

## **Jon Agar: Science in the twentieth century and beyond** **Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 2012, ix + 614 pp., no price stated**

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Jon Agar's stated goal in writing this ambitious volume is synthetic. He tries to subsume all science after 1900 under the unifying conception of "working worlds," defined as "arenas of human projects that generate problems." In his introduction, the author contends that "just as we can make sense of a pattern of lights once we can see them as structured by the working movement of a city at dawn, so we can make sense of modern science once we see it as structured by working worlds" (p. 3). Agar introduces the notion of working worlds as a guiding concept to avoid the metaphor of "context", the one habitually chosen by historians. The use of the adjective "working" is intended to draw attention to the practical side of science and how scientists deal with immensely different problems that must first be recognized as such and then abstracted away and made manageable (p. 4). Working worlds come in different kinds and the significance of this new concept becomes clearer as Agar applies it to concrete examples. Two of the most significant set of working worlds, according to Agar, concern "technological systems" (transportation, electricity, communication, computers, agriculture) and "fighting forces" (army preparation, mobilization, and maintenance). It remains to be seen what can or cannot be subsumed under this analytic category but if one follows the argument of the book, contenders for the title of "most significant working worlds" are indeed "civil administration" and "maintenance of the human body" (p. 3). The book is structured as follow: "Part I: Science after 1900", "Part II: Sciences in a World of Conflict", "Part III: Second World War and Cold War"; "Part IV: Sciences of our World", and Part V: "Conclusions – Science in the Twentieth Century and Beyond".