



State of Nature, Stages of Society: Enlightenment Conjectural History and Modern Social Discourse (Columbia Studies in Political Thought / Political History)

By Frank Palmeri

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Frank Palmeri sees the conjectural histories of Rousseau, Hume, Herder, and other Enlightenment philosophers as a template for the development of the social sciences in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Without documents or memorials, these thinkers, he argues, employed conjecture to formulate a naturalistic account of society's commercial and secular progression. This approach can be traced in the work of political economists (Malthus, Martineau, Mill, Marx), anthropologists, sociologists (Comte, Spencer), and sociologists of religion (Weber, Durkheim, Freud), and its speculative framework creates a surprising ambivalence toward modernity in these disciplines.

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- Rank: #2782101 in eBooks
- Published on: 2016-03-29
- Released on: 2016-03-29
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

Review

Frank Palmeri tackles one of the most significant ideas of Enlightenment thought in this comprehensive and thoroughly researched book on conjectural history. Tracing the origin of the concept in French and Scottish writers, such as Rousseau, Hume, and Smith, in the mid-eighteenth century, he also shows how it was transmitted through nineteenth-century writers, such as Malthus and Marx, to form a fundamental building block of modernity. Nuanced and erudite, this book will serve as an important source for scholars and others interested in the intellectual origins of modern social and political theory. (Sir Malcolm Jack, author of *Corruption and Progress: The Eighteenth-Century Debate*)

State of Nature, Stages of Society is an original, timely, and deeply learned work that will serve a useful purpose for a wide range of readers. Frank Palmeri's erudition and his commitment to a *longue durée* for the genre put him in an excellent position to become the authority of record for scholars and students of both eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European culture who want a solid grounding in conjectural history. (Noah Heringman, author of *Sciences of Antiquity: Romantic Antiquarianism, Natural History, and Knowledge Work*)

Often the best books are those that teach you something that was staring you in the face all along. This is the case with Frank Palmeri's illuminating study of conjectural history. Thanks to this remarkable book what seemed like a contained feature of the Scottish Enlightenment now stands out as an influential form of historical thought right across eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe and beyond. An important contribution to intellectual history. (Mark Salber Phillips, author of *Society and Sentiment: The Genres of Historical Writing in Britain 1740-1820*)

Highly recommended. (*CHOICE*)

The most precise and the most wide-ranging conceptual analysis of eighteenth-century conjectural history available.... Required reading. (*Journal of Historical Geography*)

About the Author

Frank Palmeri is a professor of English at the University of Miami. He is the author of *Satire in Narrative: Petronius, Swift, Gibbon, Melville, Pynchon* (1990) and *Satire, History, Novel: Narrative Forms, 1665-1815* (2003), and the editor of *Humans and Other Animals in Eighteenth-Century British Culture: Representation, Hybridity, Ethics* (2006).

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