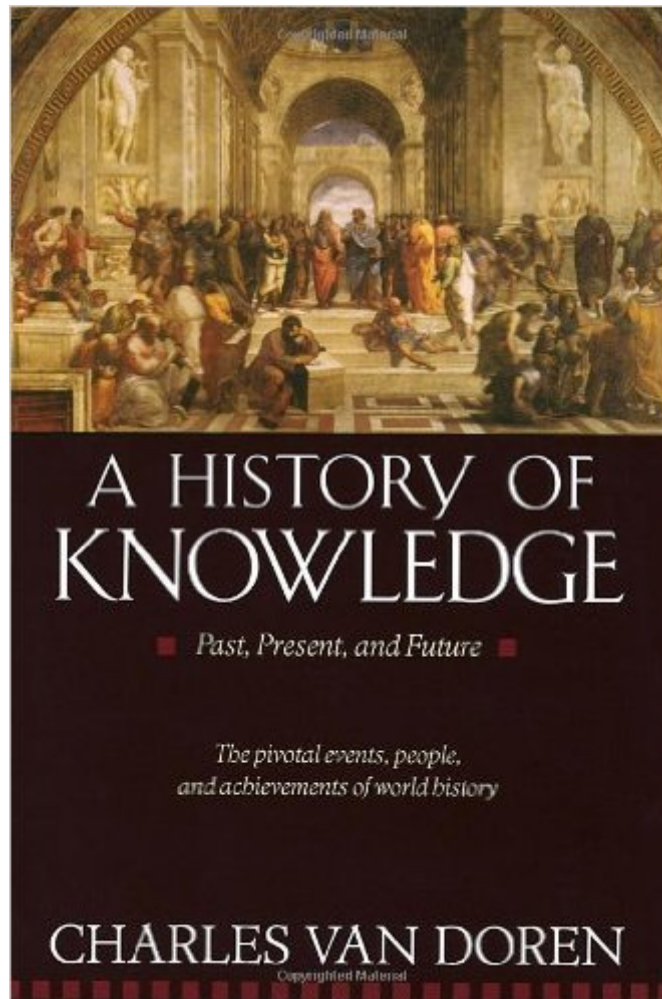


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A History Of Knowledge: Past, Present, And Future



Synopsis

A one-volume reference to the history of ideas that is a compendium of everything that humankind has thought, invented, created, considered, and perfected from the beginning of civilization into the twenty-first century. Massive in its scope, and yet totally accessible, A HISTORY OF KNOWLEDGE covers not only all the great theories and discoveries of the human race, but also explores the social conditions, political climates, and individual men and women of genius that brought ideas to fruition throughout history."Crystal clear and concise...Explains how humankind got to know what it knows."Clifton FadimanSelected by the Book-of-the-Month Club and the History Book Club

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Charles Van Doren undertook an ambitious project in this book, which according to its cover blurb purports to be 'a compendium of everything that humankind has thought, invented, created, considered, and perfected from the beginning of civilisation into the twenty-first century.' There are, alas, a few things missing, as this book only has a bit over 400 pages. But that does not really detract from the thesis of the book; it is certainly a worthy outline of human history, particularly approached through the lens of intellectual achievement and the advance of knowledge. Van Doren, as you may recall, is the Van Doren who got caught up in the quiz show scandals of the 1950s. Ironical that this fate should befall him, as his learning would obviously put to shame the current crop of would-be millionaires so popular on the television today. But, I digress. Van Doren spent the two decades before writing this book as an editor for Encyclopedia Britannica. He has put together a

worthy outline to knowledge, broad in scope and with just enough detail to satisfy the hunger and whet the appetite simultaneously. The voluminous literature dealing with the idea of human progress is decidedly a mixed bag. While some of these writings are impressive and even inspiring, many of them are superficial, perhaps even ridiculous, in their reiteration (especially during the nineteenth century) of the comforting prospect that every day in every way we are growing better and better. Van Doren does believe in progress, but not in inevitable progress. He distinguishes between general knowledge and knowledge of particulars, and explores the inter-relationship of knowledge and happiness: The desire to know, when you realise you do not know, is universal and probably irresistible.

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