

The Patterns of History

WERNER L. GUNDERSHEIMER

SHAPES OF PHILOSOPHICAL HISTORY, by Frank E. Manuel. *Stanford*. \$4.75.

RENAISSANCE AND REVOLUTION: THE REMAKING OF EUROPEAN THOUGHT, by Joseph Anthony Mazzeo. *Pantheon*. \$6.95.

Throughout the history of western civilization, men have tried to discern some pattern in the course of human events. Those who have been unable to accept traditional ideas have lost no time working up something else. Yet, as Frank E. Manuel observes, interpretations of human history over the past twenty-five hundred years have had two basic shapes. One of them is cyclical, with implications of inevitable decline, recurrence, and renewal. The other is linear, or progressive, and suggests constant change, innovation, and often some notion of a fixed goal at the end of time or of social evolution.

In *Shapes of Philosophical History*, the published version of a series of seven lectures given at Stanford University in 1964, Manuel brilliantly discusses the uses of these two basic shapes by philosophical historians from Polybius to Toynbee and Sorokin. His working assumption is that:

"If we follow these two shapes of philosophical history, the cyclical and the progressive, from the early centuries of the Christian era through the present, they will reveal themselves to be less a logical than a psychological polarity. In any period there may be a weightier commitment to one or the other, but neither has ever dominated the European intellectual field without the presence in some form of its rival. The shapes have been combined, subjected to syncretistic amalgamation, intermingled, then separated out again. Old patterns are never completely forgotten and from time to time they are taken out of the intellectual attic, refurbished and restored."

Manuel happens to be one of those rare professional historians

whose prose style is delightful, but that is not so important as his remarkable sensibility to the nuances of intellectual history. The danger in a book of this type is that it can easily degenerate into a catalogue of people's views, a check list of opinion through the ages. Dreary tomes with that flaw often appear, and the tendency to view the history of ideas as a discipline unto itself is not the least of the reasons. Though he deals almost entirely with systematic thinkers, Manuel treats them as men; he looks for their hopes and anxieties, for their ways of regarding themselves, and for their attitudes toward their predecessors. His main concern is the furniture in the "intellectual attic," but what he tells us about the attic itself contributes to our understanding of that furniture. Despite the extraordinary compression of this sprint through the ages, the reader is never left groping for background or gasping at grotesque oversimplifications.

GREEK historical thought was cyclical, perhaps owing to some deeply felt analogies with the observed changes in the cosmos and the seasons. Among the early progressivistic tendencies in western thought, the most important was the prophet Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, to the effect that the world could expect four major kingdoms. A long list of serious historians from Orosius in the fifth to Sleidanus in the sixteenth century, and even later, tantalized themselves with identifying the four monarchies in question. Sixteenth-century Frenchmen attacked the theory, because Germans were using it to show that they were the true heirs of the Roman Empire.

Serious competition to the cyclical models of the ancients began with St. Augustine's *City of God*. The cyclical view naturally undermined the uniqueness of Christian revela-

tion, and Augustine responded to the challenge by arguing that Divine Providence guides history, and that there is a progression in man's earthly life from his fall from grace in Eden to redemption through Christ's sacrifice on Calvary, to the Last Judgment, an end without end. This view, with variations, dominated European historical thought for a thousand years; and, apart from its direct influence, it is the ancestor of all subsequent progressivistic theories. Many of its ungrateful descendants eloquently voiced their rejection of its spiritual aspects.

In the Renaissance, historical explanation became secularized in some quarters, and the humanists, in their zeal to restore the tarnished glories of the ancient world, revived the cyclical model. This period saw important developments in methods of historical analysis, but its production of systematic works of synthesis was rather sparse and not particularly distinguished. However, there were some impressive attempts to formulate a secularized notion of historical progress, in response both to limitations imposed by the cyclical and religious determinists and to the past-mindedness of many humanists who saw the golden age of mankind in the primitive or classical eras. Perhaps the most important of these attempts was that of Louis Le Roy's *Vicissitude and Variety of Things in the Universe*, which combines the two shapes into a gradually ascending, open-ended spiral. This general period in the writing of philosophical history is just beginning to get its just deserts from scholars, and Manuel has made a welcome contribution by staking out the terrain in bold strokes.

THE SECOND HALF of this book considers more recent writers—the *philosophes*, the German idealists, the French social theorists of the nineteenth century, and the voluminous twentieth century, which "has spawned more works in four decades than have all previous ages of man combined." Manuel makes clear and forceful distinctions between the French and German philosophical traditions, and ingeniously suggests the ways in which Karl Marx combined the two. The Enlightenment belief in human perfectibility, with

its corollary of inevitable progress toward that goal, presents a nice foil for the resurgence of the pessimistic cyclic approach in its modern garb, with Nietzsche, Spengler, and Toynbee. The latter's attempt to view the rise and decline of cultures within a Christian providential framework suggests that the philosophy of history has come full cycle.

That the two shapes represent less a logical than a psychological polarity becomes particularly evident in the final chapter, a masterful discussion of the modern theorists. The bleakest pessimists in the group, those who have reacted most strongly against the happy myth of progress, hold out some form of hope, even if it is not strictly supported by their own theories. We are left with the rather cheerless prospect of a debate between those who believe that the world is going to pot but that there might be a spiritual renewal, and those ("the old-fashioned rationalistic sensationalist progressists and meliorists of the Anglo-French tradition") who think the world is not much worse off than it ever was, that it may even be better, and that we shall probably muddle through. In an eloquent conclusion, Manuel denies his support to both their houses. His final paragraph is an urbane quotation from Hume, skeptically reserving judgment on philosophies of history. Hume's caveat still rings true, an elegant end to an elegant book.

THE PREFACE by Joseph Anthony Mazzeo notes the great difficulties inherent in an attempt to write a comprehensive, scholarly, and yet personal book on a great historical period for the general public. These difficulties are legion and they are formidable. Mazzeo has surmounted some, but *Renaissance and Revolution* is an uneven book, and in terms of its aims its success is qualified indeed.

The four central chapters deal with four people whom Mazzeo regards as in some ways characteristic of the Renaissance: Machiavelli, Castiglione, Bacon, and Hobbes. This choice gives a somewhat odd construction to the period. Hobbes, after all, died in 1679, and the view that the Renaissance was a late (or



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for that matter middle) seventeenth-century phenomenon, even in England, is idiosyncratic. Apart from the chronological stretch forward, which has its counterpart in the absence of any key figure from the period 1350-1500, generally regarded as the main period of the Renaissance, Hobbes remains out of place on his own account. Castiglione's *Courtier* is an interesting and influential humanistic book of courtly manners, but it hardly merits its author's inclusion as a *personnage regnant*. The chapter on Castiglione is by far the shortest, and Mazzeo has relatively little to say about him; he devotes a large part to superficial comparisons with Montaigne, Nietzsche, and Mann. The chapters on Machiavelli and Bacon are a great deal more pointed and revealing. Both figures are adroitly used as Renaissance "types," and the author seems notably less dependent on secondary sources in dealing with them than he is with Castiglione and Hobbes.

THE EMPHASIS on Italian and English writers leads to a considerable oversight with regard to the French Renaissance, whose main (and in many ways very atypical) representative here is Montaigne. And the prominence of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers is only partially offset by the introductory chapter, "Renaissance and Humanism: The New Education." Here, as throughout the book, there are some interesting insights, but there are also elementary mistakes. It is wrong to say that "By the beginning of the fifteenth century the whole theory of perspective is complete both philosophically and mathematically . . ." because the essential writings of Piero della Francesca, Leon Battista Alberti, and others are all of later origin. Coluccio Salutati, Chancellor of Florence from 1375 to 1406, was the unquestioned leader of an entire generation of Italian humanists. In fact, according to his worst enemy, one sentence from his pen fell into the scales with the weight of a thousand horsemen. In this book he is dismissed as "not greatly gifted." Marsilio Ficino's elaborate and complex neo-Platonic philosophical system is "ardently imagined but weakly articulated." Such errors, both of fact and judg-

ment, are neither few nor far between.

The final chapter is a discussion of the idea of progress, which Mazzeo regards as a new orientation toward human life following upon the Renaissance, and in a sense marking its end. He dates the first appearances of this idea to the seventeenth century, overlooking important recent contributions that trace its beginnings to an early humanistic debate between ancients and moderns in fifteenth-century Italy. Nor is there any consideration of Bacon's sixteenth-century French antecedents like Jean Bodin and Louis Le Roy, upon whose works Manuel places much emphasis.

At the end of this book, the reader will still be asking whether Mazzeo thinks of the Renaissance as revolution or evolution. On the one hand, he refers to "that cultural revolution we call the Renaissance." On the other hand, he speaks of humanism, the period's main intellectual movement, as "the slow work of time and of the labors of many men." This is one of the more disturbing examples of the author's lack of precision and consistency.

In his discussion of the concept of the Renaissance, Mazzeo decides that the term is indispensable to historians, and states that Jakob Burckhardt's classic *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (which in 1960 celebrated its hundredth anniversary) "remains the best single introduction to it." It is. «»

Lautrec In Stone

ALFRED WERNER

TOULOUSE-LAUTREC: HIS COMPLETE LITHOGRAPHS AND DRYPOINTS. Text by Jean Adhémar. Abrams. \$22.50.

It is hard to disregard all the sensation-mongering stories about Count Henri Marie Raymond de Toulouse-Lautrec Monfa. They have collected like so many rocks heaped on the simple grave in the village churchyard of Verdelaïs, as if to prevent the inquisitive, indefatigable little

man from escaping to enjoy once again the boulevards and the dives of his beloved Paris. But an attempt must be made by every serious lover of art to winnow the essential from the trivial. Thousands of men frequented the café-dansants, theatres, circuses, and the bordellos of late nineteenth-century Paris, but only one, Lautrec, extracted from that bewildering milieu all the nuances of human passion and suffering, portraying them in countless drawings, paintings, and prints.

The time-consuming techniques of the woodcut and etching were not for his restless temperament. He preferred the lithographic stone on which he could quickly transfer his impressions of an encounter with a remarkable man or, more frequently, woman—dancer, singer, acrobat, or *fille de joie*. Occasionally he experimented with drypoint, a technique of engraving on a copper plate with a steel needle, which is second only to lithography as a medium of spontaneity and direct expression.

ALL BUT A FEW of the 368 prints reproduced in this large and well-designed book are lithographs, and all were made in the last decade of the artist's short life (he died in 1901, aged thirty-seven). As M. Adhémar tells us in his introduction—which is a bit too short and in spots very pedestrian in style—Lautrec, unlike other printmakers, did not confine himself to drawing on the stone but supervised every detail in the printer's shop. When he was not entirely satisfied with a sheet, he tore it up. After he was finished with an edition, he defaced the stone so that it could not be used again. Lithography had several excellent practitioners before Lautrec—Goya, Whistler, and Redon come quickly to mind—yet he was the first to use it for commercial posters that are nevertheless the epitome of art and have outlasted much more ambitious, more "refined" creations of his era.

The collection starts with a bang with "La Goulue au Moulin Rouge," a color poster commissioned by the directors of that famous cabaret. The grotesque, almost Mephistophelian figure of the thin, amazingly agile dancer Valentin, called "The Boneless," is in the foreground, and on the bare floor

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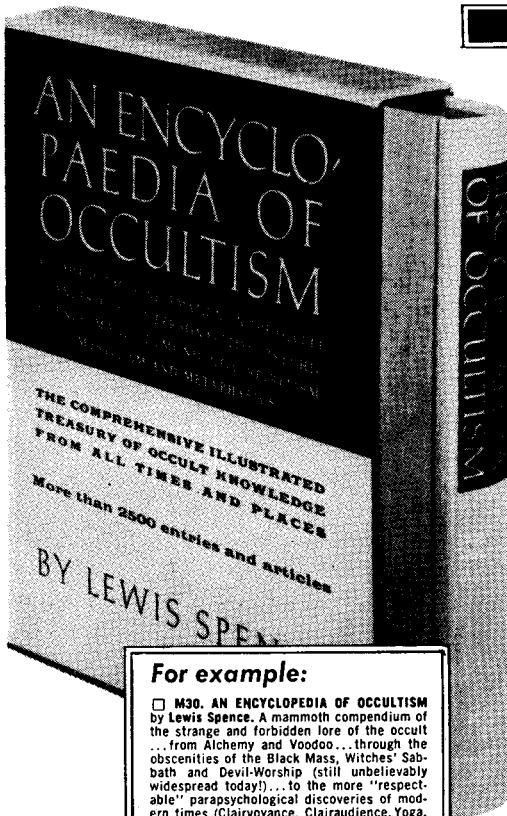
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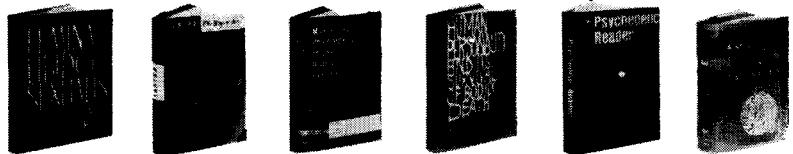
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