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J. W. Burrow. *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought, 1848-1914.* Yale Intellectual History of the West Series. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000. xvi + 271 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-08390-3.

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The Crisis of Reason

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The triumph and collapse of the Revolution of 1848 marks the opening of J. W. Burrow's, *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought, 1848-1914.* Beginning with Richard Wagner and Mikhail Bakunin as exemplars of the Promethean spirit of the "Generation of '48," Burrow traces a familiar story–one of hopes joyfully held only to be dashed and plunged into disillusion and darkness. Tragedy is the trope Burrow adopts, and given the great shadow of the First World War that lurks at the end of the period he canvasses, it is well chosen. Burrow's ability to harness that trope and offer a study that ranges widely, analyzes ideas and thinkers astutely, and at the same time entertains, marks his notable achievement.

Burrow's aim is to allow the reader to "eavesdrop" on past intellectual discussions, while simultaneously being faithful to the intellectuals and their ideas, controversies, and the "intellectual deadends" of the past (p. x). To accomplish this task, he employs a tactic of "thematically overlapping circles" throughout the book's six chapters (p. x). As a result, Burrow successively deepens his analysis of particular thinkers and more completely relates how cultural, social, and political events shaped their thought and activity. Thus, we get a better sense of the full trajectory of individual thinkers (e.g. Marx, Herbert Spencer, or Hippolyte Taine), as well as important concepts like the notion of the autonomous self. It is a structure and technique that could easily lead to confusion and opacity, but Burrow's practiced hand keeps the reader aware of their place and progress throughout the text.

A particular strength of the book (not surprising given Burrow's past work on Darwin) is the discussion of science and its impacts during the period. The first two chapters trace the development of materialism and the triumph of scientific method as a mechanism for inquiry into all human activities. Burrow presents a trenchant discussion of the progress of materialism, from the foundational *Kraft und Stoff* (1855) of Ludwig Buchner, to the sensationalism of Ernst Mach. His vivid analysis allows the reader to experience the elation of the materialists as they appeared to slay holy superstition–only to be dogged by charges of founding their own metaphysics through the equivalence of matter and energy. One path away from dogmatic materialism was Mach's emphasis on sensation. He sought to place knowledge on phenomenological, not metaphysical, grounds. Knowledge did not offer a royal road to the truth, but was merely an ordering of sensations into concepts that one could employ in their daily life. In Burrow's description, "Knowledge, in the newer version, was not a self-justifying ideal, the goal of humanity in its highest manifestation, as comprehension of the world in its totality, as in the neo-Hegelian conception of Renan and Taine; it was an organizing instrument in the struggle for life" (p. 61).

Ernst Haeckel and his supporters, Burrow rightly points out, presented another alternative to straight materialism. Burrow goes some way toward recognizing the importance of Haeckel and his place in European intellectual history. However, Haeckel remains a somewhat ghostly figure who appears and recedes throughout the text. One is left intrigued, but ultimately unsatisfied, with his treatment of such a central, but controversial figure. Nevertheless, Burrow does an excellent job of tracing the overall path of physical science in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

An exemplary effort is also produced in the discussion of the life sciences. Burrow's familiarity with Darwin and the various evolutionary schemes that led to a budding of "Darwinisms" is welcome and apparent. His discussion of classification, or taxonomy, and its importance to questions of evolution is solid. Just as probing is Burrow's treatment of the range and importance of Herbert Spencer and his theories. Burrow demonstrates the Lamarckian underpinnings of Spencer's entire body of work, especially his understanding of social evolution.

Thanks to Lamarckian notions of adaptation, Spencer argued that individuals in a highly complex society could learn, over time, to regulate their conduct in society without perpetual recourse to a strong central government. Thereby, Spencer hoped to reconcile his explanation of social evolution through the division of labor with his desire for a classically liberal government and society. Social evolution, according to Spencer, would ultimately allow government to "wither away." (p. 73) As a counterpoint to Spencer's use of evolutionary arguments for his social theories, Burrow offers the example of Emile Durkheim. He cogently presents Durkheim's arguments for social integration based on the creation of a moral order. (p. 76) He does so in such a clear and concise way that his explication serves to delineate not only the differences between Spencer and Durkheim, but it also underscores the many forms in which evolutionary ideas (both Darwinian and non-Darwinian) could appear.

Conceptions of the self are also a central concern of the text. In chapters four and five Burrow considers the development (and destruction) of the notions of the autonomous and transcendental self. His discussion is well constructed and clearly presented. His judgements are sound. For example, in his discussion of J. S. Mill and his idea of the individual, Burrow points out that Mill's call for individual emancipation and the creation of an autonomous self appeared thin when one asked the simple question of "How?" Mill relied on injunctions to develop one's individual "character" (p. 156). But how to discover, and simultaneously mold, one's character remained largely unexplained.

The transition from nineteenth-century confidence to modernist conceptions of decadence and degeneration is also nicely presented. Burrow identifies many of the leading ideas and issues that led to a modernist movement determined to shatter the tyranny of the concept. Using examples like the Futurists, Burrow contends that, "Modernism… was concerned, as a defining characteristic, not only with disrupting the serial character of logic and narrative but with challenging the techniques of representation, verbal and visual, by which the illusion of a world of stable characters and things, governed by intention and causality, had been sustained" (p. 240). One might search long and hard before finding a more cogent, and useful, definition of the modern project in the arts and beyond.

Clearly, Burrow has produced a thorough and accessible text that is more than just a survey of the intellectual history of the period. His sources, listed in a select bibliography, are apt and used well. The illustrations are well chosen and enlightening. The text is an enjoyable read and might profitably be used in an undergraduate survey course. One can only hope that the forthcoming volumes in the Yale Intellectual History of the West series will be as well executed.

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