such as the Shakers or look in on such perfectionist communities as that established at Oneida.

The merits of this book, however, are balanced by its shortcomings. There is much more to the American faith than the reader can gain from this volume. Looking backward to the origins of that faith, it must surely be admitted that it is more than the mere flowering of a growth rooted in "the radical lower-class sects of the Protestant Reformation." American ideas and idealism are deeply imbedded in Christendom, which itself is a blending of the heritage of faith, reason, and law deriving from Israel, Greece, Rome, and beyond – as deBurgh demonstrates in his *Legacy of the Ancient World.* In other directions, the book needs to be supplemented by such works as Garrett's *The American Story,* Beston's *American Memory,* and Morley's *The Power in the People.*

EDMUND A. OPITZ

**Theory and History: An Interpretation of Social and Economic Evolution**

*By Ludwig von Mises.* New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press. 384 pp. $6.00.

SINCE MEN first started to record events, they have sought to understand why things happened as they did. It has been suggested variously that all actions of man were predestined according to some superior over-all design; that they were merely the consequences of physiological phenomena; or that they arose solely from environmental conditions or characteristics of society or race. Such explanations, however, as Ludwig von Mises shows in his new book, are inconsistent with real life on this earth as we know it.

Dr. Mises is the leading exponent today of the Austrian School of economics. He has taught and lectured in a dozen different countries and now holds a position as Visiting Professor at New York University. His writings have spelled out in detail many aspects of economics, explaining in every instance how the free market is the basis of individual freedom. In this new book, he applies his knowledge of the theory of human action and of market operations to the interpretation of history and historical philosophies.

The major part of the book is devoted to analyzing various interpretations of history and to comparing each in turn with the philosophy of utilitarianism which Mises calls "a philosophy of individualism," because it "rejects universalism, collectivism, and totalitarianism." One by one, he refutes the philosophies of history

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that deny freedom of the individual to act as he sees fit. Dr. Mises calls attention to "the emotional appeal which cognizance of this freedom has, and the idea of moral responsibility which it engenders. . . . One of the fundamental conditions of man's existence and action is the fact that he does not know what will happen in the future." He points out, on the other hand, that positivism, behaviorism, and scientism, for instance, reduce the role of the individual to that of a robot. He shows that the Marxist idea of "class conflict" denies the obvious fact that individuals act according to what they consider to be their own interest, not that of their "class."

Dr. Mises explains why the claim that environmental factors alone determine a person's ideas and actions – and thus, history – is a contradiction of reality. In fact, the situation is the other way round. It is ideas that are responsible for social institutions, technological and political changes, and economic conditions. This thesis, the importance of ideas, runs like a refrain throughout the book.

Men are rational creatures, Mises reminds us. Their actions are the results of thought and reason. Acting men seek various ends, according to their individual value judgments and ideas, using means they believe, or hope, will be effective. They do not always use proper means, and they may change their minds after making a decision to act, but this does not deny that men act rationally and purposively in the hope of gaining desired ends.

Men frequently act in cooperation. Their reason tells them that there are advantages in social cooperation, due to the fact that specialization and the division of labor are more productive than self-sufficiency. This recognition leads most men to prefer peaceful relations to strife and conflict with their fellow men. Indeed, the history of civilization consists of the development of specialization and division of labor. Thus, the desire for social cooperation is an important motive for individual action.

It is the task of the historian to record and to explain, insofar as his knowledge, understanding, and opportunities permit, the manner in which events arise from the individual actions of individual men. To explain why men act, he must make use of "specific understanding" as well as knowledge in all other pertinent fields, including economics. The more complete his knowledge and understanding, the more accurate can be his interpretation of historical data.

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Modern historians tend to be impressed by mass phenomena and the actions of large groups. In this, their writings reflect the current fallacies of "pseudo-economics." They are inclined to forget that history always deals with individuals. Even the actions of societies and long-term historical trends are traceable ultimately to many small and interrelated individual actions. When men cooperate or act together as members of groups, they are, nevertheless, still acting as individuals under the influence of certain specific ideas.

History is made by man. The conscious intentional actions of individuals, great and small, determine the course of events insofar as it is the result of the interaction of all men. But the historical process is not designed by individuals. It is the composite outcome of the intentional actions of all individuals. No man can plan history.

Although the advantages to be gained from interpersonal cooperation under a system of division of labor and interpersonal exchange on an unhampered market have long been recognized, many persons, historians included, believe that an inevitable conflict of interests exists among individuals and among groups. The belief persists that there are "have-nots" in the world, precisely because there are "haves." This is true, of course, in societies where wealth is the result of special privilege. But in a free market, i.e., under capitalism, no conflicts need exist among the rightly understood interests of all members. Because many historians have failed to understand this, they have helped to popularize the idea of conflicting interests as well as other neo-mercantilist ideas which lead to international conflict and aggressive nationalism.

Perhaps the most startling idea brought to light by Dr. Mises in this book concerns the role historians have played in promoting various types of collectivism. By adopting philosophies of history based on economic fallacies and the thesis that individuals do not have the power of free choice, they have actually helped the cause of socialism. Their acceptance of the idea that material and technological advances are somehow "automatic" and "inevitable" has led them to endorse, and thus to popularize, policies of govern-

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ment interference with individual initiative, efforts, and savings which make such advances possible.

The closing note of Mises' book, however, is hopeful. "The keystone of Western civilization is the sphere of spontaneous action it secures to the individual." Although the trend of recent years has been toward trying to "stabilize" economies and inhibit individual initiative through government intervention, so far, Mises concludes, the advocates of these policies in the West have not succeeded in wiping out "the individual's disposition to think and to apply to all problems the yardstick of reasoning."

This book is a deep, philosophical analysis. It is not intended for beginners. It contains much which should be of vital interest, however, to serious students of history and philosophy. If it is read and understood by the world's "thought leaders," it could have a profound influence for the cause of freedom. BETTINA BIEN

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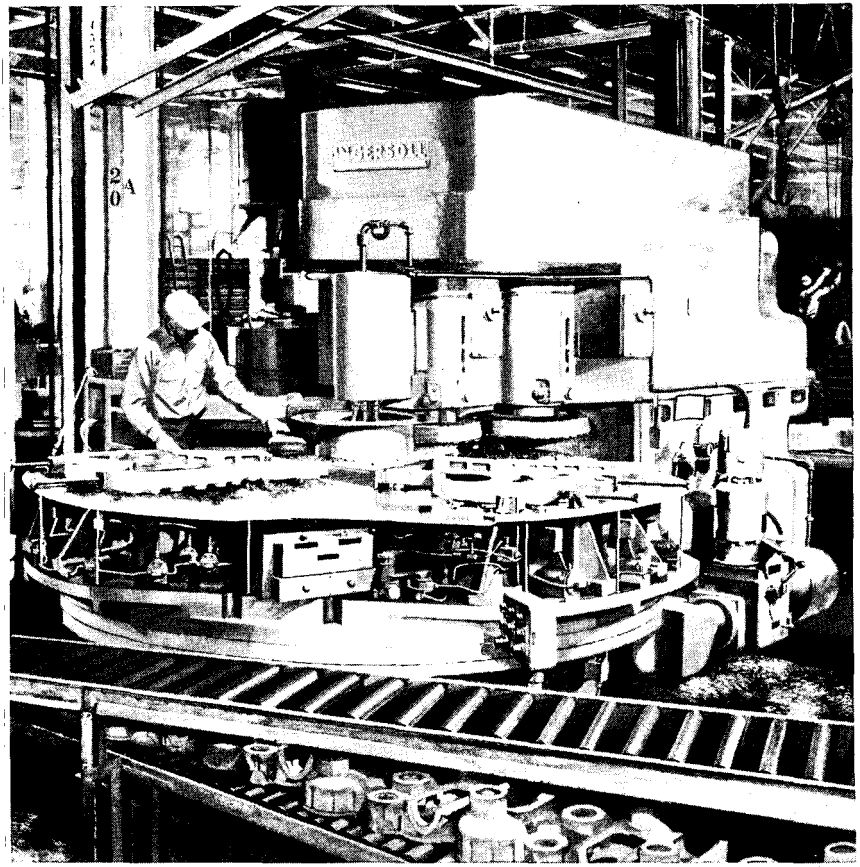


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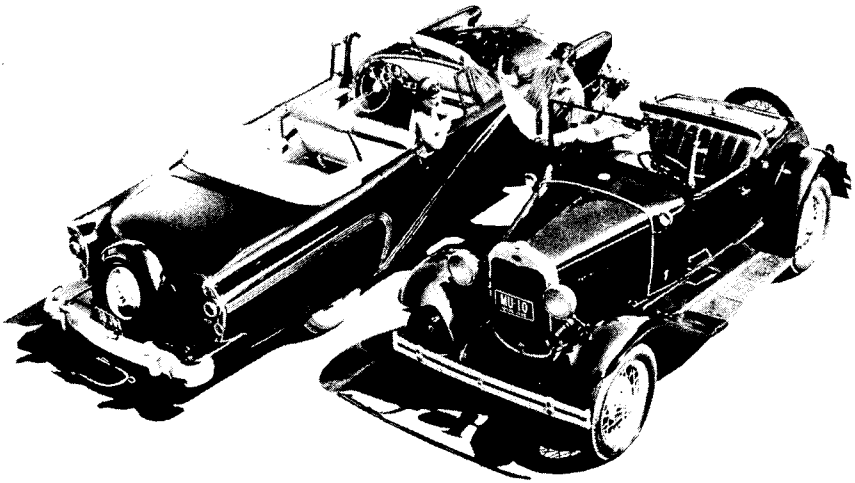

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1ST SESSION

# H. R. 8108

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
JUNE 13, 1957

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