



Imagination and Critique: Two Rival Versions of Historical Inquiry (Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture)

James R. L. Noland

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This book is most easily described as philosophy of history; however, this description may be a little misleading. Truly, this is a work of applied philosophy that was originally conceived not in a philosophy seminar but in a school of public policy. As a philosopher learning about the study of public policy formation, I was frequently struck by what I perceived to be two very different sets of assumptions and methods at work. I found these assumptions and methods to be mutually exclusive conceptually, but they were often employed simultaneously. On the one hand, it was often accepted as given when studying past policy changes and political events that history is shaped by impersonal forces, that people's actions can, and ought only to be understood as manifestations of their own material interests, and that individuals are to be identified as representatives of their respective demographic categories. Thus, for example, the events in question were explained in terms of the race or class of the various parties. When such an approach was challenged with an appeal to the actual arguments and stated rationales of the participants of the historical moment in question, this was taken to be an option that might be employed either in conjunction with the former method or as an alternative. Which method one chose to emphasize or employ exclusively seemed more a function of inclination or intuition than rational adjudication.

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