

42 per cent of rural France could identify, much less care about, Jean-Paul Sartre, France's most famous contemporary philosopher. While France's intellectuals and artists hungrily bid for universal fame, the majority pursued its pleasure almost anywhere else than in the complex, depressing, and narcissistic creations of the nation's cultural élite. Zeldin used this striking illustration: "As great French actress Sarah Bernhardt labored before the Great War to make 8000 francs on a good Sunday at the Parisian box office, Joseph Pujol (Le Pétomane), farter extraordinaire, hauled in 20,000 as masses poured in to watch him do such things as insert a hose into his anus and puff a cigarette attached to the end, and then play the flute with it."

The frivolity of the masses did not always hide the deeper fact: "Frenchmen no longer needed to fear death by starvation. But men became more mobile, both physically and socially; the many new opportunities before them complicated the choices they had to make and created tensions as severe as have been experienced before or since." This meant experiencing the anxiety that comes with the desire for a better life, the guilt of having and trying to satisfy new wants, the boredom that invariably comes with first experiences of idle Sundays. In some cases it even meant trying to square one's pleasure and religion, superstitions and science. (Zeldin delightfully calls our attention to the existence of *voyantes diplômées* and *mediums agréés*!)

In short, there was deep confusion. It is little wonder "that nostalgia was more wide-spread than optimism" in the presence of so much uncertainty. And there cannot be much surprise in the fact that different parts of these nations zig-zagged, turned about, and were twisted in their search for a sustaining sense of order. Two quotations can be used to summarize Zeldin's view of the uncertain position of the individual and the superficiality of the national ideal:

"The individual had not learnt to cope with himself, let alone with the political and economic institutions surrounding him....The problems of human relations, of dealing with family, friends and strangers, were baffling because human knowledge was still in a very primitive stage. Frenchmen were not short of ideas, nor banners behind which they could march, but they were

short of mirrors in which they could see themselves."

And "The nationalism of France was based on a euphoria which gave people the illusion that they had found a purpose....It undoubtedly made possible the achievement of noble and plausible goals, but it also diverted a great deal of energy into sterile pursuits. French nationalism in this period, though it was progressive and liberal, was still the child of the monarchs of the ancient régime; it was obsessed by power and vanity. Its ambitions were constantly disrupted by emotion, because it had only a limited understanding of the individual imagination: it placed its faith in laws and institutions. Individuals learnt to shrug these off, and this, as much as the efforts of the politician, explains why France was, to a certain extent, or sometimes, a free country."

Much the same, one suspects, might be said of the United States. Zeldin's study of France illuminates a more general truth: that human groups are many, and, like the human heart, do not proceed at the same tempo, the appearance of structural unity notwithstanding.

## Education by Choice: The Case for Family Control by John E. Coons and Stephen D. Sugarman (University of California Press; 249 + xiv pp.; \$10.95)

### Theodore Michael Kerrine

The state of public education seems to be on everyone's mind these days. Almost daily we are reminded of the alarming rate of decline of test scores across the nation. States are falling over one another in a rush to establish minimal competency standards. Congress is caught up in debate over the relative merits of a number of proposals designed to provide fiscal relief to the parents of students. Meanwhile, education costs continue to soar, and literacy, especially in the inner cities, remains locked in a nosedive.

For some time there have been two main schools of thought on how to remedy this unhappy state of affairs. One would increase present funding of local school systems in the hope that

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## COMING HOME— TO CHINA by Creighton Lacy

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more money will effect a turnaround in results; the other would fund the families of students to allow them to make the choices about education. As its title suggests, *Education by Choice: The Case for Family Control* by Coons and Sugarman makes the argument for the latter alternative. The book is enriched, not only by their considerable knowledge of this area, but also by their experiences as seasoned litigators who have argued similar questions before high courts. It is almost certain to become a major point of reference in the continuing debate.

This is a book about primary education, where the tender age of the "client" demands the involvement of mature judgment—the state, acting

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*Debunking the notion that "the state knows...the best interests of the child."*

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through its school boards, or the parents. The authors condemn the enforced uniformity of the present system and debunk the notion that the state knows what is in the best interests of the child. Aside from agreement about a child's need for basic skills, they argue that there is no consensus about the objectives of education or how to achieve them. They also point to the dissensus concerning the inculcation of values in a child's training. According to the authors, the present policy of value "neutrality" offered in most public schools is an implicit endorsement of "majoritarian social and political norms." Hence, they argue, behind the professed neutrality of the public schools is in reality a "hidden curriculum" designed to turn out, like a factory assembly line, a "true American" as its final product.

The goal of education, say Coons and Sugarman, is to promote individual autonomy, and the best milieu in which to achieve that goal is one that engages the family in a choice system. They propose that government seek to ensure the empowerment of all people to form educational communities of choice, primarily through the provision of vouchers.

Coons and Sugarman are not just picking on a system that is down on its luck. On the contrary, one has every reason to conclude that even were the educational bureaucracies across the country doing their jobs, the authors would have written this book. The thrust of their argument is unabashedly libertarian, and readers should not be surprised by the mention of some early proponents of that ideology in an opening chapter. Yet, because of its engaging commonsensical reasoning, the appeal of this book is not limited to convinced libertarians.

In the manner of skilled advocates the authors lead the reader on a progression that begins with an examination of the absurdity of the present system of pupil assignment based on geographic proximity, continue with a discussion of

conflicting values, racism, and pluralism, and end with a review of possible alternatives. Not surprisingly they come out in favor of some kind of public subsidy that would allow parents to select for their children the school of their choice. To most readers the idea of educational vouchers will not seem terribly new. What is unprecedented about this work is the thoroughness of the analysis. Thorny legal questions involved in choice systems are discussed interestingly in lay terms. The objections about balkanization and racism that are routinely raised by opponents of choice systems are squarely confronted.

If the book has any weakness, it is the speculation about race and class segregation. Here the authors must acknowledge that we really do not have the experience to justify anything but educated guesses. They make a strong case, however, for optimism. Apart from excusable uncertainty on this one point, this timely book is outstanding in its completeness, clarity, and ability to engage the reader.

## Briefly Noted

### Edward Gibbon and the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire

ed. by G.W. Bowersock, John Clive, and S.R. Graubard

(Harvard University Press; 257 pp.; \$11.00)

Not the least value of this volume celebrating the two hundredth anniversary of the publication of the first volume of Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is a delightful essay on "Gibbon's Humor" by John Clive, one of the editors. A critic of Gibbon spoke "of those silly witicisms as pointless as they are puerile in which Gibbon at times indulges," but Gibbon used humor as a distinct technique, a way of keeping distance from himself and his subject, of protecting himself from criticism, a device to expose pretension and foolishness and to undercut the spiritual and abstract by the mundane and earthly. Gibbon remarked: "Some resemblance may be found in

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the situation of two princes who conquered France by their valor, their policy, and the merits of a seasonable conversion." On St. Augustine: "[his] learning is too often borrowed, and...[his] arguments are too often his own." He speaks of the "melancholy duty" imposed on the historian "who must discover the inevitable mixture of error and corruption which [religion] contracted in a long residence upon earth," and of an author whose tragedy of the emperor Heraclius "requires more than one representation to be clearly understood; and...after an interval of some years, is said to have puzzled the author himself." And of his own work: "In the course of this history the most voracious appetite for war will be abundantly satisfied."

Of course this volume is about more than Gibbon's humor: essays by specialists in ancient history assessing Gibbon's work in light of modern scholarship and, especially of interest to readers who know only the history, essays on Gibbon and the world of the eighteenth

century. Considered are the influence of contemporary historiography on Gibbon, especially of Catholic and Protestant historians, his influence on later historical writing, including the history of art, and other topics. Gibbon was a shrewd and often cynical observer of human existence and the frailty of human accomplishments, even his own. He wrote in his autobiography: "In old age, the consolation of hope is reserved for the tenderness of parents, who commence a new life in their children; the faith of enthusiasts who sing Hallelujahs above the clouds; and the vanity of authors who presume the immortality of their name and writing." Gibbon had only the last, but the presumption of immortality, which he parodied in others, he himself achieved.

—Robert L. Wilken

## The Government and Politics of the Soviet Union

by Leonard Schapiro  
(Vintage; 192 pp.; \$2.95 [paper])

Since 1965 this little work has become a standard reference and is widely used in classrooms. To those not acquainted with it, this new (sixth) edition is warmly recommended. Schapiro succeeds in putting a great deal of information and judicious comment into a small space.

## America in Maps

ed. by Egon Klemp  
(Holmes and Meier; 294 pp.; \$335.00)

A truly spectacular publishing venture. The maps date from 1500 to 1856 and are accompanied by an informative text translated from the German (the volume was originally published in East Germany). On large and handsome folios are reproduced both colored and black-and-white drawings with marvelous exactitude. Lay readers will be astounded by the imagination of early explorers, which, more often than not, was vindicated by later discoveries. The chief impression is that the difference between sixteenth and nineteenth-century cartographers was largely one of filling in details. This extraordinary limited edition of only 1,200 copies will be cherished by libraries and collectors alike.

## The Seven Deadly Sins by Henry Fairlie

(New Republic; 216 pp.; \$10.00)

The seven core essays appeared in *The New Republic* and startled, in salutary fashion, many of the readers of that very secular journal. Fairlie is convinced, however, and he argues convincingly, that the classic categories of sin are unparalleled in their ability to explain contemporary culture and ourselves in it. His choice of theological guides is somewhat eclectic, and his protestations of socialist loyalty seem unnecessary. But these and a few other caveats aside, Henry Fairlie has put together a book that deserves high praise. Pride, envy, anger, sloth, avarice, gluttony, and lust—they all come across with an illuminating, even revelatory, force that make the related psychological categories seem pale by comparison. Fairlie accepts the description of his own posture as one of "reverent disbelief," and yet the intuitions of Christian faith are inescapable. Many who claim greater certainty in their faith, but are too eager to accommodate themselves to secularly respectable definitions of the human condition, might benefit from Fairlie's bracing little exercise in moral reflection.

## The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions

by William Julius Wilson  
(University of Chicago; 204 pp.; \$12.50)

For some time it has been suspected by astute social observers that race *as such* is no longer the issue—that, in fact, it is not a question of black America versus white America but of the development of at least two quite different black Americas. The black middle class is in many ways advantaged, while at the same time most blacks are poor and getting poorer. As we say, the intuition has been expressed before, but Wilson's contribution is to argue it incisively and provide the massive documentation for the case. This will almost certainly turn out to be an important book in the development of thinking about American race relations.

## Moral Formation and Christianity

ed. by Franz Böckle

and Jacques-Marie Pohier  
(Seabury Press; 109 pp.; \$4.95 [paper])

Number 110 in what some view as the invaluable and others as the interminable "Concilium" series in Christian, mainly Roman Catholic, thought. Of special interest is a fair and strongly critical article by Kevin Ryan, "Moral Formation: The American Scene," in which he addresses the current popularity of "values clarification" and "the cognitive developmental theory." It should be read with care by educators, both religious and secular.

## The Soviet State by Ellsworth Raymond

(New York University Press; 462 pp.; \$15.00)

The second edition of a deservedly respected text. The title is misleading, since the book deals with much more than the state in the Soviet Union, being especially strong on Russian history. Like Schapiro (see above) Raymond is realistic about the internal Soviet situation without resorting to ideological polemics.

