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The French Enlightenment: An Age of Crisis

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technological order of the present and the future obtain its spiritual fulfilment. This is certain. But must it pass through the cultural channels that conveyed it in the past?

THOMAS J. O'SHAUGHNESSY

THE FRENCH ENLIGHTENMENT

AN AGE OF CRISIS: MAN AND WORLD IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY FRENCH THOUGHT. By Lester G. Crocker. The Goucher College Series. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1959. 496 pp.

Men and women familiar with the history of speculative thought in the Philippines should be aware of the strong and lasting influence of the French Enlightenment here. The ideas developed in eighteenth-century France formed the theoretical background for the Revolution, and they are still felt in the philosophical and literary output of certain of our universities.

Although the French philosophers of the eighteenth century—in contrast with certain English philosophers of the same century and with Descartes of the seventeenth century—cannot be considered first-rate, still their influence on present-day thinking has been very strong, as Professor Crocker repeatedly points out. Some of them stand as a bridge between the pessimists of the late Renaissance and our twentieth-century pessimistic philosophers, by questioning man's relation to the rest of nature and the basis for morality—if indeed they hold man is under any obligation at all.

The book is the first of a projected trilogy designed primarily to present ideas current in eighteenth-century France. Crocker makes it a point to include the opinions of the less known authors, in addition to the more famous—Diderot, Voltaire, Rousseau, Marquis de Sade, Condillac, Fontenelle, Helvetius, La Mettrie and Montesquieu, to whom, of course, he accords the main treatment.

Among these authors the defenders of human freedom tried to save the basis of ethical living, while the materialists of the early part of the century logically deprived men of moral responsibility. According to the latter, behavior was to be determined not by obligation, but by social pressure, habit and pleasure. It is because of this that "the age of reason" is an incorrect designation for the eighteenth century, at least in France. As Crocker says, "men, despite their possession of reason, do not live like reasonable beings; instead of following their reason in some objective way, they prostitute it to

their passions or interest" (p. 225). "Reason plays a subordinate role even in the mental processes" (p. 229).

The philosophical reader should be strongly convinced by the numerous examples of 1) the dependence of ethical opinion on one's philosophy of man, 2) the dependence of both of these on one's metaphysics, 3) the practical consequences of ethical theory on private and political behavior.

The opinions described by Professor Crocker range from the conservative to the extremely radical, from aggressive optimism to repulsive and brutal pessimism, from the nihilistic materialism of La Mettrie and Helvetius who maintained that man is so closely integrated with the rest of the material universe as to be a mere minor member of that universe, through Voltaire, Rousseau and Diderot who admitted certain distinctive human needs and an ethics that was somewhat determinate, to the religious apologists who defended a moderate humanism and the traditions of the Church concerning sin and grace. But amid all the diversity of conflicting and even contradictory opinions, it is clear that behavior depends on ethical theory, which in turn depends on one's view of what man is and his relations to the rest of the world and to God.

The book is a balance of paraphrase, quotations and synthesis. Crocker is particularly adept at synthesis and should be encouraged to do more of it in the subsequent volumes. There is a minimum of evaluation, but what evaluation is given is solid, particularly since the author relates eighteenth-century French thought to the present-day menace of totalitarianism and to other aspects of our contemporary ethical plight.

Perhaps a different title should have been chosen for the book, since there have been a dozen or so "Age of ..." books in the past ten years. The subtitle would have been adequate.

FRANCIS E. REILLY

JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

LES ÉCRITS SPIRITUELS DES PREMIERS JÉSUITES. Inventaire commenté. by J. Fr. Gilmont, S.J., Inst. Historicum S.J., Via dei Penitenzieri 20, Rome, 1961, 357 p.

RÉPERTOIRE DE SPIRITUALITÉ IGNATIENNE. De la mort de S. Ignace à celle du P. Aquaviva (1566-1615). by I. Iparra-guirre, S.J., Inst. Hist. S.J., Rome, 1961, xx, 268 p.