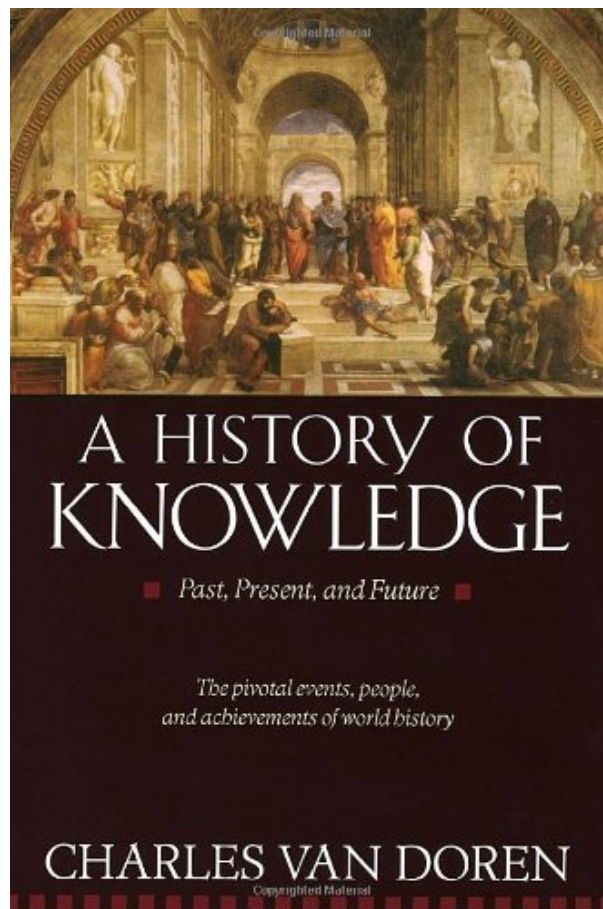
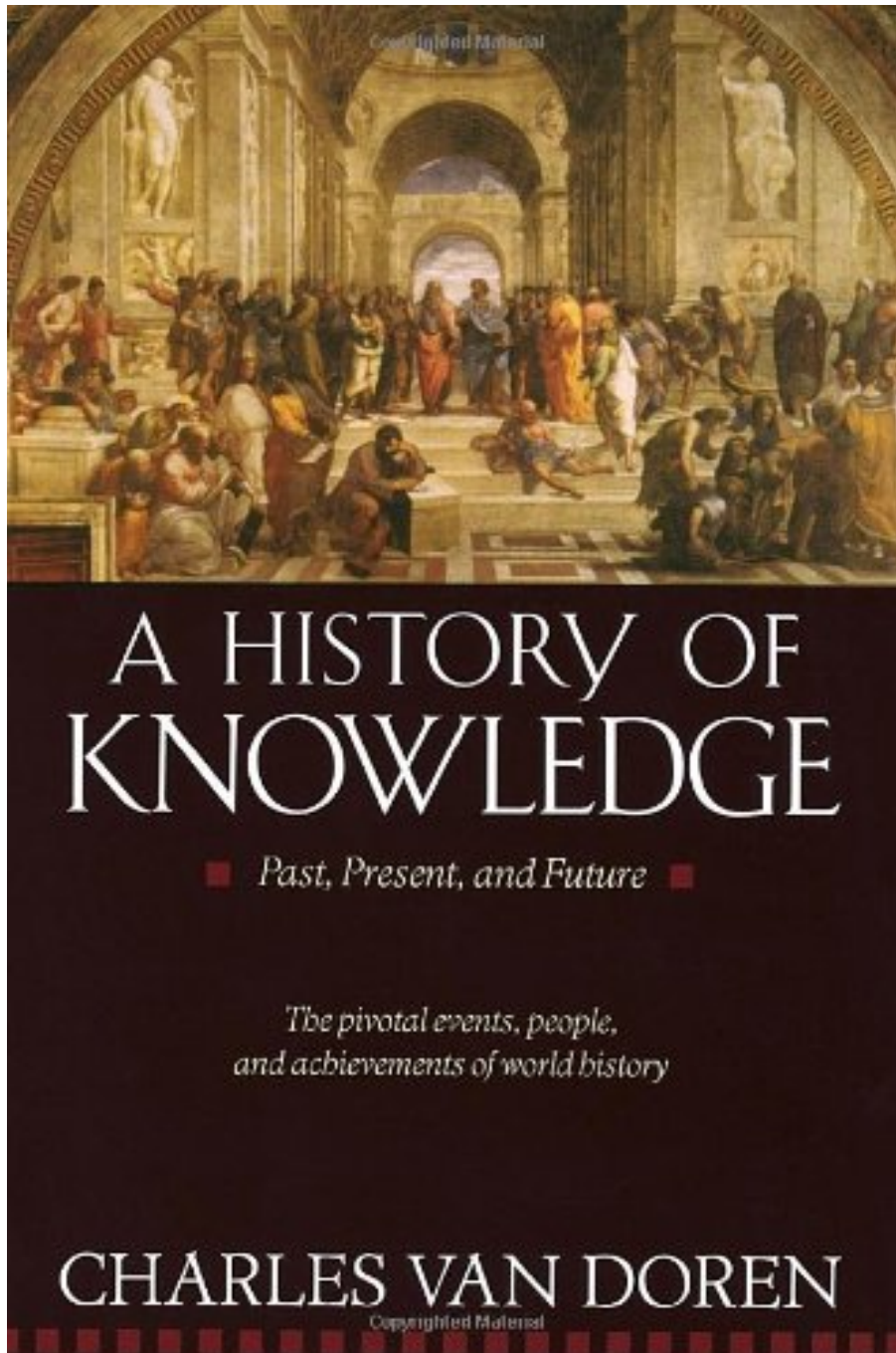


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Van Doren, once editorial director of the Encyclopedia Britannica, has produced a miniature encyclopedia, organized to show that there is progress in knowledge. He praises Columbus for giving us "a world well on the way to the unity it experiences today." India is mentioned as the source of the caste system. The Chinese gave us Confucius, but Van Doren notes their main legacy seems to be good recipes for tyranny. He warns that some good knowledge is unpleasant: we must now control our technology. Ultimately, the best knowledge for him is Western scientific knowledge since it is cumulative, meaning that better theories nearly always replace worse ones. An avid reader of Popular Mechanics who went to sleep in Peoria, Illinois in 1920 and awoke today with this book in her/his hands would probably find their ideals intact, needing only new technical knowledge and preparation for Van Doren's predicted revolt of intelligent machines. Van Doren has distilled the ideology of scientific progress into a neat, short drink that should win him a place on every library shelf.

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- Binding: Paperback
- 448 pages

Features

- Great product!

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0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Four Stars

By Renata McGovern

Great book

61 of 68 people found the following review helpful.

A somewhat mis-titled book

By Keith Smith

An ambitious book by Van Doren, "A History of Knowledge" presents a sweeping portrayal of knowledge and its developments from the time of the ancients to today and beyond. This portrayal is a relatively easy read, and Van Doren's style is alternately conversational and didactic. While it's a good book, I wouldn't recommend it unreservedly. Why? I believe that it has two key flaws.

First is its scope. Any book titled "A History of Knowledge" is bound to miss a few things while keeping the size of the book down to something that doesn't require a pickup truck to haul around, and this is no exception. However, the things that Van Doren has chosen to eliminate include all of the progress of knowledge in the Far East or the early Americas (the book would be more accurately titled: "A History of Western Knowledge"). If you're looking to see how knowledge has waxed and waned across the world through recorded history, your best bet is a more focused title (see any of Boorstin's recent three book series for a focus on technology, arts, or philosophy; or Beckman's "History of Pi" for a more mathematical insight).

The second, and arguably more serious, flaw is the increasing focus on opinion and interpretation rather than historical presentation. We've become accustomed to separating our history into two parts, one that presents it as it happened (or we believe it happened at any rate), and one that interprets and analyzes it for reflection and understanding. Van Doren hasn't done this. And while I appreciate an author's perspective, I tire of reading of his unalloyed joy in his Judeo-Christian ethic, in the victory of Capitalism over Communism, and in the superiority of democracy over ALL other forms of government. And anyone who's read any science fiction at all will cringe at the prognostications regarding the next 100 years.

It's a good, but flawed, book.

15 of 15 people found the following review helpful.

Ambitious? Yes. Knowledgeable? Yes, but...

By passerby02

It was a good read. But I have to warn the future readers of this book: be careful, since it has a lot of mistakes. I mean, factual mistakes, not opinions I disagree with. Japan was not opened in 1868, and Lenin's supporters came to be known as 'Bolsheviks' well before his conflict with Kerensky, and Greeks did have a written tradition before the 8th century BC and, and and... Feel a bit sorry, since these problems could be

easily fixed. It would be enough to give the MS to a knowledgeable editor or, better still, to few friends with good education in different areas. I like the book's approach and ideas, but I see that the author is so often wrong on what I know well (I'm Russian teaching Asian studies in a Western university). This makes me very skeptical about other statements and observations which probably do not deserve such skepticism.

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