

ANARCHY AND ORDER. By Herbert Read. (Faber; 16s.)

ROUSSEAU—POLITICAL WRITINGS. Translated and Edited by F. M. Watkins. (Nelson Philosophical Texts; 10s. 6d.)

'Anarchism means literally a society without an *arkhos*, that is to say, without a ruler. It does not mean a society without law, and therefore it does not mean a society without order' (p. 129). It is not always easy to see what Sir Herbert Read takes such a remark to imply; sometimes his anarchism seems to mean the freedom of the individual from the authority of any community—'Creeds, castes and all forms of intellectual and emotional grouping, belong to the past. The future unit is the individual, a world in himself, self-contained and self-creative, freely giving and freely receiving, but essentially a free spirit' (p. 39)—but sometimes it seems to mean the elimination of an overall state authority leaving only the authority of organic functional groups—'The most effective community is the smallest, the family. Beyond the family is the parish, the local association of men in contiguous dwellings. Such local associations may form their courts, and these courts are sufficient to administer a common law based on common sense' (p. 134). This book is unfortunately full of such ambiguities, which can only be reconciled either by supposing serious shifts of meaning or by diluting one or both of the contrasting positions to a pious platitude. No doubt this is partly due to the fact that the book is a collection of essays previously published at different times between 1938 and 1949, but the author claims to have removed 'rash and ambiguous phrases'.

It is frequently difficult to tell what kind of discussion is being carried on; for example we find: 'Morality, as has often been pointed out, is antecedent to Religion—it even exists in a rudimentary form in animals' (p. 40). It is not clear whether this is a dubious generalization in anthropology, or an assertion that ethics is possible without supernatural sanctions, or a definition of religious activity to include moral activity, or merely an expression of the author's dislike of going to church. It would help if he told us who had pointed it out and in what context. The remarks on Religion are some of the least thoughtful passages in the book. On the one hand we are told: 'Religion, in its later stages, may well become the opium of the people; but whilst it is vital it is the only force that can hold a people together—which can supply them with a natural authority to appeal to when their personal interests clash' (p. 46). On the other hand we read: 'I am so imbued with the spirit of toleration that religion, as such, does not seem to me to enter into the discussion of public affairs' (p. 122). The reader is left with a confused impression that something called 'religion' is essential to a community but that we must on no account say so. It is in any case doubtful whether terms like 'religion', 'toleration', 'opium of the

people', etc., can be used in the description of every human community; no doubt in each society there are activities and beliefs which it is convenient to class as religious, but that common to all societies there is something called *Religion* which has a definable relation to something else called *Public Affairs*, is a thesis to be demonstrated empirically rather than to be assumed.

Despite the large claims of his generalizations, I think the author is talking primarily about Christianity and European or American society, and his notion of religion is one that is peculiar to the tail-end of a particular Christian tradition. He says 'I cannot think of religion as anything but the expression of individual emotions', though he recognizes that some people might want to add that it is also '. . . a system of ethics or an explanation of the universe'. This extraordinary view of Christianity as Ethics plus Pious Feelings is not confined to those who, like Sir Herbert Read, disapprove of 'the Churches'; its gravest defect for the purposes of the sociologist is not that it is bad theology but that it eliminates any empirical control for his generalizations about Christianity and the community, for the Christians who in actual fact developed the European communities meant something quite different by 'religion'. What a community would be like if it developed entirely under the influence of Sir Herbert Read's kind of religion is a matter of speculation and not of historical evidence.

The essay on Existentialism and Marxism is written in a style that one had hoped had died out in English philosophical writing some twenty years ago ('As soon as materialism becomes dialectical, it associates itself with contradictions, and the contradictions of matter are essences', etc.), but it is no worse than some of M. Maritain's later writings and, if I have understood it at all, the doctrine is not dissimilar.

It is unfortunate that there should be so much to irritate the reader in this book, for the essential themes that can be disentangled are usually truths of very great contemporary relevance, such as the implicit appeal all the time to the primacy of intelligence (which is not confused with the ability to calculate), and the insistence on the idea of natural law and of the relativity of all human authority. But above all this book is worth reading for its single short essay called 'The Prerequisite of Peace'; its conclusion—'We must be at peace with ourselves before we can be at peace with one another'—may sound trite enough, but it is nonetheless true and in the course of arriving at it the author submits more facile attitudes to war to a really penetrating analysis; among others he efficiently disposes of that theory of war which used to be only too common among Catholics of the Belloc tradition and which he associates particularly with Mr Douglas Jerrold.

It was almost inevitable that a book of this kind should attempt some

assessment of Rousseau. We are given one of the two contrasting but equally conventional criticisms—Rousseau was ‘the true founder of State Socialism’.

For those who are tired of both Rousseau the Anarchist and Rousseau the Totalitarian, I can strongly recommend the new Nelson edition of Rousseau’s political writings. Professor Watkins in his excellent introduction gently reproves the classical critics for ‘crediting Rousseau with a degree of logical consistency which is not in fact characteristic of his writings’, and manages to avoid the standardized perspectives which have been imposed on his author’s writings by the later developments of those who have claimed to be or been accused of being Rousseau’s disciples. When all this has been cleared away and we read *The Social Contract* without reading into it modern preoccupations the outstanding feature of the book is, as Cassirer has pointed out, its intense moral seriousness; it was this that accounted for the admiration which Kant (hardly an enthusiast for either anarchism or totalitarianism) had for Rousseau. Professor Watkins makes this his starting point in his analysis of the work and suggests that it is in part derived from the Calvinism of Geneva. I think he does less than justice to the originality of Rousseau and Kant when he describes the theory of the General Will as essentially a restatement of ethical rationalism, the tradition of which extends from the Stoic idea of natural law to the Kantian categorical imperative. Professor Watkins says: ‘It is true that the rationalistic element is somewhat obscured by his emphasis on will’; this emphasis cannot, surely, be brushed aside as misleading, for in it is the seed of Kant’s achievement—the development of a non-naturalistic ethic within the rationalist tradition. Besides giving the most readable English translation of *The Social Contract* that has yet appeared, Professor Watkins also provides translations of *Considerations on the Government of Poland* and part of the *Constitutional Project for Corsica* in which we see Rousseau at work on concrete political problems in the light of his theory. Of the two the essay on Poland is the more interesting, perhaps because Rousseau was so conscious of the obstacles to ideal legislation in that country. Corsica he thought of as the perfect setting for his state and the Project is consequently much less down to earth.

H.M.C.

FROM ROMAN EMPIRE TO RENAISSANCE EUROPE. By Denys Hay.
(Home Study Books, Methuen; 7s. 6d.)

The author of this little book succeeds very well in carrying out his intention of ‘conveying a general impression of the changes in European society during a thousand years of its development’. Of course he