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

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Without being necessity 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 inclu-
sion 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 understand-
ing 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 recom-
ended to those who make use of the concept of “world-
view” 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 devel-
oping a genuinely Christian world-view.

Donald R. Kelley, *Fortunes of History: Historical
Inquiry from Herder to Huizinga.* Yale University
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 char-
acter 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 publish-
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

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 cen-
tury with Herder (where else?!), Kelley adopts an organiza-
tional strategy towards his subject matter that reflects a dom-
inant feature of the period itself—the rising power and dom-
nance 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-mind-
edness” arose preeminent out of a conservative reaction to
the French Revolution. The roots of this awareness lie in the
The Poverty of Historicism

down that it purported to

had yielded valuable insight. It challenged the

had been erected

(332). The “historicism” that was the object of

1944, 45,

ments of

human past in a more genuinely historical way.

generative power to shape and change human thought, life, rela-

tionships, and institutions. It was the means whereby gener-

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reached when, in the wake of German defeat in 1918, his-

torismus) comes to be seen as a problem, a ver-

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 secular-

ist, and materialist thinking lies much that the history of scien-

cence 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

eo-Rankians arraigned themselves against the upstart ex-

ponents 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, his-

toricism (Historismus) comes to be seen as a problem, a ver-

itable 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-for-

mative power to shape and change human thought, life, rela-

tionships, and institutions. It was the means whereby gener-

ations 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 rel-

ativism that eroded the very Kultur that it purported to

champion. Here Kelley’s discussion of figures such as

Wilhelm Dilthey, Ernst Troeltsch, Otto Hintze, and Friedrich

Meinecke repays careful reflection (328-333). Kelley is

right in pointing out that Karl Popper’s use of the term “his-

toricism” 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—contem-

porary 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 ref-

erence 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 strate-

gies 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, how-

ever, 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 historiogra-

phy 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 historio-

graphical 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 historiogra-

phy 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.