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The Enlightenment and Ethics: Nature and Culture

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The seemingly disproportionate amount of space given to Shi'ism, whose adherents now number less than ten per cent of all Muslims, is justified by the claim that Shi'ite thought is highly important as a source of inspiration for Islamic philosophy as here treated. One might more easily accept this explanation if some of the other chapters had been further developed. Sufism, for example, is justly praised as the outstanding effort in Islam to interiorize the teachings of the Koran, to break with legalism, and to relive Muhammad's religious experience (p. 47). Yet the four centuries that saw the initial flowering of this ascetical movement are covered in twenty-one pages. Al-Maturidi, whose school with al-Ash'ari's has dominated Sunnite theology for the last ten centuries, is given only a few lines on page 171. Much of the material in Chapter IV on the contributions of Muslims to medicine, grammar, and mathematics seems to cast little light on the main topic of the book and could have been abbreviated or omitted in favor of a more extensive discussion of figures like al-Hārith al-Muhāsibī, al-Hallāj, al-Ghazzālī, and Ibn Tūmārt. Muhāsibī and Ibn Tūmārt are merely named—the latter with an incorrect date—and al-Hallāj, one of the greatest Muslim ascetics, is allotted only three pages. Likewise, the five pages given to al-Ghazzālī seem insufficient for the Aquinas of Islamic religious thought.

The bibliography, covering fifteen pages and arranged according to chapter and sub-section, omits little of importance within the limits set down in the introductory note on page 348 where it is announced that no exclusively Arabic or Persian works are to be cited. One outstanding article that might have found a place in it is that of J. Maréchal, "La problème de la grace mystique en Islam," *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, XIII (1923), 244-92. But as it stands now, this up-to-date and detailed piece of documentation by itself makes Corbin's book worthwhile for any student of Muslim philosophy and theology.

THOMAS J. O'SHAUGHNESSY, S.J.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND ETHICS

NATURE AND CULTURE: Ethical Thought in the French Enlightenment. By Lester G. Crocker. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1963. xx, 540 pp.

In this volume Lester G. Crocker, chairman of the Department of Romance Languages at Western Reserve University, presents his second study of philosophical thought in France during the eighteenth century. The first study, *An Age of Crisis: Man and World in Eighteenth*

Century French Thought, was published in 1959 and reviewed in the pages of this journal in 1962. These two volumes are clear evidence of Mr. Crocker's competence as a scholar, as a historian of ideas, and as a philosophical critic of high excellence. Together they give a detailed picture of a complex intellectual struggle, and abundant documentation of the relevance of a philosophical theory of man, the world and God, as an underpinning of ethical attitudes.

Crocker's method embraces an analytic study of the more important eighteenth century French writers and an estimate of their historical significance. The latter is based both on the flow of these ideas from their European past, and their influence on contemporary thought both in Europe and across the seas.

Ethical speculation in eighteenth century France resulted from the challenge rising out of the collapse of the Christian cosmos and from a response that took two directions. On the one hand there were those who attempted to re-validate ethical considerations, and on the other those who asserted that men were condemned to live in the moral rubble of the collapsed world. With this as a background the essence of the moral problem was, as Crocker sees it, "the socialization of the egoistic individual." While the nihilists either avoided the problem or solved it by opting for the exercise of egoistic tendencies, there were those who took moral conscience seriously with its altruistic demands, its standards and its importance for society.

There are then two main questions concerning ethical theory which the thinkers of the eighteenth century (and of any century for that matter) had to face: (1) the somewhat psychological question concerning the origin of moral judgments: is it reason? or the emotion of pity? or self-interest? or the special conditions of the individual? or some other? or a combination of several? (2) the more substantive question about the object of moral approbation: what makes something right or wrong? These two questions form the basic division of the book into "The Nature and Genesis of Moral Experience" and "Moral Values."

The first section begins with a chapter on the Natural Law, which, Crocker holds, is a theory standing somewhat between a revealed ethic and one derived by purely human construction from experience, affection, reflection and custom. After a broad survey of Natural Law theories, he concludes with an estimate of its strength: it agrees with common sense, with the universal affirmation of justice beyond the laws of states, its assertion that obligation arises from liberty and man's responsibility to live in keeping with his nature.

His chapter on Moral Sense Theories is quite short, because of the weakness, and lusterless and unsystematic character of this position in France (as contrasted with its strength in England). With high

optimism the members of this group proposed the heart's inborn instinct as a surer guide to moral behavior than reason.

A much longer chapter is devoted to those who, influenced by Newton, Locke and Hume, defended moral obligation as deriving from data and from experimental methods exercised on human choices. After studying the thinkers in this tradition, Crocker concludes with his own critique of the limitations of eighteenth century experiential theories. These theories, he maintains, lessened the role of ethics as a relation between individual men, and replaced this by considering the individual in his relation to society taken as an abstraction. They confused virtue with altruistic action and proposed an unconvincing account of our experience of anguish over the sufferings of others. All his criticisms add up to one major point: the moral life is not confined by its genetic factors. Although moral attitudes may have arisen from biological and psychological needs, from our quest for happiness, security, guiltlessness, utility, survival mechanisms, etc., their mere origin does not account for the permanence of moral judgments. "Right and wrong are distinctions demanded by the species and by the individual, and it is impossible to conceive of a group of men who... would not develop such distinctions with the unfolding of their faculties" (p. 163).

By way of corollary consideration Crocker takes up the eighteenth century attempt to re-evaluate conscience after the attitude of distrust common in the seventeenth century, and the complex discussions of the relations of justice and law.

The second part of the book is concerned with moral values. Two main groups of thinkers are considered, the utilitarians and the nihilists.

The development of thought through the eighteenth century reveals a definite pattern, as the author reconstructs it. The rebellion against traditional values began with the assertion of self-centered hedonism, took a sharp turn toward social utility, i.e., duty to others considered as duty to oneself, and finally love of virtue in some cases evolved into an end, virtue being understood as a sacrifice of personal interest. The utilitarian choice then was to be made between happiness or pleasure on the one hand with virtue as a means to achieve it, and on the other virtue or character, with happiness as an accompaniment.

Crocker's critique of utilitarianism is somewhat lengthy and on the whole quite excellent. It is based on the fact that man, though he is wholly in nature, is unique, possessed of faculties for responsible decisions, for contemplating himself, for understanding all other beings as subjects, for engaging in this contemplation objectively. It is part of our nature to make judgments concerning right and wrong, to transcend the biological in these judgments, to prefer the right, even though at

times we may not desire it, to surpass egotistical drives in the direction of social creativity, even though motivated by a yearning for happiness and reward, to unite nature and culture, since culture is a part of our nature.

The growth of utilitarian thinking gave rise to nihilism, an attempt to separate nature and culture, embracing both the pessimists who despaired of any reconciliation of the two, and those who approved of the failure and revolted against culture in their preference for nature. Crocker sees three bases of eighteenth century nihilism: (1) the absurdity of the world, (2) the power of hedonism, and (3) the character of human life.

In a meaningless universe all things and all behavior are indifferent, and no moral action is possible. In the absence of law, the ego is the law. In the absence of value, the only value is instinct and passion. In an absurd universe, unchained egoism and disorder are the only reasons for action. Crocker notes the direct line from such thinking to the Nazi and other totalitarian infamies of our own century. "Totalitarianism is a defense of culture based on the acceptance of the truth of nihilism; it pretends to nothing more than a tyrannical and arbitrary imposition of a superego and contemplates the remaking of the individual, through the pressures of total conditioning so that the id is inhibited and the ego enslaved. If the effort toward humanistic self-control and voluntary co-operation does not succeed, culture is left with no other way to defend itself" (p. 396).

While nihilism goes beyond hedonism, it begins with a revolt against sexual restraints and from there it is a short step to the unfolding of other egoistic aggressions. The upshot is the discovery that "the act of hurting and destroying is itself a source of pleasure" (p. 368). The Marquis de Sade, to whom Crocker accords lengthy treatment, is the supreme example of this type of revolt against culture, really a revolt against men. The Sadian revolt is the total destruction of culture, of everything uniquely human, of life itself, and for this reason is "the greatest danger humanity must face." Sade's assumption that "what is most vile is most sincere and natural" is a refusal to accept the universe as it is, and is a denial that "pity, sympathy, justice, the surpassing of self, and the demand for limit are natural," whereas the truth is that these and others are all specifically human.

After a short chapter on the influence of ethical views on political theory, Crocker ends his work with an epilogue, in which he asserts that though there are conflicts between egoism and social demands, between man's basic psychological equipment and the needs of social living, still we must not conceive in exclusive, Procrustean fashion of

"nature" and "culture" as unrelated categories. "Nature is involved in all we do, and culture is man's mature" (p. 504).

While the Enlightenment deserves praise for the legacy of liberalism it has left us, still historical honesty demands that we recognize that totalitarianism and nihilism are also parts of that legacy. The thinkers of eighteenth century France have brought out into the open both hopes for the best and fears for the worst, as Crocker says at the end of his book.

FRANCIS E. REILLY, S.J.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF METHODISM IN THE PHILIPPINES

THE STORY OF METHODISM IN THE PHILIPPINES. By Richard L. Deats. Manila: National Council of Churches in the Philippines, 1964. xii, 129 pp.

The title is appropriate for this little book which, as the author indicates, is not a church history but rather a short account of the development of what today is Methodism in the Philippines. Mr. Deats is particularly well equipped for the task he has set himself. His doctoral thesis dealt with the Christian religion and modern nationalism with special reference to the Philippines.

Also, he has had at his disposal source material which is not generally available. This is especially true of Annual Board Reports and Conference Journals. In addition he has been able to check his references with Filipino ministers and laymen whose memories go back at least forty years or more.

While Dr. Deats is primarily concerned with nationalistic and ecumenical aspects, as pointed out early in his booklet, he nevertheless gives an ample general account of the early beginnings and institutional aspects of Methodism in the Philippines. His chapters on *Reasons for Rapid Growth, Persecution and Trials, the Moral Life*, and sections on hospitals, clinics, educational and other church institutions make edifying reading not only for the Methodist constituency, but to other evangelical Christians as well.

It is a pleasure to comment on the excellent printing job done. There would appear to be only one place where evidently a whole line was dropped between the bottom of page nine and the top of page ten. On page 29, in the footnote, and on page 61, the year for the