
Pro Rege

Volume 32 | Number 3

Article 6

March 2004

Fortunes of History: Historical Inquiry from Herder to Huizinga (Book Review)

Keith C. Sewell
Dordt College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege

Recommended Citation

Sewell, Keith C. (2004) "Fortunes of History: Historical Inquiry from Herder to Huizinga (Book Review)," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 32: No. 3, 43 - 44.
Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol32/iss3/6

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the University Publications at Digital Collections @ Dordt. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pro Rege by an authorized administrator of Digital Collections @ Dordt. For more information, please contact ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu.

the spiritual one, of an overly enthusiastic pursuit of the esserly entangled in unwanted implications resulting from the origin and development of the term in the context of modernity. He remains cautious in his conclusions, but he clearly and persuasively answers his third question with his argument that the term can be “baptized” and put to Christian use.

the spiritual one, of an overly enthusiastic pursuit of the Christian worldview: It is a grave mistake to confuse or substitute a proper relationship with the Trinitarian God for the crafting and promulgation of a Christian *Weltanschauung*. Now the two are fruitfully combined such that one's relationship with God fosters the appropriate worldview, and vice versa. But it is still relatively easy to absolutize the process of worldview formation as a means of Christian ministry and transform it into an intellectual or spiritual idol as an end in itself (338). While he clearly supports the concept as being beneficial overall, he nevertheless recognizes potential dangers, both in its origin and in its misapplication.

That “worldview” is an important and much-used concept in contemporary evangelicalism hardly needs to be stated. Naugle has done the church and academy a great service by carefully studying the origins and history of the term and by further reflecting on both the fruitfulness and pitfalls engendered by its use. As can be seen from the preceding summary, the book can be broken easily into three major sections: an introductory part, which details the impact of “worldview” thinking on Christian thought; the main part, which develops the history of the term in its various contexts; and a final section of reflections on “worldview,” with a view to defending its use by evangelicals and to further developing a proper understanding. As such, Naugle's overall thesis is that Christians can make use of the term and concept of *Weltanschauung* without being nec-

essarily entangled in unwanted implications resulting from the origin and development of the term in the context of modernity. He remains cautious in his conclusions, but he clearly and persuasively answers his third question with his argument that the term can be “baptized” and put to Christian use.

One of the endearing features of the book is the inclusion of a prologue and epilogue, both based on the Narnia tales by C. S. Lewis and used to illustrate what is meant by “worldview.” Many readers will also find the stories to which Naugle refers to be elucidated by connecting them to the notion of worldview. Moreover, Naugle gives an intriguing series of quotations prior to the Foreword, from the diverse group of William James, Richard Weaver, G. K. Chesterton, and Karl Barth. These quotations, together with the Narnia prologue, aptly help to set up the ensuing discussion.

Worldview: The History of a Concept would be an excellent resource for anyone seeking a better understanding of the term, particularly its historical development in various fields. It would be appropriate for use in an upper-level philosophy course or for a seminary course dealing with philosophy and apologetics. It is especially recommended to those who make use of the concept of “worldview” in their teaching. You may not agree with all of Naugle's analysis and conclusions, but he raises important issues and helps us to think through what it means to develop a genuinely Christian world-view.

Donald R. Kelley, *Fortunes of History: Historical Inquiry from Herder to Huizinga*. Yale University Press, 2003. xiii + 426 pp. ISBN: 0-300-09578-3. Reviewed by Keith C. Sewell, Professor of History, Dordt College.

Put simply, historiography is the writing of history. Accordingly, the history of historiography is the history of the writing of history. And the history of historiography is a fascinating subject, addressing as it does the changing character of our historical awareness as well as the depth and extent of our historical understanding. Writing the history of historiography is a formidable task. Donald R. Kelley's *Fortunes of History: Historical Inquiry from Herder to Huizinga* is a continuation of his earlier *Faces of History: Historical Inquiry from Herodotus to Herder* (same publisher, 1998). It is, perhaps inevitably, a book about books. Kelley's work stands in the line of George Peabody Gooch's *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century* (1913, second edition, 1952), Herbert Butterfield's *Man on His Past: The Study of the History of Historical Scholarship* (1955), Eric Cochrane's *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance* (1981), and Norman Cantor's *Inventing the Middle Ages: The Lives, Works, and Ideas of the Great Medievalists of the Twentieth Century* (1991).

This present volume is a remarkable achievement. The

many references Kelley provides to authors and books are not a defect but a fount of instruction. The easy flow of the prose rests on foundations of very considerable learning and scholarship. In commencing his discussion of the modern period of western historiography in the late eighteenth century with Herder (where else?), Kelley adopts an organizational strategy towards his subject matter that reflects a dominant feature of the period itself—the rising power and dominance of nationalism. Accordingly, for a substantial part of this volume, Kelley focuses on the development of national historiographical traditions—the German (112-140, 173-197, 265-272), British (81-111, 225-253), French (141-172, 198-224), and Italian (259-264). Understandably enough, American historiography emerges as an interweaving of indigenous and diverse European (and not least German) influences (280-303). All this is a mighty story, and the author handles the complexities with deftness and subtlety. He addresses for us the misconception that “historical-mindedness” arose preeminently out of a conservative reaction to the French Revolution. The roots of this awareness lie in the

centuries preceding 1789. Moreover, he rightly insists the temptation to focus excessively on the German development and offers valuable discussions on figures such as François Guizot (145-153), Jules Michelet (160-172), and Jacob Burckhardt (191-197). Leopold von Ranke is given his due recognition (134-140), and so are his disciples (173 f.), but they are not permitted to dominate the scene improperly.

Still, the vastness of Kelley's canvas inevitably leads to some regrettable contractions. I would have liked to see a fuller exploration of the assumptions driving the work of John W. Draper and Andrew Dickson White, for example (294-296). In their kind of anti-Christian, militantly secularist, and materialist thinking lies much that the history of science has had to unlearn in the twentieth century. But such points are minor, and the reviewer must be careful not to require of an author what lies beyond his avowed intention.

For this reader, the discussion gains pace in Chapter 12, where the author reflects on the phenomena of the "New Histories." Here are discussed the work of Karl Lamprecht and the resulting *Methodenstreit*, in which the establishment neo-Rankians arraigned themselves against the upstart exponents of *Kulturgeschichte*, these developments bringing us to the work of Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch and the *Annales* in France and the work of Johan Huizinga in the Netherlands. At an early stage this "new history" had a marked impact also on American historiography (310-317). Still, the main action was in old Europe. The crucial point is reached when, in the wake of German defeat in 1918, historicism (*Historismus*) comes to be seen as a problem, a veritable *Krisis des Historismus*. As a methodology *Historismus* had yielded valuable insight. It challenged the abstract rationalism of the enlightenment, and it took very seriously how successive generations use their cultural-formative power to shape and change human thought, life, relationships, and institutions. It was the means whereby generations of historians and other scholars had come to view the human past in a more genuinely historical way.

However, as and when *Historismus* had been erected into an all-encompassing world view, it led to a rootless relativism that eroded the very *Kultur* that it purported to champion. Here Kelley's discussion of figures such as Wilhelm Dilthey, Ernst Troeltsch, Otto Hinze, and Friedrich Meinecke repays careful reflection (328-333). Kelley is right in pointing out that Karl Popper's use of the term "historicism" diverged significantly from the original *Historismus* (332). The "historicism" that was the object of Popper's critique (*The Poverty of Historicism*, 1944, 45, republished 1957) implied a determinism that purported to validate prediction and legitimize a planned society (cf. his *The Open Society and its Enemies*, 1945).

As his title leads us to expect, Kelley's discussion rarely takes us very far beyond the 1920s. "New Histories" notwithstanding, we learn nothing here of his estimation of figures such as Louis Namier, whose big impact came from

1929 onwards. Authors such as Robin G. Collingwood and Arnold Toynbee are mentioned only in passing. Having given us volumes on the *Faces of History and the Fortunes of History*, I wonder if Kelley will eventually give us a third to make up a trilogy—possibly the *Fate of History* down into the era of our new-style historicist relativism—contemporary postmodernism.

Kelley comes to this conclusion:

The effect of the First World War was mainly to enhance . . . the inclination of historians to national ideologies, and to eschatological philosophies of history, to replace the discredited myth of unending Progress, if not to restore it in more complex terms. These were the foundations on which the modern discipline of history would continue to be built and rebuilt into the present millennium. (345)

This conclusion is surely a thesis that itself calls for further elaboration. No discipline is an island unto itself. The exquisitely diverse and complex reality, which confronts us all and of which we all are part, can never be successfully reduced to a single explanatory standpoint, as if everything were only mathematical or only physical or only historical. Accordingly, the history of historiography should never be viewed as an island unto itself either. When it is, it always is in danger of becoming little more than a listing of one book after another, one historian after another.

Kelley touches somewhat upon this problem in his reference to the work of Hayden V. White (341). White (*Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, 1973) may have rested too much at the level of "emplotment"—at the structure-determining strategies used by historical authors in the crafting of their literary artifacts. Nevertheless, he was pointing in the right sort of direction. And we might now well ask, "So why did they elect such and such a starting-point?" For White, the answer was likely to be a moral or aesthetic one. Some of us, however, would argue that the answers to such questions point to the ultimately religious stance that we all ineluctably adopt in all that we say and do. However difficult the task, what is needed is a history of historiography that has found how to take into account the all-important pre-theoretical first assumptions that historians make before they embark upon their researches and fashion their narratives. And, of course, to say this is to acknowledge that the history of historiography itself can never dispense with a starting-point, be it pagan, humanist, Christian, whatever. It seems that we are still some way from articulating and utilizing such an insight—we might say, from a new critique of historiographical thought—but that is not to say that such a task should not be contemplated. Meanwhile, this volume will be indispensable for all serious students of modern historiography and is strongly recommended. And perhaps we may hope for a third volume from Professor Kelley—one that takes us to the end of the twentieth century.