

*letters* and the legitimization of the use of reason over memory in fact selection. Two centuries later, the writing of history, as well as the history–memory relationship, return as main points on the agendas of historians. This book, then, could be read as a history of philosophical reflections about some problems relating actual debates with modern ones. First, the book aims to show how those problems about the boundaries of historical knowledge, methodological topics, and matters of style in history are grounded in a more fundamental problem underlying all eighteenth-century theoretical reflection: differing determinations of the epistemological domain. Regarding this objective, three topics are analyzed: 1) the role of the *Encyclopédie* in history, and the rupture with the view connecting history with memory located in the article “histoire” written by Voltaire; 2) the Humean distinction between historical and fictional discourse, and the role of imagination in historical matters; and 3) the impact of the idea of nature in the conception of progress. Second, in the “History and Narration” section, different perspectives regarding the controversy about historical representation and its turning point in the 1990s are discussed: 1) scopes and boundaries of theories that have their origin in rhetoric understood not only as tropology but also as a theory of argumentation; 2) the function that historical narrative has traditionally played in the constitution and social communication of knowledge; and 3) the implications of the narrativist thesis that supports the continuity between narrative discourse and temporal experience for a relationship among historical discourse, collective memory, and historians’ contexts. Finally, in the “History and Memory” section, tensions between the historical past and historians’ present are discussed, bearing in mind the “memory problem.” In the second part of the twentieth century, most discussions of historians and theorists could be viewed as questioning, or not, the rupture between memory and history to which the Enlightenment gave birth. Here, four topics are analyzed: 1) the change of the meaning of “testimony” from “evidence or proof of” the real past to “access to” it; 2) the history of epistemological assumptions of the recent past; 3) psychoanalytical and neurological versions of the use of trauma as an analytic historical category; and 4) historiography’s contribution to the constitution of social memory.

M. I. M.

ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT: A METABIOPGRAPHY. By Nicolaas A. Rupke. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2005. Pp. 320.

“Metabiography” is a form of historiography that tells the story of a life by looking through the eyes of groups of biographers who previously described that life. The term should not be confused with Hayden White’s “metahistory,” which says that historical narratives can be understood in terms of literary genres. “Metabiography” has much in common with reception theory, yet goes further in its historiographical claims. Whereas reception theory presupposes a “Ding an sich,” which is then received, metabiography acknowledges that the very telling of a past life invariably and inevitably changes the object of the story. How this happens is illustrated by the example of Alexander von Humboldt.

The book examines how Humboldt has been portrayed in the biographical literature by his fellow Germans, through the various periods of German political history, starting in the middle of the nineteenth century while Humboldt was still alive, and ending with today’s period of post-reunification. With each major shift in politics, a new image of Humboldt was created.

Some six major, distinct Humboldt representations can be identified, among which are the Nazi Humboldt of the Third Reich, the Marxist Humboldt of the GDR, the free market internationalist of the FRG, and currently, following the collapse of the Berlin Wall and German reunification, the supranational information network pioneer and supporter of popular causes ranging from environmentalism to gay rights.

These Humboldts are collective constructs—not merely individual readings—of Humboldt, and appropriations by groups of authors who in speaking with a similar voice were subject to shared institutional constraints. Humboldt metabiography supports those who regard historical scholarship as a form of memory culture, bound and shaped by vested interests, professional methods, intended audiences, sociopolitical locations, commemorative practices, and sites of remembrance.

N. R.

HIDING FROM HISTORY: POLITICS AND PUBLIC IMAGINATION. By Meili Steele. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005. Pp. ix, 204.

This book examines the ways that philosophers of public reasoning and their critics hide from history and then proposes an alternative problematic that shows how we can reason through the historical-social imaginary. The study begins (Introduction and chapter 1) by showing how recent debates in history—the flying of the Confederate flag and the German “Historians Debates”—are not just passing phenomena but constitute a crisis for the liberal philosophies of public reason espoused by John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Larmore, and Martha Nussbaum. Their problematics all hide from the historical and semantic embeddedness of all principles. This failure not only undermines their coherence but also prevents them from responding to the challenges of the international public sphere. Chapter 2 explores the structuralist and poststructuralist historical critique of liberal premises in the work of Hayden White, Judith Butler, Joan Scott, and Michel Foucault. The chapter examines how they all objectify the historical imaginary, dissolve the subject of judgment, and hence block any philosophy of public reason. Drawing on the work of Charles Taylor, chapter 3 develops a transcendental argument that shows how the social imaginary can be a place for reasoning and not simply an object of study. When citizens confront an innovative situation or text, they are not simply applying principles but recontextualizing beliefs, concepts, and images—that is, reasoning through the social imaginary. (Literature can be read as offering this kind of public argument.) Even if we objectify features of the social imaginary as historians or sociologists, rather than as philosophers of language and practical reason, we are nonetheless drawing on other dimensions of this shared imaginary background, which can never be fully thematized. The rest of the book develops how this problematic can transform public debate through various examples—Ralph Ellison’s exchange with Arendt on public education in Little Rock, Amartya Sen’s debate with Ashis Nandy on secularism, Stanley Fish’s historicist critique of principle, and Edward Said’s reading of Samuel Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations*.

M. S.

HISTORIANS IN PUBLIC: THE PRACTICE OF AMERICAN HISTORY, 1890–1970. By Ian Tyrrell. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Pp. xii, 348.

This book examines American historical practice from 1890 to 1970, focusing on the ways in which historians sought to make history “useful” to wider publics. It addresses contemporary concerns about history’s decline, concluding that the oft-perceived “threat” to history is recurrent, exaggerated, and often misunderstood. The book suggests that contemporary debates wrongly label professionalization and specialization as the root problems, since historians in the first half of the twentieth century combined growth of professional historiography with advocacy of outreach and public relevance. History has adapted to and