
I have always enjoyed books of quotations. They offer a sampling menu of savory, digestible ideas. This new collection is a welcome addition to the existing books of scientific quotations. It includes the thoughts of scientists and many others on the disciplines of science and on scientists themselves. Arranged alphabetically, with a handy keyword index, the book has quick and easy accessibility. The British editors might have been expected to overlook very few memorable British utterances related to science. So James Clerk Maxwell has almost a chapter (well, seven pages) and Isaac Newton a few more. However, unlikely and delightful contributions are also included from such figures as Cole Porter, William Wordsworth, Ibn Khaldun, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Henry Ford, and Michel Foucault. From Thales to still living writers, the contributions tell the story of mankind’s journey from wonder, to philosophy, to scientific rationalism. The reader is free to supply the trajectory of development over time—or not. The attractiveness of this kind of compilation lies in the opportunity it provides the reader to reflect upon the processes of thought and intuition, connect or contrast the bits of wisdom or opinion, and claim one’s own synthesis.

It is probably not fair to criticize the editors for not including everything ever said about science by everyone. Still, I would have liked to have seen some notice of Nicholas of Cusa and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

The paperback version is particularly affordable and should open the market for the book beyond that of the school and public libraries. A nice bedside companion.

Peter McDermott

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