason for this unequal performance, which is largely that the bell curve for males is a lot wider (or longer) than the bell curve for females. So men have more geniuses and more morons. This probably does not completely explain the difference in math ability, but I find it hard to care because I have never accepted the loony idea that men and women are interchangeable parts. Nevertheless, a lot of people get seriously upset by this essay, as if it were illegal even to broach the idea of sexual inequality. (By the way, Jensen in his authoritative book, *The g Factor: The Science of Mental Ability (Human Evolution, Behavior, and Intelligence)* documented at some length the fact that men and women score equally on intelligence tests.) No, the most interesting essay in here is the one about Idealism ("A Victorian Horror Story"), although the others are well worth a read. Contra Idealism, it seems to me the most obvious thing in the world that human beings have knowledge about the (external) real world. This is not some sort of Primitive Philosophy: it was shared by Avicenna, Maimonides, and St. Thomas Aquinas. It is the matrix which underlies modern science. The idea that the only reality is in your head is the Loony-Tunes idea, defended among others by that "pathological windbag Schopenhauer." (Those are Stove's words, not mine, but I agree!) I don't think that David Stove is the first philosopher to Get Everything Right, but he does write brilliantly and he will make you think. I recommend this book highly. 18 of 24 people found the following review helpful. *The Stove Cult and other Philosophical Frivolities* By Steven M. Duncan

In the first place, David Stove was a crank, a witty crank but a crank nonetheless. After reading these reviews, it appears that most of the people who like his books are cranks as well. It is a reliable rule of thumb that any philosopher who accuses his targets of being dogmatic, irrational and guilty of elementary errors that even a child could detect is almost certain to be at least as guilty of these vices as those he attacks. Indeed, it is only because he or she is committed to a set of definite and usually simplistic views that he or she is capable of seeing those opponents in this palpably distorted way. Stove is often accused of being a latter-day positivist, but he was in fact a Baconian inductivist who believed that casual, everyday observation was a sufficient epistemic ground for sweeping philosophical claims. (This, in fact, was the view that he defended - against Hume - in his technical philosophical work on induction.) His constant appeals to "what everybody knows" and the prejudices of two generations ago that pass themselves off as "common sense" illustrates that well enough. For example, we all know that women are less intelligent than men; history proves it, after all, inasmuch as women have failed to achieve anything even remotely close to what men have achieved in historical time. And, if women do as well on math tests as men, that just proves that math tests are not a good way of comparing males and females with regard to intelligence. Casual induction, the source of stereotypes and prejudices of all sorts, apparently trumps the social sciences as well, which are to be dismissed simply as the running dogs of political correctness. Stove is funny (though in a mean-spirited and often heavy-handed way) and entertaining to read; I thoroughly enjoyed reading his essays. That is not to my credit. Each of us secretly desires to see those smarter and better than ourselves exposed as stupid and wicked; Stove appeals to this form of intellectual *schadenfreude* - we read him and we feel good. However, when this guilty pleasure wears off and we begin to actually think about his arguments soberly, they are far from convincing. I am neither a Popperian nor an Absolute Idealist, but I know enough about these philosophies to know that what Stove says about them amounts to a silly caricature, one so distorted as to be completely irrelevant to the proper philosophical evaluation of those views. I am much more sympathetic to his attacks on sociobiology and cosmic evolutionism - which has been much more effectively critiqued by others without his particular axe to grind - but I doubt that anything Stove says will impress Dennett or Dawkins, and not simply because they are as intransigent and dogmatic in their own way as Stove is in his quite different one. To conclude, "irrationalism" is not a matter of what views one holds, but rather of the manner in which those views are held. Humor, wit and style are not antithetical to good philosophical prose, but hyperbole, misrepresentation and dismissiveness are and no substitute for argument. Stove's passionate commitment to a set of atavistic ideas that have long since fallen out of fashion (at least in some cases for good and solid reasons) leads him to see "irrationalism" and imminent anarchy lurking everywhere in the contemporary world. He is the philosophical equivalent of the prophet of doom standing on the streetcorner with sign saying "THE END IS NEAR" hanging around his neck: good for a laugh, nothing more. Still, a good laugh is worth something - so read this book.

Little known outside his native Australia, David Stove was one of the most illuminating and brilliant philosophical essayists of the postwar era. A fearless attacker of intellectual and cultural orthodoxies, Stove left powerful critiques of scientific irrationalism, Darwinian theories of human behavior, and philosophical idealism. He was also an occasional essayist of considerable charm and polemical snap. Stove's writing is both rigorous and immensely readable. It is, in the words of Roger Kimball, "an invigorating blend of analytic lucidity, mordant humor, and an amount of common sense too great to be called 'common.'" *Against the Idols of the Age* brings together a repre-

sentative selection of Stove's writing and is an ideal introduction to his work. The book opens with some of Stove's most important attacks on irrationalism in the philosophy of science. He exposes the roots of this fashionable attitude, tracing it through writers like Paul Feyerabend and Thomas Kuhn to Karl Popper. Stove was a born controversialist, so it is not surprising that when he turned his attention to contemporary affairs he said things that are politically incorrect. The topical essays that make up the second part of the book show Stove at his most withering and combative. Whether the subject is race, feminism, the Enlightenment, or the demand for "non-coercive philosophy," Stove is on the mark with a battery of impressive arguments expressed in sharp, uncompromising prose. *Against the Idols of the Age* concludes with a generous sampling of his blistering attacks on Darwinism. David Stove's writings are an undiscovered treasure. Although readers may disagree with some of his opinions, they will find it difficult to dismiss his razor-sharp arguments. *Against the Idols of the Age* is the first book to make the full range of this important thinker available to the general reader.

"Stove was undoubtedly the most stylish and witty writer of all philosophers of the last one hundred years, if not of all time. When it comes to attacking the absurdities of twentieth century intellectual movements no one else came close, and certainly no one else was as funny. The greatest iconoclast of the twentieth century, we can now see in retrospect, was not any of the European avant-garde, most of whom in fact, epitomized the spirit of the century perfectly, but this no nonsense Australian. His greatest contributions were in the philosophy of science, in particular in his defense of inductive reasoning, and in his attack on the sort of irrationalism manifested by his four horsemen, Popper, Kuhn, Lakatos, and Feyerabend." *The New Criterion* "A self-proclaimed neo-positivist and a brilliant, truculent, cantankerous essayist--Stove attacks everything from contemporary philosophy of science and evolutionary theory to religious belief and intellectual equality of women." *The Weekly Standard* "The greatest philosopher of the twentieth century may not have been Wittgenstein, or Russell, or Quine (and he certainly wasn't Heidegger), but he may have been a somewhat obscure and conservative Australian named David Stove (1927-94). If he wasn't the greatest philosopher of the century, Stove was certainly the funniest and most dazzling defender of common sense to be numbered among the ranks of last century's thinkers, better even by far than G. E. Moore and J. L. Austin. . . . What separates Stove from your average angry-eyed reactionary is the startling brilliant way that he argues, combining plain horse sense with the most nimble and skillful philosophical reasoning this side of Hume, along with a breathtaking wit." *Partisan* "An early, fearless, sometimes reckless combatant in the science and culture wars, Stove fought wittily and two-fistedly on the side of empirical realism." *Choice* "The incisiveness of [Stove's] logic presses toward something new and adventuresome that has been obscured by the intellectual idols of the age." *The New Criterion* "David Stove is thoughtful, trenchant, sharp and wonderfully disrespectful of the established pieties of our time." Harvey C. Mansfield, Harvard University "Stove is an independent and honest philosopher who, like Voltaire and Nietzsche, has the wit to make us laugh as we learn." John Silber, Boston University **From the Back Cover** David Stove is thoughtful, trenchant, sharp, and wonderfully disrespectful of the established pieties of our time. He's also a treat to read. --Harvey C. Mansfield, professor of government, Harvard University A philosopher whose wit and satirical genius was directed against the follies and absurdities to be found in philosophers--and others. --David Armstrong, emeritus professor of philosophy, University of Sydney In a culture of iconoclastic posturing, David Stove is the true iconoclast. He is outrageously wrong about some things, but putting up with that is a price worth paying for his formidable, and frequently funny, contributions to--in the words of the great Dr. Johnson--clearing the mind of cant. --Richard John Neuhaus, editor in chief, *First Things* David Stove took no intellectual prisoners. A deadly serious (and hilariously funny) enemy of intellectual cant and the higher pretensions, he wrote to kill. In the process he demonstrated what had come to seem questionable: that professional philosophers can still make a vital contribution to public debate. Many thanks to Roger Kimball for making these brilliant essays available in America. --Owen Harries, editor, *The National Interest* David Stove was a man before his time, providing answers to a number of mounting problems in politics and academic life whose eventual, disastrous dimensions were foreseen by very few others when he wrote. He long had a small circle of admirers who appreciated not only his intellectual brilliance and the polish of his unadorned prose, but how funny he invariably was. Since his death in 1994, the circle of insiders has widened to include many people who had not read him when he was alive but who, on discovering him, have asked almost incredulously: why didn't I know of his work before? This book shows just how much, until now, they have all missed. --Keith Windschuttle, author of *The Killing of History* As Francis Bacon alerted us to the misleading habits of mind--idols of Tribe, Cave, Marketplace and Theater--that deprive us of knowledge, David Stove exposes the irrationalities of fashionable ideologies that deliver us over to relativism, skepticism and cynicism. Roger Kimball offers us, with an introductory overview, an astute collection of essays by Stove, brilliantly exposing current ideologies under the Baconian title *Against the Idols of the Age*. Stove's carefully reasoned arguments expose the intellectual fraudulence and cant that have blinded us to the attainability of knowledge. He makes the case not only that it is intellectually respectable to seek the truth, but that it is contemptible to be bullied by bad arguments and paradigms of the politically and intellectually "correct" into abandoning the search. Stove is an independent and honest philosopher who, like Voltaire and Nietzsche, has the wit to make us laugh as we learn. --John Silber, chancellor

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About the Author
Roger Kimball is co-editor and publisher of *The New Criterion*, president and publisher of Encounter Books, and an art critic for the *London Spectator* and *National*. Roger Kimball is co-editor and publisher of *The New Criterion*, president and publisher of Encounter Books, and an art critic for the *London Spectator* and *National*. David Stove (1927-1994) taught philosophy at the University of New South Wales and the University of Sydney. He is the author of numerous books, including *The Rationality of Induction* and *Against the Idols of the Age*.