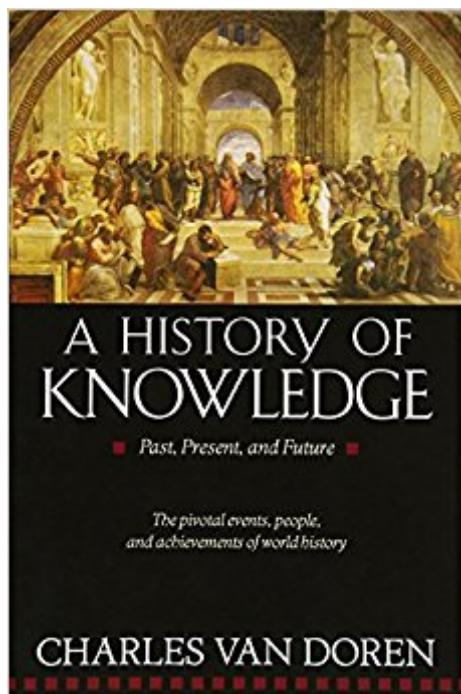


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# A History Of Knowledge: Past, Present, And Future



## **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 Fadiman Selected by the Book-of-the-Month Club and the History Book Club

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Van Doren's provocative, encyclopedic guide to great thinkers, concepts and philosophical trends was a BOMC and History Book Club selection in cloth. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc.

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.- Leslie Armour, Univ. of Ottawa, CanadaCopyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc.

--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Van Doren does a pretty good job of tracing the history of knowledge, putting the major events in our intellectual evolution in some kind of useful perspective. Not being an expert, I'll accept the criticism of many other reviewers here that the book contains errors and is even sophomoric in some chapters. But on the other hand, I learned a lot about things I had little familiarity with, and I was able to trace, in some rudimentary fashion, how one thing led to another to another to another... Of course, since the book was written in 1991, Van Doren's attempts of predicting the future, near and long-term, are necessarily naive. When he wrote it, the Internet was not in full bloom, 9/11 hadn't happened, the Green revolution had not really caught fire. As the author proceeds through history, his personal opinions creep further and further into the text. Finally, when he reaches the 20th Century, his often hysterical and naive views come into full flower which takes away from the book. All in all, if you're a scholar, you'll probably find the book wanting. But if you are a layman, looking for a book that coherently describes the evolution of knowledge in a simple format, you've come to the right place.

Starts off a little slow in the beginning. Sort of feels like your reading a Bible with the repetition and finite way of describing the early civilizations. As we get closer to the modern era it seems to pick up and supply the information a little more brightly rather than slow and dim. An informative read all in all. Wheelchair Bob

This is a very enjoyable book. The format is very concise with its entries. It covers a lot of ground and is a lot of fun to peruse. Charles Van Doren is a great mind. You really cannot go wrong with this book.

This is my second reading of this book. I borrowed it from the library and I quote it so often my husband bought me the paperback for Christmas. I also bought a copy for my 16 year old nephew. It is an interesting look at our way of thinking through the years.

Excellent book, well written and delivers great perspectives on history, science, humanity, and technological progress.

Lots of interesting information delivered in small, but clear doses. For those who are well versed in history this book might be judged by what the author emitted as well as what he included.

Never before have I bothered to write a book review, though I'm an avid reader. But this is one of the greatest books I've ever read! My ex-wife bought this for me 20 years ago as a gift and then put it away for her reading pleasure. I recently rediscovered it. Not an easy read, but for anyone interested in a panoramic view of human knowledge throughout recorded history, this is a must. The author (I hope he is still alive to read this) ferrets out the tiniest details and recognizes the broadest patterns that have shaped human knowledge. Some of his insights are stunning. For example, a key reason for the contemporaneous success of Guttenberg's invention of movable type was the sudden abundance of a new type of paper fabricated from cloth. Previously prohibitively expensive and cherished for clothing, cloth suddenly became garbage, the discarded garments of the tens of millions who perished during the Black Plague. The plague itself resulted from the first recorded biological attack in history, a siege of a fortified city during which the attackers loaded their catapults with the corpses of their stricken colleagues, causing a panic evacuation of the city. The consequent spread of the disease was facilitated by a decree from the Pope during the Spanish Inquisition that cats were evil, causing tens of thousands to be hurled into bonfires across Europe. An explosion in the rat population ensued furthering rampant spread of the disease. I could go on for many more paragraphs without doing justice to this book. Buy it.

Charles Van Doren develops an exhaustive journey in de development of knowledge and human progress. One of the most interesting compilations on milestone events of humankind from the perspective of evolution of our understanding, of the world and of ourselves.

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