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Book Reviews

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**La France et les
français vus par les
voyageurs américains
1814-1948.**

(2 vol.)

by

G. de Bertier de Sauvigny

Paris: Flammarion, 1982-1985.

In a day when even elementary school pupils venture abroad, visitors' opinions of countries not their own are surely commonplace. Students of American history are only too familiar with Europe's views of us as expressed in Alexis de Toqueville's *De la Démocratie en Amérique*, Frances Trollope's *Domestic Manners of Americans*, or Dickens' comical description of stage-coach travel in the States. What others have thought of us is no secret.

But what have we, in *our* travels, thought of them? A delightful and splendidly researched answer, at least as to Paris and France, may be found in Bertier de Sauvigny's recent volumes covering the first half of the nineteenth century. Renowned as the authority on the French Restoration era, and most recently the biographer of Metternich, Bertier is as comfortably at home in the States as in his native France, having taught in many of the great universities throughout the nation, and numbering among his friends distinguished American historians. His approach to both his homeland and American visitors to it is a provocative olio of admiration, irony, good-humored raillery, and fond indulgence.

Bertier's roster of *voyageurs* includes names as well-known as novelist James Fenimore Cooper, historian George Bancroft, orator Edward Everett, suffragette Julia Ward Howe, artist Rembrandt Peale, and educator Emma Willard. Altogether he has selected, from an estimated 30,000 Americans who crossed the Atlantic between 1814 and 1848, some 170 travellers who were not only literate but literary, as these fastidiously selected excerpts from their published works attest. They represent a wide range of views: those of doctors and medical students (25), clergymen (18), women (15), men of letters (13), jour-

nalists (10), artists (7), along with others in government service (army, navy, diplomacy, and consular service), bankers, merchants, lawyers, and other men of affairs. As Cooper observed, "There were no two travellers who saw precisely the same thing or who saw them with the same eyes." Yet, as Jean-Max Guieu of Georgetown University comments, reviewing the first volume of Bertier's exhilarating survey in the *French Review* (57, October 1983, 125), "The contribution of this work, which in spite of the multiplicity of voices ... shows such consonance of opinion, rests notably in this multiple American vision of France

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under the constitutional monarchy, at the precise epoch of Toqueville."

Since these Americans taken together commented on almost every aspect of French society and culture, the twenty-six chapters of Volume I (published in 1982) furnish a veritable *Guide Bleu* to the City of Lights and *la belle France* surrounding it in the days of Washington Irving, Samuel Toppliff, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Margaret Fuller, Samuel F. B. Morse, Lewis Cass, George Catlin, and the lesser lights who visited there. The reader travels by proxy the voyage across the Atlantic, visits the cafés and restaurants, strolls the streets and public gardens, visits prisons and cemeteries, and views with awe the museums and monuments. Beyond Paris he leisurely explores the *départements* where the French were predominantly a rural, agricultural people. In short, through the eyes of Bertier's delegates, one generally explores the visible forms of *France et les français*.

The second volume of this engaging retrospect, published three years later, is even more to this reviewer's liking. As the third major division of the whole work, it centers on the people themselves, their character, personali-

ty, their daily life -- economic, political, intellectual, religious -- giving one the sense of actually living in the France into which Emile Zola was born.

The position of women startled some Americans. "Women of all classes knew business and managed these affairs as well and perhaps better than men." Though until 1838 they were forbidden on the floor of the Bourse, they speculated in the stock market from the small *Café du Report*. In France women of sixty-five were more charming, better company, than twenty-five-year-olds were thought to be in other countries. Married women enjoyed greater independence than in the States, and in Paris seemed free to go anywhere unescorted. Many dressed as men, and one tailor specialized in adjusting masculine clothes to the womanly figure. Bertier comments dryly, "The conduct of George Sand would appear less extravagant than one was sometimes tempted to believe."

Bertier is equally tongue-in-cheek introducing the section on dogs: "Finally one must not forget a not inconsiderable portion of the *parisienne* population constituted by its inhabitants with four paws. The stranger is always surprised at their number and the importance humans attribute to them." The Americans most astonished by the rank canines enjoyed in France were the Iowa Indians whom George Catlin had brought with him to Paris. After taking a census of ladies with dogs, and the numerous pets -- leashed or unleashed, riding *en voiture* or on their mistress' arm -- the Indians presented it gravely to their guide, inquiring why dogs were kissed on the mouth, but children on the forehead. Particularly, after visiting an orphanage, they demanded why these women did not adopt a baby, instead of a dog.

La France et les français must be read in its entirety (with a French dictionary close at hand) for the density of its detail, the elegance of its style, the panoramic picture it furnishes, and the sheer pleasure of its lore. Although Americans continued to believe their own country superior to any other, many left France with the sentiments of young Augusta Colles, who confided to her journal, "When I left home I thought it could never happen that I could cry on leaving any other country ... but then, I had not seen Paris."

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Wickedness: A Philosophical Essay

Mary Midgley
Routledge & Kegan Paul
1984

Why do people act as badly as they sometimes do? Why are human beings callous, cruel, vindictive, selfish, exploitive, manipulative? What are the sources of human wickedness, evil, wrong doing, vice, immorality? Philosophers have long worked to expand our comprehension of such positive notions as goodness, morality, duty, virtue and happiness. By comparison, their consideration of the nature of evil and its sources has been slight most often peripheral to other inquiries. Mary Midgley's *Wickedness* offers at least a partial corrective to this neglect. But her work is not merely the product of an intellectual's curiosity about an underexplored topic. Midgley knows that evil undermines us and we have no hope of controlling it unless we understand evil and its origins.

Where should we look to uncover the spring of evil in our lives? To the mysterious workings of God? To a cosmic diabolic force which opposes the separate force of goodness? To a destructive element within nature? To the dynamics of flawed social structures? With varying degrees of thoroughness, Midgley considers and rejects each of these approaches to understanding human evil in terms of something external to individuals. The locus of the insertion of evil into human reality is human beings themselves. And inquiry into such evil must focus on human nature. To her examination of evil and human nature, Midgley brings the conviction that we are, above all, persons, requiring an integrated personality, integrity and responsibility, in pursuit of a good life. Accordingly, her book has at least three primary goals: to dissuade us from misguided approaches to understanding evil, to expand our comprehension of persons as purposive agents, and to identify the sources of evil within human nature. Throughout, *Wickedness* builds upon a profound project to deepen our self-knowledge carried out in two of her earlier works, *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature* and *Heart and Mind: The Varieties of Moral Experience*.

The prophet Jeremiah knew where to look for the root of evil -- to the human heart. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (*Jeremiah 17:9*) Midgley agrees that the source of human evil is the heart. But contrary to the implication of Jeremiah's question, she believes that we must attempt to know the heart and that we can know it. Our biggest obstacle to doing so is a variety of misconceptions about the motives, drives and feelings harbored in the heart. There is a common tendency to believe that human nature is polluted by one or several inherently evil motives or drives. For example, aggression is sometimes viewed as an innate, positive, solitary, irresistible drive which alone causes human wickedness. Midgley argues that such a view is completely mistaken and tends to reflect an untenable conception of human motivation. Not all wickedness is aggressive, much of it results from other motivations, e.g., fear, sloth, greed, habit. Nor is all aggression wicked. 'Aggression' refers to an inclination to attack others, most often out of anger. It functions mainly to drive others away, thereby providing individuals with the space needed to carry out the business of living. As a motive, it produces evil only when it is out of control.

Midgley finds fear as a motivating force to provide an interesting parallel to aggression. Certainly, fear is an innate element in human beings and it can lead to despicable acts and worthless lives. This is especially true when our response to fear is cowardice. However, fear is an essential aspect of human existence and our response to it need not, and often does not, result in any wrongdoing. Fear is an emotive recognition of danger to something of value, whether it be oneself, others or things. The pursuit of well-being requires such recognition. Fear becomes destructive when we fear the wrong things or when our fear is out of proportion to the danger encountered. Fear and aggression are natural motives and essential elements of a good life "because they are responses to evil, and there are always some evils which ought to be feared, and some which ought to be attacked." Our task is not to eradicate these motives or to become fatalistic about them, but to direct them properly.

Midgley's approach is distinctly Aristotelian. Human beings have a variety of natural capacities and needs. All

of us tend to become angry, fearful, competitive, desirous of pleasure and so forth. Wickedness does not arise in human life simply because we have such motives. Each of these natural motives is linked with a wide range of possible behavior and only some acts within each range are wicked. Our propensity for good or evil depends largely on the character traits we develop in connection with each of these motivational capacities. Virtuous traits are life enhancing and bring us to feel anger, fear, desire for pleasure, etc. at the right times, with reference to the right objects, toward the right people and with the right motive. However, as Midgley notes, "to be capable of these virtues is also to be capable of corresponding vices, just as the possibility of physical strength carries with it that of physical weakness." Here she develops the idea, deriving from the ancient Greeks, that evil is essentially negative, a type of dysfunction, a general sort of failure to live as we are capable of living. The problem of dysfunction is complicated by the fact that our various natural motives tend to conflict. It is a matter for the heart or character to strike compromises among the strong, constant feelings and motives which clash within us. The kind of character we have determines what sort of compromises we are likely to strike and, thereby, whether and to what extent we bring evil into the world. Compromises for the good arise when we view our motives and feelings not as occasional and isolated, but as part of an ordered set within the context of a way of life. Motives and feelings are linked with universal human needs. Needs come as a set and have some structure. "When increasing intelligence brings to consciousness conflicts which in other animals seem to pass unnoticed, human beings are forced, on pain of disintegration, to form some kind of policies for reconciling their contrary impulses. This makes some kind of morality necessary, and the nature of the contending motives lays limits on what kind it can be."

Working with this model of human agency, she explores the development and manifestations of the dysfunctional root of human wickedness. Inner conflict between competing motives is a typical and constant feature of our personal identity. A good and viable way of life requires self-knowledge, self-criticism and the maintenance of an inward balance of competing motives. However, we have

a tendency to divide ourselves into the self we esteem and affirm and its darker shadow which we deny. Thus, we refuse to acknowledge motives which are in fact our own and regard them as alien to us, often projecting them onto other persons. Through this self-deception vice easily grips us and becomes especially pernicious. When the balance of motives is insecure and incomplete, obsession becomes a possibility, with all motives giving way to a ruling passion. Certain desires become detached from the rest of character, which atrophies so that the person disintegrates. The badness of bad motives most often derives from the breakdown of an internal system of counterbalancing motives, especially concern for others.

Though Midgley focuses on the source of evil, she also inquires about a large variety of topics, including the nature of science, moral scepticism, determinism, free will, chance, communal persecution, temptation, cultural relativism, Freudian theory and evolution. While this rich diversity of topics makes her work fascinating, the nucleus of ideas connecting these inquiries is sometimes lost and generally underdeveloped. Also, some of her key notions -- e.g., "wickedness," "motive," "agency," "drive" -- are desperately in need of more careful analysis given the heavy work they do in her book. Overall, Midgley's work is a worthy complement to two other recent philosophical treatises on human evil -- Judith Shklar's *Ordinary Vices* and Ronald Milo's *Immorality*.

David Cheney
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Actual Minds, Possible Worlds

Jerome Bruner
Harvard University Press
Cambridge and London, 1986

Let's assume you have read some of the articles in this issue of the *Bridgewater Review* before getting to this one. It is unlikely that you stopped to consider how the reading of them resulted in your knowing something new, not just in terms of how your eyes work, or even how the brain records

information, but how the whole phenomenally complex process operates. Such abstract and involved issues rarely intrude on our everyday lives. We read or watch or do something and learn from the experience and that, as the saying goes, it that.

It is such hard work to consider issues like the relationship between language and knowing. Most of us lack the knowledge, time or skill to even begin. However, such barriers should not reduce our interest in difficult questions, especially when there are thinkers like Jerome Bruner who can bring the results of their comprehensive studies to us in clear, energetic language. Bruner shows in his newest book, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, that the effort needed to study such large, abstract questions is worthwhile.

Bruner has long sought the key to the relationship between language and knowing. Although he is recognized as an important developmental psychologist, he also has the rare ability of the philosopher to elevate discussions to the level of what it means to be human. Of course, nothing is more uniquely human than our capacity for utilizing language to determine and understand our circumstances.

Bruner's most recent work with Harvard University's Project Zero research into the relationship between artistry, language, and culture generated enormous expectation and promise.

In *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, Bruner delivers on the promise, accomplishing three significant goals. First, he presents the results of his research into important aspects of developmental psychology. Second, Bruner has gathered and synthesized a much larger body of relevant thought, from a great many of the world's outstanding theorists in very diverse fields, to shed new light on the entire language process and its specific application in literature. Third, Bruner's work in this book provides a secure new base from which further exploration can be carried out. All the bricks of this intellectual edifice, no matter how widely scattered their points of origin, have been solidly mortared together, and the whole has greater strength by virtue of having been put together by a thinker of Bruner's prominence.

At its highest level, AM, PW represents a new approach, a new view of how the mind works. The author guides the reader carefully along the way, writing about the most complex

research into the language process in his own clear and energetic language. The reader never feels pulled or pushed along awkwardly, but rather simply follows step by step. The view is fascinating.

There are three major areas. Each is composed of two or more essays originally written between 1980 and 1984, now rewritten and realigned as parts of a comprehensive whole.

Part I, Two Natural Kinds begins with ages-old questions concerning the problems of multiple interpretations or meanings in literature. These essays do not provide answers, but suggest new approaches to asking questions. Bruner contends that in literature, the plot, (composed of a line of incidents) and the themes (composed of a pattern of meaning) continually interact so that the reader must respond by adjusting understanding while continuing to read. The reader changes through the process. Bruner distinguishes between what he calls "actual" and "virtual" text. The actual, or printed text causes the reader to *perform* by creating a virtual, or interpreted text.

Reading a good story and performing the meanings of the virtual text represent a way of thinking, a system of description and explanation very different from another mode, that of the well-formed argument, the logico-scientific or the formal mathematical system of description and explanation. Bruner calls the second mode of thought *paradigmatic* and the literary mode of thought *narrative*. The paradigmatic mode achieves truth through proof: *if x, then y*. The narrative mode achieves lifelikeness through the appearance of truth: *Romeo died, then Juliet*. "Great fiction, like great mathematics, requires the transformation of intuitions into expressions in a symbolic system -- natural language or a more artificialized form of it." (The paradigmatic mode can prove truths once they have been formulated, but not until then: *if x* must first be intuited. It may shock us that Newton and Einstein created their respective theories of gravity and relativity suddenly, as whole pictures, not mathematical symbols, yet we expect that kind of sudden whole creation of our authors.)

In the narrative mode, the action includes a consciousness, which knows, feels, thinks about presupposed circumstances. These presuppositions imply multiple meanings when they are triggered through complex

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language transformations (verb forms which include the psychological process in their actions): Tom Sawyer seems to enjoy whitewashing the fence. Bruner describes this process as "subjunctivizing reality [through language by] triggering presuppositions."

Readers also have a strategy and a repertoire that they bring to bear on a text. The reader's strategy determines how the presuppositions of the virtual text are reconciled with the reader's repertoire of possible human realities.

These subjunctive realities, created for and by the reader, exist among many possible realities, many possible worlds. "It is far more important, for appreciating the human condition, to understand the ways human beings construct their worlds" than it is to compare them to a concept of a fundamental, objective reality. Artists create possible worlds through metaphor, which functions as a comparison that transforms the givens, the conventional presuppositions, as the actual text is transformed into the virtual text. Scientists also engage in a wide ranging variety of world making, (sometimes even transforming the givens for description and explanation, as in current theoretical physics). The proof of a scientific theory achieves "a universality through context independence..., invariant across human intentions and human plights." The appearance of truth of a work of art achieves a universality through "context sensitivity, ...understanding the world as it reflects the requirements of living in it." Considering *Tom Sawyer* and $E = mc^2$, each is a comparison between the variable and the given, and experiencing each creates a transformed world. There are many possible worlds from which to choose.

Part II, Language and Reality, begins with an examination of the ways in which the social, interactive nature of human beings requires a complex set of shared assumptions and beliefs about mechanisms, results, intentions, definitions, and so on. The process of these transactions is negotiated by "the capacity of language to create and stipulate realities of its own, ...by warning, by encouraging, by naming, and by the manner in which words invite us to create 'realities' in the world to correspond with them, ...for example, the law, gross national product, antimatter, the Renaissance." (The law, for example, creates corresponding realities, such as legislatures, courts, police, jails, and rehabilitation centers.) Indi-

vidual behavior in a human culture depends upon extensive negotiation of agreement for the transactions to take place, comparable to interpreting an ambiguous text in literature. In this sense, interpreting the literature of our culture seems to provide "a map of possible roles and of possible worlds in which action, thought, and self-definition are permissible (or desirable)..., the major link between our own sense of self and our sense of others in the social world around us."

As individuals, and as a whole culture, human beings interpret given circumstances in different ways at different times, for example in ways dependent upon the age of the interpreter. "Contrary to common sense, there is no unique 'real world' that pre-exists and is independent of human mental activity and human symbolic language; (but) what we call the world is a product of some mind whose symbolic procedures construct the world." The primary difference between arts and sciences is not the conflict between objectivity and subjectivity. It is rather a difference in the use of symbol systems, but both attempt to understand the world by creating a version of it with a symbolic language. (A mathematical version and a biological version can seem to differ as greatly as a sculptural and a musical version.) In every version, the reality is what we stipulate, rather than find, and what we make of it in thought, action, and emotion. "We know the world in different ways, from different stances, and each of the ways in which we know it produces different structures, or representations, or, indeed, 'realities' ... We give different 'reality' status to experiences we create from our differently formed encounters with the world.... We place a canonical value on certain stances that yield certain forms of knowledge, certain possible worlds." The rational, logical, scientific, paradigmatic worlds now seem to

dominate Western cultures, yet multiple versions of reality, or forms that reality can take, or possible worlds, can be accepted as independently truthful, despite the apparent contradictions at the heart of such tasks as determining school curriculum. (We accept and try to understand the truthful coexistence of biology and friendship, psychology and justice, physics and music.)

In *Part III, Acting in Constructed Worlds*, Bruner explores the tangible effects of language on the multiple social worlds we construct. "A culture itself comprises an ambiguous text that is constantly in need of interpretation by those who participate in it." The constant recreation of our culture through reinterpretation and renegotiation of its multiple meanings establishes the concept of culture as a forum for that process whereby "language creates social reality." There are three forms in which we structure experiences, from which we construct our many realities: the experience of the senses; the symbolically encoded experience we gain through interacting with our social world; and the vicarious experience we achieve in the act of reading. The narrative mode of thought in our culture's literature is essential in teaching us how to interpret, negotiate, and understand our evolving culture. When developmental psychology becomes an ever more active influence in the interpretation of our culture, the theory of the evolution of human beings as a species seems to enlarge. Not only genes, but culture as well is responsible for the development of brain function. "The literary artist ... becomes an agent in the evolution of mind -- but not without the co-optation of the reader as his fellow author."

In *AM*, P.W. Jerome Bruner has set himself a seemingly impossible task, as all explorers do. He rarely delivers less than he promised, and often more than we have expected. His focus, however, is limited by its bias toward a paradigmatic, logical-scientific approach, even when evaluating the narrative mode of thought. Bruner counts the number of verb transformations in literature. It seems an odd and limiting analytical tool for someone who has argued that literature is by nature metaphorical. A more holistic process for the analysis of literature would seem appropriate, given Bruner's theories.

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