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Book Note

Philosophy of History: A Guide for Students, by M.C. Lemon. Routledge (2003), 480pp. ISBN 0-415-16204-1 (Hardback: \$125); ISBN 0-415-16205-x (Paperback \$31.95)

In recent years introductions to the philosophy of history have been written by non-philosophers, chiefly historians. This book is no exception, Lemon being a lecturer in the history of political thought and theory. Indeed, as we shall see, for a book whose primary intention appears to be to introduce some relevant *philosophy* to students of history, there is remarkably little of it.

One important difference between this book and recent competitors, however, is that this is a *historical* introduction to the philosophy of history in the sense that it gives us a history of ideas about history, rather than a thematic introduction. One might therefore suppose that whatever the book lacks from a philosophical perspective it will surely gain from a historical one. But things are not so. While Lemon's 480 page history of (Western) historiography begins with pre-classical conceptions and ends with Fukuyama, it unfortunately leaves out far too many important theorists in between. Key contributors to the philosophy of history which Lemon fails to even mention (let alone properly introduce) include Isaiah Berlin, E. H. Carr, R. G. Collingwood, Benedetto Croce, Wilhelm Dilthey, William Dray, R. J. Evans, Herbert Fisher, Patrick Gardner, Eric Hobsbawm, Maynard Keynes, Arthur Marwick, Michael Oakshott, Karl Popper, Anthony Quinton, W. H. Walsh, and Peter Winch. Others, such as Spengler and Toynbee are represented by a half-line reference to their 'dubious notions' (p. 392). It is perhaps worth emphasizing here that it is the 'analytic philosophy of history' section that suffers the most in this respect, being less than 50 pages long (the section on speculative history is over 230 pages), with no section devoted to any particular philosopher.

So much for the book's chief weakness. Let me now focus on some of its many positive points. Lemon's writing is extremely lucid, and he introduces all relevant philosophical terminology with great clarity and care while simultaneously managing to dig well beneath the surface of a number of issues. To give an illustrative example, his chapter on Classical Greek and Early Roman Speculations on History includes thoughtful discussions of myth, historical cycles, "'fate', 'fortune', and 'the gods'", the biological analogy, the ages of man, political cycles, and human nature, as well as a commentary on conflicting views on the idea of "progress" in the classical world. In the same vein, his chapter on the Renaissance and Machiavelli does not restrict itself to the relevant theories but introduces them in the context of Aquinas, scholasticism, cultural relativism, individualism, Moore's Utopia, and even the advancement of printing. Moreover, in chapters like this, and the ones on the Pre-Classical World, the Christian Challenge, Giambattista Vico (Lemon's philosopher of choice), and the Enlightenment, Lemon offers much information that is simply unavailable in other introductions to the topic.

Students and scholars of various disciplines may not always agree with Lemon's own take on any given conception of history (and/or the contextual background he gives it) but they will no doubt recognize his remarkable ability to guide the reader through a (selective) history of approaches to history that is populated with dense forests, steep cliffs, and wayward paths.

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