

tion of freedom Mill declaimed in that book. Among them was the learned and thoughtful Leslie Stephen who, in an article beguilingly titled "Social Macadamisation," wrote: "The argument, in short, that all moral pressure ought to be destroyed because it may be misapplied implies the assumption that no spiritual authority can ever be set up because the old one turned out to rest on a rotten basis. As against this, we should hold that one main need of the day is to erect such an authority upon reason instead of upon arbitrary tradition....Distant as the prospect may be, it is in that direction that we must look for the formation of firmer and healthier intellectual and moral conditions."

If such an authority was "one main need" of that day, think of the even greater intensity of the need in our own day! In a bold passage Professor Himmelfarb writes: "Liberals have learned, at fearful cost, the lesson that absolute power corrupts absolutely. They have yet to learn that absolute liberty may also corrupt absolutely." The affinity between the two kinds of absolutism is very close in history. No one knew that lesson better than Burke in his celebrated observation that kings will become tyrants by policy when governing subjects who are rebellious by principle. In the nineteenth century such minds as Tocqueville, Burck-

hardt, James Fitzjames Stephen, and Emile Durkheim would echo that observation. It was Durkheim, sociologist and Dreyfusard, who could write: "In sum, the theories which celebrate the beneficence of unrestricted liberties are apologies for a diseased state....Through the practice of moral rules we develop the ca-

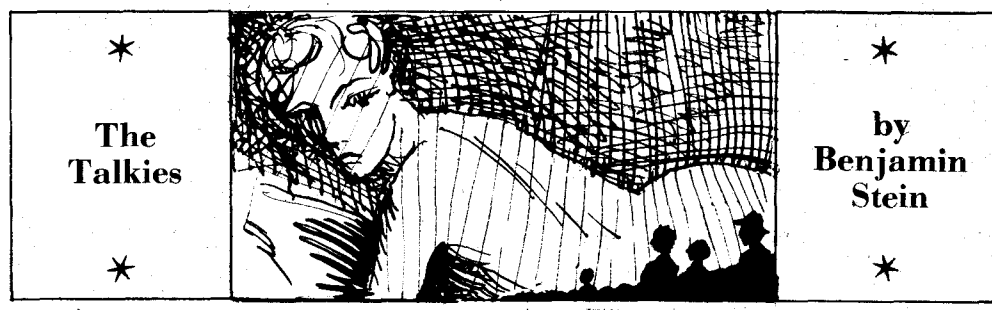
"Liberals have learned, at fearful cost, the lesson that absolute power corrupts absolutely. They have yet to learn that absolute liberty may also corrupt absolutely."

capacity to govern and regulate ourselves, which is the whole reality of liberty."

What a cost we pay for our contemporary belief—on a scale so much wider than anything that the Victorian age knew—that liberty and authority are antithetical. The "adversary culture" which Lionel Trilling has for so long and so profoundly identified for us, which is based, as Trilling stresses, on the belief that "a primary function of art and thought is to liberate the individual from the tyranny of

his culture...and to permit him to stand beyond it in an autonomy of perception and judgment," rests in very large measure upon the conception of liberty that Mill chose to give to the world in his *On Liberty*.

In a final, brilliant chapter, "Some Paradoxes and Anomalies," Gertrude Himmelfarb shows us explicitly some of the consequences to contemporary culture of ever-widening use of, belief in, and quotation of (in major legal cases and governmental commission reports) Mill's "one very simple principle." Her treatment of the *Wolfenden Report* is exemplary in this respect. The theme of the chapter, as nearly as I can state it succinctly, is that the same liberalism which has so largely magnified the power of the political state in social, economic, and moral affairs has, in its Janus-like magnification also of absolute individual liberties, gone a long way toward the destruction of the means whereby political authority in any realm can be given legitimacy and thereby effect. This is, as Professor Himmelfarb shows us, the supreme paradox of our age: All that has been given to state and individual alike in the way of autonomy of action has been taken from the intermediate, moral sphere that is the sole possible base of genuine political authority and of genuine individual liberty. □



Stavisky & Young Frankenstein

We are haunted by what we are and what we might be. We see all around us the evidence of the fluidity and impermanence of life, and it frightens us, and gives us hope. We are poor and see that we might be rich, or weak and perhaps powerful, and the contrasts give us obsessions and also sustenance. Or we are rich and think that we might be poor, powerful but perhaps weak, and the contrasts make us afraid.

Poverty coexists with riches both in real life and in our thoughts, and we look with longing upon those who seem not only to get along in the midst of this confusion, but also to thrive on it. When they fall, we feel it keenly, just as we feel uneasy when someone seemingly healthier than us falls gravely ill.

Stavisky, a new import from France, is the story of a man who, for a time, seemed buoyed up by the very currents of

uncertainty that weigh the rest of us down, but who finally succumbed to them in the most severe way possible.

Stavisky was a French swindler and confidence man who became one of France's most powerful men during the Third Republic and who caused a tremendous furor when he fell. He had managed an empire of bonds and night-spots based largely on the equivalent of check kiting and fraud. At a time when the whole Western world was locked in depression and poverty, he lived it up with a lavishness that would make Jackie Onassis envious.

He came from nowhere—his parents were Jewish émigrés from Russia—to sit with Cabinet members and nobility. He gambled away millions while other people who came from his background starved.

The movie about him works on three

levels, all of them executed extremely successfully.

At the most superficial level, the movie is a fashion show. The sumptuousness of life among those who have a lot of money when most people have none is graphically brought across by the clothes, the cars, the interiors in which Stavisky and his crowd operated. We do not need to see the contrast with the clothes, cars, and interiors of most people to know that what we have seen is all the more lush because of the comparison.

At a slightly deeper level, the story is a social one. It tells about the corruption and decadence of life in the Third Republic. We see the power of money operating through the government, the press, the organs of justice. We see that Stavisky's legal troubles resulted not from perfection of the legal system, but from the use of that system by people with political ends—people trying to make political capital out of exposing competitors involved with Stavisky. We see the anti-Semitism of even Stavisky's closest friends, who tell him that when he falls they will say that they had been misled and should have known better than to associate with rootless cosmopolitan Jews. We see, in short, the awfully repulsive milieu in which Stavisky lived.

But at the deepest level, *Stavisky* is a film that plays on existentialist themes. It says that when people live in a world in which there is nothing but random chance, they should not be surprised at

what happens. Stavisky, at his most fundamental, was a failed existentialist. He recognized no moral imperatives in his dealings with others. He thought that since there was no heavenly or worldly force preventing him from cheating and stealing, that he might as well cheat and steal as not.

When other people cheat him and betray him, though, Stavisky is shocked and outraged. He should have known better.

The director, Alain Resnais, is one of the few authentic geniuses operating in the world of film, and he plumbs deep into our fears of existence and tells us how we should not react. He shows us that people whom we might have considered successful do not really know how to cope.

Running parallel with the story of Stavisky's last months is a story of the arrival of the exiled Trotsky in France. Its meaning is rather obscure, but is probably that Trotsky did know how to cope. When confronted with the failure of a truly grand and enormous project (in a physical and not a moral sense), namely the Russian Revolution, Trotsky withdrew and continued to fight for what he wanted, without being surprised at anything. Stavisky, the sharpie and con man, was an idealist about other people, while Trotsky, the idealist and revolutionary, was a realist about what life held.

The movie is shot beautifully and every frame is a joy to behold. Jean-Paul Bel-

mondo is a wonderfully mobile and sympathetic Stavisky. The movie is that rare breed—intensely interesting and entertaining, and thoroughly instructive.

A further reason to see *Stavisky* is that Stavisky's wife, Arlette, is beautiful beyond words.

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Mel Brooks, a writer and comedian of great ability, has always had difficulty in keeping his directorial efforts from simply falling apart. *The Producers* had a funny idea, but it became a collection of more and more in-joke gags which finally ended without much point. *Blazing Saddles* had the same problem. It really was not a whole movie. Rather it was a collection of jokes which were sometimes individually funny, but did not hold together. At the end, it was almost incredibly sophomoric.

Now Brooks has made *Young Frankenstein*. It hangs together; it works; it is a scream.

Based on the *Son of Frankenstein* story, Brooks' movie stars Gene Wilder as an American teaching physician who is a grandson of the Baron Frankenstein. Wilder inherits his grandfather's castle in Transylvania and is impelled into working to bring the dead back to life. Like Brooks' earlier movies, *Young Frankenstein* is full of jokes. But its main character has a certain kindly lunatic quality

about him that makes the story whole. It is not a nightclub act; it is a funny fictional snatch of biography.

There are hilarious supporting characters such as the hunchbacked Igor, played by Marty Feldman, whose hump keeps changing sides. There is Cloris Leachman as the incredibly severe housekeeper. Frau Blucher, whose very name makes the horses shiver. Madeline Kahn makes a wonderful Jewish princess who tries to keep the monster from raping her but who then, because of his monstrous proportions, falls in love with him.

Young Frankenstein is not the definitive spoof of the horror film genre, but it is a very good one.

It is extremely interesting to notice how similar the humor of *Young Frankenstein* is to that of television shows. The staple of television humor is the deflation of an attitude. For instance, Dr. Frankenstein thinks his experiment has failed. He says calmly that scientists sometimes fail. He says he will be stoic. Then he pauses a moment and goes into a frenzy. Or when Igor has stolen the wrong kind of brain, Dr. Frankenstein says he will not be mad at him but then starts to strangle him. It is television humor at its most evanescent, yet it works.

Young Frankenstein is an imperfect film and no work of lasting greatness, but it is funny while you watch it, and even, in contrast with Brooks' other movies, for a few hours afterwards. □

Book Review/David Brudnoy

The Little Engine That Could

Professor Rothbard is a little engine that could. He is young (as philosopher giants go), brilliant, tireless, generous, and open. He has a couple of great works under his belt—*Man, Economy and State* and *For a New Liberty*—as well as numerous other seminal books and countless provocative articles. His multi-volume history of these United States is up-coming; you can bet your bottom funny-money that a Rothbard history isn't going to sound like warmed over Blum-Catton-Woodward-Schlesinger and Co. For all his tendencies to radical a-priorism now and again, Murray Rothbard represents the best of today's libertarianism, and exemplifies a quality rare among libertarians, who, next to Stalinists, are generally the most humorless of men: a keen wit. It helps when you're a libertarian in 1984 minus nine.

What a nuisance he is, too. He won't stay pigeonholed as academic high priest of his anarcho-capitalist subcult of the dismal science. He ranges wide, and insists on pushing things back to first causes, examining problems constantly in

terms of principles with scarcely a graceful bow to practicalities and suchlike impedimenta; what a nuisance is this guy who—politely, sure—offers at best an *up yours* to those who would contain him within their limited purview.

Egalitarianism as a Revolt against Nature And Other Essays

by Murray N. Rothbard
Libertarian Review Press \$2.50 (pb)

There is a striking quality to this collection of Rothbard's recent essays, which may have for others an effect of shaking up previous beliefs like that a collection of la Rand's essays had upon this reviewer long ago. Someone fed up to here with statist jargon and altruist preachments, coming upon *Egalitarianism*, might recognize it as a welcome assault on the reader's present view of the world, and dash on from there into the rich vein of libertarian and conser-

vative writings available to those who will push beyond their school reading list and locate the stuff.

Murray Rothbard wants no truck with contemporary glibness. In the title essay (from *Modern Age*, 1973), he offers what may well be the neatest libertarian critique available, without technical and obfuscatory jargon, on the doctrine of equality. He doesn't merely sputter sputtering comes easy to rightists these days. He doesn't give away the battle by conceding, as many do, that the Left is right in theory, just impractical. "Egalitarians do *not* have ethics on their side unless one can maintain that the destruction of civilization, and even of the human race itself, may be crowned with the laurel wreath of a high and laudable morality." It is a smashing piece, as are several others herein.

"Left and Right: The Prospects for Liberty" (from *Left and Right*, 1965) is disquieting. Whatever its guise, he attacks statism, of which he finds a surfeit on the Right as on the Left. "Socialism, like liberalism and against