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.

In short, there was deep confusion. It is little wonder "that nostalgia was more widespread than optimism" in the presence of so much uncertainty. And there cannot be much surprise in the fact that different parts of these nations zigzagged, 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.
Debunking the notion that "the state knows...the best interests of the child."

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 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 a "hidden curriculum" designed to turn out, like a factory assembly line, a "true child's training."

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 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

(Prentice Hall; 257 pp.; $11.00)

Not the least value of this volume celebrating the twelfth 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 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 doing their jobs, 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.

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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.

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 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.

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 polemies.