

Alexander Bevilacqua and Frederic Clark, eds., *Thinking in the Past Tense: Eight Conversations*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2019. 224 pp. Index. \$90.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0226601175; \$30.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0226601205; \$30.00 (eb). ISBN 978-0226601342.

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Intellectual history is making a comeback, in part because its practitioners have started to pay closer attention to the collective nature of intellectual labor. No longer are singular intellects imagined as geniuses, producing great works of scholarship in seclusion. Scholarly communities foster ideas and provide space for ruminating on complex concepts. Peer-reviewers and editors (informally or formally) sharpen arguments. Graphic designers and typesetters give the text a pleasurable appearance. Publishers process texts for consumption. Friends and family support in so many ways as well. In this collection of eight interviews with distinguished scholars of early modern intellectual history, the book's compilers and principal interviewers, Alexander Bevilacqua and Frederic Clark, highlight yet another element of the collective intellectual labor: mentorship, with all of its high-philosophical talk of Aristotelian metaphysics and more mundane considerations like shifts in how one organizes research when PDFs on a computer desktop displace photocopies on an oak desktop. At its core, this volume is about translating the experiences of eight distinguished practitioners of intellectual history into a type of textual mentorship for the next generation of intellectual historians.

The book has a brief fourteen-page introduction, followed by eight interviews with early modern intellectual historians. They appear alphabetically in the book, and each author was chosen to highlight a particular branch of intellectual history: Ann M. Blair (the history of the book), Lorraine Daston (the history of science), Benjamin Elman (the history of non-western intellectual traditions), Anthony Grafton (the history of scholarship), Jill Kraye (the history of philosophy), Peter N. Miller (the history of antiquarianism and material culture), Jean-Louis Quantin (the history of religion), and Quentin Skinner (the history of political thought). Most interviews begin by asking the origin story question (i.e. "How did you begin?" [p. 40]) and end with aspirational if not near prophetic questions (i.e. "What are your hopes for the history of philosophy?" [p. 138] or "What do you see as the future of intellectual history?" [p. 39]) Questions in the middle range from practical considerations to historiographical debates. Rather than trying to provide a synopsis for each interview, I would like to highlight a couple of major intersections between the different interviews.

First, Bevilacqua and Clark insist "intellectual history is a broad tent," characterized more by multiplicity than monolithic schools (p. 13). The historians interviewed in this collection have challenged "heroic narratives about individual thinkers in order to recover a multiplicity of intellectual actors' practical interactions with intellectual traditions" (p. 13). Our understandings of the intellectual past reflect the state of the field. The volume then models the kinds of eclecticism that are characteristic of intellectual history and the analytical frames and methodologies of the field's practitioners. The interviewees identify diverse reasons for this turn towards eclectic intellectual history. The de-pantheonization of high intellectual figures by the

social history of ideas crowd-turned cultural historians in the 1960s through 1980s receives its due credit. Robert Darnton, Carl Schorske, Clifford Geertz, and Edward Muir are regularly referenced in the interviews. Intellectual history as a nexus discipline is an argument of this collection. More recent turns towards global approaches to intellectual history—“global philologies” (p. 84) as well as “non-Western” intellectual histories in political thought—also help to explain the canon-less character of intellectual history.

If eclecticism and multiplicity are hallmarks of this volume and intellectual history more generally, then why did the interviewers and compilers focus on the early modern period specifically? Was there anything exceptional about early modernity, or is it just that intellectual historians who tended to make the greatest strides happened to work on early modern subjects? Bevilacqua and Clark insist, at least on some level, that both of these points are true. Citing Paul Hazard, the compilers argue that Europe was witnessing a crisis of the mind. Printing press technology combined with classical revivalism, the “discovery” of the Americas, the Reformation, and the Wars of Religion to engender a culture of questioning ripe for historians to explore. That this was true of the early modern period more than other chronological periods is not seriously considered in this book, but that the early modern spoke to issues of interest over the last fifty years makes sense. Challenges to religious authority by advocates for ascendant secular and scientific understandings accompanied global warfare, terrorism, and scientific innovation. The early modern period proved a laboratory for scholars to think through their own times. If the early modern period will continue to be as important for future generations is a question that only time will answer.

Thinking in the Past Tense is an approachable volume that could easily be incorporated into an intellectual history class or historical methods at the advanced undergraduate level, as well as act as a supplementary text in a graduate class for students to read alongside an author’s monograph. While some readers might find this focus on the early modern period too limiting for their own study or classroom uses, the analytical and methodological insights discussed have far more general applicability. Beyond this, *Thinking in the Past Tense* also captures the spirit of a good academic conference. A more general academic audience would find this work useful and enjoyable.

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