

of increasing profundity. Those of the first half are concerned with our present social and political problems, and at times treat of them with an immediateness which is rare among modern professional theologians. But since the key to Professor Niebuhr's approach is what he calls Christian realism, i.e., a political prudence which being based equally on the doctrines of man's dignity and of his original sin, avoids both cynicism and utopianism, his comments are penetrating and sober.

Since none of our present problems can be correctly focussed without reference to the Russian Revolution of 1917, which commands the politics of the twentieth century just as the French Revolution those of the nineteenth, much in this first half of the book is reminiscent of Burke, who is, indeed, singled out for praise. Nevertheless, as already indicated, the present author's realism has deeper roots, and the essays of the second half of the book are concerned with its foundation in Christian theology. Professor Niebuhr is an independent in theology, but finds St Augustine the most satisfying guide although not one to be unreservedly followed. His essay on 'Augustine's Political Realism' has much of value to say.

It is natural, however, that a Catholic reader will find this theological part of the book less satisfying. He will, for example, not find it so much of a 'mystery how the Christian insights into human nature and history, expressed by Augustine, could have been subordinated to classical thought with so little sense of the conflict between them in the formulations of Thomas Aquinas'—precisely because he will deny any such subordination. If 'grace perfects nature' is one of the main themes of St Thomas's syntheses of natural and revealed truth, all the *subordination* is on the part of nature which grace certainly never contradicts but also infinitely transcends.

R. T.

A HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT IN THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION. By Perez Zagorin. (Routledge and Kegan Paul; 15s.)

Given such a subject, this book could hardly fail to be interesting. The only excuse that can be made for its faults is that Dr Zagorin is engaged on a social history of the English Revolution, for which the present volume should no doubt be regarded as a collection of notes. We are presented with a series of essays on rather more than twenty major and minor theorists of the Revolution who contributed to the vast debate touched off by the defeat of the King. The technique employed is that of seizing a writer, summarising his views, commenting on them, dismissing him and taking the next on the list. This

process begins with the Levellers, passes on by way of Winstanley and the communists to Ascham, the Fifth Monarchy men, Milton, and Harrington, before reaching a conclusion with Hobbes. Rather curiously it then starts again with the Royalists and stops, exhausted, after only two hundred pages. In those two hundred pages, however, a great deal has been said, and, on the whole, said well. Any one of a dozen topics, once broached—the nature of law and the law of nature, popular sovereignty, natural rights, property, modes of government, religious toleration—inflamed the minds of thinkers, and more immediately of publicists, in an age when intellectual exploration in books and pamphlets was more daring than ever it had been before. The reaction of every type of thinker to these great problems is examined, nor is the author too much preoccupied with great names to have no time to spare for those lesser figures who played, often enough, a greater contemporary part in the moulding of opinion. Familiar subjects are illuminated: particularly commendable is the chapter on Hobbes, which while unlikely to displace Mr Oakeshott's celebrated essay, contains much valuable comment and sensible criticism. Dr Zagorin places a useful emphasis on the distinction, in his own words, between the 'descriptive' and the 'normative' in *Leviathan*, and, realizing the contractual nature of the Hobbesian commonwealth, is able to put his finger neatly on its essential weakness. The debt of many of the radicals to Machiavelli and the thought of the Renaissance is also given a welcome prominence which may help to dispel the still surviving belief that all or most of the innovators were Puritans drawing their inspiration from Scripture. The gradual disillusionment of political thinkers as the course of events after 1648 alienated one after another of the idealists is shown to produce the mechanistic positivist philosopher, who, weary of attempts to build Westminster on Mount Sinai, relapsed into an insufficient humanism. Dr Zagorin here draws our attention to a real connection between Hobbes and the Utilitarians.

The author's technique makes for neatness and has produced not only an interesting but a stimulating and informative book; nevertheless, the reader cannot avoid his doubts. Although a phenomenal amount of ground is covered, one feels not only overwhelmed by the speed and compression of the discussion, but suspicion of the sometimes rather glib dogmatism and easy classification inevitable in a book executed in this fashion. More fundamentally, the book has the strange defect of being too academic. There is often an unreality about political philosophy which Dr Zagorin, by failing to provide a proper introduction or an adequate political and economic background, does little to dispel. The Harringtonians, indeed, have compelled a greater attention to social realities than is elsewhere apparent, but those who

are convinced by Mr Trevor-Roper's recent essay on the forces at work in the earlier seventeenth century will demand some qualifications as to the facts. For the rest, political theory seems to exist *in vacuo*, even the particular writers he discusses being strangely isolated from all that had gone before. A book of this sort might reasonably be expected to open, rather than to close, with an account, if not of Hooker and Bacon, at least of the political assumptions of the immediately preceding years. A curious and significant omission is that of Cromwell, who, precisely because he was a successful soldier and politician, is especially worth studying as a thinker. But Dr Zagorin's interests are so exclusively academic that, because Cromwell never wrote a treatise formally *de re publica*, he is thought, apparently, to have had no political philosophy at all. Such an attitude detracts from the value of the book, and it is to be hoped that when its author comes to write up these notes into his later work, he will anchor his discussion of theories more firmly to the lives and times of the men who produced them.

T. G. I. HAMNETT

THE AGE OF ABSOLUTISM, 1660-1815. By Max Beloff. (Hutchinson's University Library; 8s. 6d.)

This is just the kind of book that a volume in this series should be: compact, thorough, scholarly, vigorous, and (one must say it) thought-provoking. Mr Beloff packs a great deal into his one hundred and eighty pages, and only very occasionally does his normally lucid and pungent style show signs of strain. He does not pretend to give a political history of the period. He means what his title says, and his chief interest lies in the institutional organization of European states, primarily in the eighteenth century. This might be forbidding, had not the author given the dry bones intelligible life by constant reference to social and economic developments. By taking France as the author of absolutism in the seventeenth century, with Prussia as its leading exponent in the eighteenth, and considering the rest of Europe mainly in relation to these two states, the author gives his study unity without (such is his skill) upsetting its balance. Nor does he forget that Europe had leaped the Atlantic, for an able and highly relevant sketch of the American Revolution, whose European significance he emphasizes, is thrown in towards the end. In his final chapter (on the years 1789-1815) Mr Beloff is not afraid, even in this age of elaborately dispassionate historiography, to point a tactful moral. Absolutism, he reminds us, is not a monopoly of monarchical society. With a warning gesture in the direction of totalitarian democracy, he ushers in the succeeding age. It is a wise and intelligent little book, which well deserves its place in a very useful series.

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