

Philosopher-propagandist

MALRAUX

an essay in political criticism

DAVID WILKINSON

Malraux, Mr. Wilkinson tells us, has never written a *Politics*. His politics, contained as they are in his esthetics, must therefore be extracted from his novels, his philosophy of artistic creation, and his rhetoric. And that is what this study attempts to do—to define and assess the political concepts of André Malraux, who is presently Minister of Cultural Affairs in France and one of this century's major novelists and art critics. In a chronological dissection of the political themes implicit in Malraux's work (including one of his best-known novels, *Man's Fate*), Mr. Wilkinson delineates Malraux's conviction that the deepest human needs are those which are cultural, and that therefore one of the state's central responsibilities is to foster artistic creation by massive dissemination of the objects of culture. The book reveals a man who is complex but thoroughly comprehensible. \$5.95

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CLASSICS REVISITED—LIII

The "Mahabharata"

By KENNETH REXROTH

FOR THOSE who read only English, the *Mahabharata* is one of the last great classics that must be taken on faith, at least as poetry. The translations are all unsatisfactory and most of them are appalling. Yet few works of the imagination have ever had a more profound and lasting effect on their own culture.

Embedded in the *Mahabharata* is the *Bhagavad-Gita*, not only one of the world's major religious documents, but, like the Bible and the *Koran*, an epitome of the virtues and vices of the civilization which produced it and even more of the one which followed it. If the world's classics are in any way keys to the understanding of man in history, the *Mahabharata* is an essential key to an entire subcontinent which now contains more than 500 million people.

So we must perforce struggle and suffer through the inept translation and try to imagine the original. Few, indeed, will be able to endure the entire book, but most translations are drastic abridgments, anyway. The faults are not all in the English. Hindu literature by our standards is decadent from its prime foundations. Like Hindu sculpture, Indian poetry and prose have a jungle profusion that more spare cultures can never assimilate. Indian art and literature must be pared and boiled down before they can be transmitted—even to the Far East. So Buddhist art came to China simplified and ordered by transmission through the Bactrian Greeks and the peoples of the desert oases.

But the *Mahabharata* cannot be pared down to a simple substructure. Profusion is inherent in every sentence. Read as a whole, in the unidiomatic English of the translators—a job that will take even the most rapid reader a very long time—the impression is one of disorder in the overall organization, in the main line of the narrative, and in detail—in the rhetorical proliferation of each sentence. In addition, the psychological and symbolic monotony of the hundreds of episodes (a characteristic the *Mahabharata* shares with the *Ramayana*) has the cumulative effect of a narrow but unending dream, a kind of relentless impoverishment of the unconscious, that finally produces a comatose and uncritical acceptance. Partly these effects are inherent in Indian culture, in the esthetics implicitly accepted by the so-

ciety. Partly they are due to the evolution of the epic itself.

The critics of the last century might be right—Homer might be the product of "the folk" rather than of a single poet—but it is easy to demonstrate that the *Iliad* is as tightly organized as a play of Sophocles. The Cnidian *Aphrodite*, one of the most erotic of all works of art, is a statue of a single nude girl in a comparatively modest pose. The great Sun Temple at Konarka is a large building completely covered with small statues of men and women in every erotic posture. The Western mind boggles, attention fails, and monotony destroys stimulus and response. Perhaps, following Coleridge, we have misjudged the mental structure of the creative act. Perhaps the unconscious is fundamentally unimaginative and unoriginating.

The legendary author of the *Mahabharata* is called Vyasa—"the arranger"—simply the personification of an obvious fact. About one-eighth of the more than 100,000 couplets (in other words, about as many lines as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*



together) are devoted to the core narrative—a superficially complicated but fundamentally simple story of a feud between two barbaric families, the Kauravas and the Pandavas, supposedly cousin-families descended from the king of a town between the rivers Ganges and Jumna in the vicinity of modern Delhi. The original epic may well have begun to take shape about 500 B.C.—the time of Buddha—when this entire region, from the plateau that divides the Indus and the Ganges basins on around the Himalayan foothills, was in a state of intense political and intellectual ferment.

(Continued on page 61)



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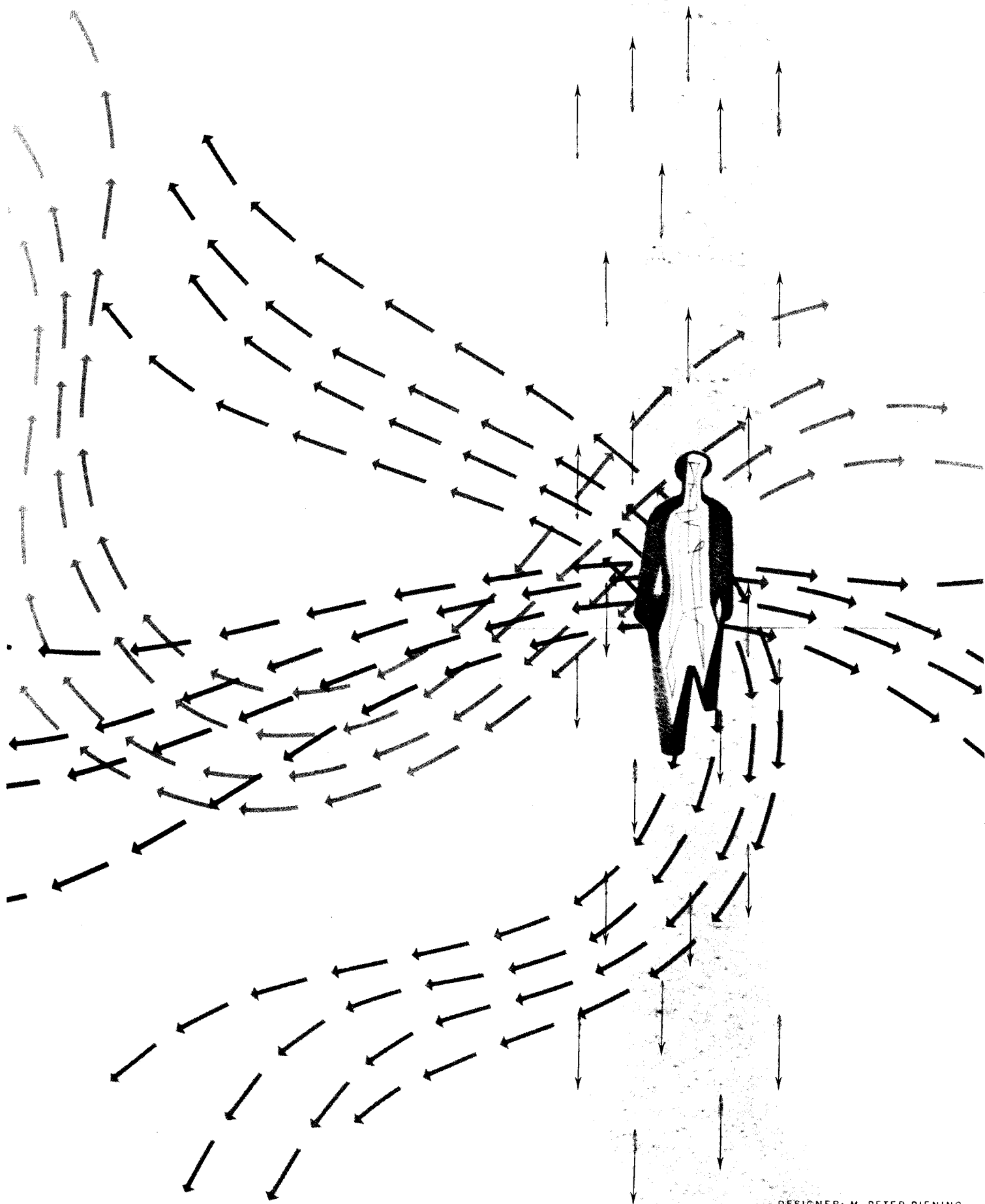
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How Should We Think About Transportation Progress?

by **ALAN S. BOYD**

Secretary of Transportation

Transportation exists in the United States in a special environment unlike any other in our society. We have evolved a special technique, combining public and private transport investment. One not only complements the other; in some cases, one makes the other possible.

This blending of private and public money has helped the United States produce a national transportation system superior to that of any other country. But a minor drawback of this uniquely American approach is that it tends to obscure the real costs of movement.

Perhaps no freight rate or passenger fare today reflects the actual costs of transportation. Local, state and federal governments—that is, the taxpayer—always bear some part of the burden:

... Almost all of the cars and trucks are privately owned, but the highways and freeways are publicly maintained.

... All barges and towboats are private property, but the canals and rivers are kept navigable by the Corps of Engineers.

... All U.S. airlines are competing private enterprises, but major airports are publicly maintained, and the air routes are assigned by a federal agency.

... America's ocean-going vessels are privately owned, except for some military supply ships; but the great harbors and port facilities are a public investment; and the United States Coast Guard maintains maritime law and safety.

... Most railroad rights-of-way originated in federal land grants or other forms of public support at state or local levels.

The dominant pattern is clear. Our nation has agreed, on public policy grounds, to provide the basic route support for each of the emerging transportation technologies. The lump-sum investments required for highways and harbors and canals and jet airports are not only beyond the usual means of private companies; considering other expenditure priorities, they are also at times beyond the means of the U.S. Government.

The total transportation investment in America—by private firms and individuals and by all government jurisdictions

combined—is some \$425 billion. If passenger fares and freight rates and car ownership had to reflect this full cost, there would be significantly less personal travel and freight movement.

Three major elements shape the American transportation environment:

1) *The importance we attach to freedom of movement—personal mobility.* This is a political right as well as a social value, and it supports the reality of a mass market over a vast territory, free of the Old World barriers to travel and commerce.

2) *Our system of private ownership and competitive free enterprise.* This very profound and pervasive approach in our society reinforces our dominant moral and ethical concepts. Though somewhat blurred in the operations of the carriers themselves, it is powerfully displayed by the great users, the shippers, as well as transport equipment manufacturers.

3) *The intervening authority of government—any level of government.* The classic partnership that exists between public and private investment may be viewed as a form of subsidy. But the power to give or withhold a franchise or license, and the power to set operating rules and standards, is a far more fundamental role. Here government is an instrument for the protection of the community's total interests.

The interaction of these forces, in the dimension of time, has produced a complex landscape of transportation institutions. The recent establishment of the Department of Transportation represents a decision to give greater unity and coherence to the Government's role.

We need to give more serious thought to the meaning of transportation in our society. It has become increasingly apparent that in a society such as ours transportation is one of the great choice mechanisms. Like the ballot box and the marketplace, it expresses popular desires. It helps shape our communities and institutions.

No family, for instance, moves to a suburban home as a destructive act. Yet the

effect of a million such decisions may be the relative decline of downtown business districts, congestion on urban highways, relocation of firms, disintegration of central city school systems, air pollution and innumerable other side effects.

Our nation knows a lot about the engineering and economic and efficiency aspects of transportation. Such knowledge has produced the greatest system of airlines, rail lines, pipelines, highways and waterways in the world.

But we do not have a very good understanding of the social effects of transportation. Most refinements in transport technology have long-lasting consequences which, for our future happiness and perhaps even survival, we had best learn to anticipate. We have hardly begun to sound the depths of the human implications of our transport decisions.

As usual, the hardest part of the problem is how to think about the problem. Popular expectations may be unreasonable, but expert knowledge has its limitations as well. We will have to be cautious in our acceptance of definitive solutions, confidently presented.

What kind of a community do we want, and what kind are we willing to settle for? We must set our own standards in this matter, dealing with transportation as a servant rather than a master.

If we are not able to anticipate all of the ultimate results of our transport investment decisions, that should not be used as an excuse for not making any decisions at all. Important incremental investments are being made daily—even hourly—in private and public sectors. Our mutual responsibility is to insure that in both sectors the social consequences are given adequate consideration.

If we can do this—if we can use the public interest as our consistent measure, though navigating in uncharted waters—our nation may be assured of true progress in transportation.



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A LAST MEMOIR

Ilya Ehrenburg: What I Have Learned

The personal testament of one of the most extraordinary literary figures in Soviet life—a fiery, acerbic novelist and critic whose career spanned two eras.

By ILYA EHRENBURG

I HAVE been asked what life has taught me. Everything; I was born uneducated, like all babies. Everything and nothing, for I see every day how much there is that I do not know. For the past fifteen years or so, I have been learning how to be an old man. This is not nearly as easy as I thought when I was young. I used to think that desires die down along with the possibilities of satisfying them; but then I began to understand that the body ages before the spirit, and that one has to learn to live like an old man. One learns even in dying; to die in such a way that death is a fitting end to one's life is not an easy art.

A man who, like myself, has lingered on in this world must learn that experience, concepts, emotions are all relative. I do not approve of old people who grumble about the younger generation; instead of helping it to live in accordance with the requirements of the present era, they do nothing but carp on the era's mistakes. They are like old kerosene lamps that smoke instead of giving light—not a pastime to be recommended.

What I am about to say is not intended as a lesson for the young. Rather, it is the confession of a man who was born in the past century and whose mind was formed by many of its ideas. Such a confession may, perhaps, be of some use to the young. Of course, I realize that people seldom learn from the mistakes of others—not because they deny the value of the past, but because they are faced with new problems. The tale of how their fathers and grandfathers got hurt cannot protect them from getting hurt in their turn, for they are beset by different dangers. At the same time, some of an

old man's misadventures may give useful pointers to the young, and that is why for the past seven years I have been working on a book of reminiscences, *People, Years, Life*.

It is a familiar fact that objects seen in childhood are remembered as being very large. I used to think, for instance, that I lived in a great big house, and I was taken aback when I revisited the "big" house of my childhood—it turned out to be very small. When I was young, I thought history proceeded at a dizzying pace, although in those days there were no airplanes, and trains moved with slow dignity, like asthmatic old men. I did not know then that everything takes much longer than one would wish and that mankind is not speeding down a freeway in a racing car but painfully groping along winding paths which sometimes turn right around, so that pessimists take them for circles, although in fact they are spirals. When I was fifteen, I became obsessed with politics, joined an underground Bolshevik organization, and even spent six months in a Czarist jail. At the age of eighteen, I had to flee to Paris to escape prosecution. There I began to write poetry, fell in love with art, and forgot politics—but politics soon caught up with me, as it did with everyone else in Europe: The First World War broke out, and hard on its heels came the Russian Revolution.

WHAT did I learn in the decades that followed? First of all, that it is far more difficult to change the mentality of the people than it is to change a country's political order or even its economy. The second of these changes may be effected in a few hours, the third in several decades, but the first can take centuries. Let me take nationalism and racism as

examples. When I was a child I knew that if I wanted to be admitted to school I had to do better than everyone else in the entrance examinations—at that time there was a 3 per cent quota for Jews in Moscow. When I went to visit my grandfather in Kiev I heard that there had been a pogrom and that there would surely be another. My father read the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and the liberal Russian newspaper *Russkie vedomosti*. He used to say that anti-Semitism was unthinkable in such a culturally advanced country as Germany. Thirty-five years later the Nazis had their *Kristallnacht* in Berlin—that is what they called their pogrom.

When traveling in America, I toured the southern states—Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana. This was in the spring of 1946, one year after the collapse of German racism. I saw racism in another form. The whites have for too long insulted national and human dignity in America, in Africa, and in Asia; there has been an accumulation of hatred, and accounts are often being settled in the same currency. I understand now that one must see the world as it really is and not mistake one's wishes for reality. Naturally, I continue to think that solidarity among men will overcome intolerance, racial and national arrogance, and brutality, but now I know that the road is long and that strenuous efforts and great sacrifices will be required.

I have lived through two world wars (I am not counting the Russian and Spanish civil wars). I have come to hate war not only because it kills off the flower of every nation, but because it destroys spiritual as well as material values, and sets people and nations far back in their development. I see no other way out for mankind than complete