Book Reviews

A History of Western Morals. Crane Brinton. Harcourt, Brace, New York, 1959. x + 502 pp. $7.50.

It is always a pleasure to see a thoroughbred professional at work. Whatever may be wrong or weak in what he does—for a professional remains mortal and fallible, despite what laity and profession may at times believe — he knows what he is about and does not fumble. Professional training may reduce a man's stature, repress and dwarf his genius, so that he is less able to formulate startling truths, but one is at least sure that his errors and bathos will be of the accepted kind, which merges conveniently with truth and in its way supports truth until the time when the convention changes.

Crane Brinton's bold attempt to write in one volume the history of western morals shows him off as a magnificent professional. He moves with ease among the books, ideas, and persons that encumber three thousand years of western history, and puts each in its place sooner or later, with just the nod or pat that his ambitious scheme required. An epithet here, a comparison there, a footnote directing to an opinion or a study, a quotation from a text or one about a thinker or a thought—all these props of confidence or aids to verisimilitude are carried forward in the stream of the author's narrative without seeming to slow it up or alter its substance.

It is of necessity a peculiar narrative, since the subject is one that lies mainly outside public events. Ideas, conceivably, can be treated like events; they have a genesis and lead to consequences. But how can one impart a like sense of movement to the description of human traits which manifest themselves as habits—sometimes trivial—and which are diffused among the multitudes rather than concentrated in striking exemplars? The morals of the Dark Ages, the morals of the Renaissance—what can these phrases mean, once we have excluded moral *theories* and those moral acts that are conspicuous because uncommon?

Brinton has answered these awkward questions as the antimetaphysician is said to have shown the possibility of motion by moving. Brinton describes and discusses what he calls "conduct," from ancient Egypt to yesterday, by the simple expedient of having something to say about the apparent assumptions, the wills and acts, the social arrangements, and the ethical judgments of the peoples and periods recognized in political history.

When I say that he gives movement to these rapid and varied *aperçus* by presenting them as his impressions and his conclusions, I do not mean to suggest that he is egotistical or capricious. Rather, I mean that he adopts the simplest and best pedagogical device, which is to speak in the first person as one who has read and thought, rather than as an oracle or teletype machine. Indeed, Brinton's book is a gigantic lecture, in which "I" recurs naturally and effectively as the associative principle amid the discontinuous facts, intuitions, and conjectures. At times, the lecturing technique is carried to the point of self-consciousness, as when a footnote withdraws a qualifier in the text or throws doubt on a conclusion just stated: Brinton is thinking before his class, and warning them of his biases or improvisations.

In keeping with this stance, the diction of the book is colloquial. The French word *vulgarisation* properly describes the work, in that the term implies a desire to interest and instruct any reader of good will, often by conciliating his prejudices and ignorances as a first step to refining his views. The language of this rapprochement is therefore that of conversation, but since the chief modern prejudice takes the form of suspecting what is high, good, or great, the tone of the *vulgarisateur* is depreciatory. And so we find it in Brinton. Just as he self-consciously debunks himself in certain footnotes, so with a word he demolishes pretensions even before they are made. It is part reassurance, part entertainment. Thus, apropos of Homeric Greek life, we are given an enlivening aside: "There are the individual crotchety interpretations. Samuel Butler, the Victorian rebel against a Victorian father, wrote a book to prove the *Odyssey* was written by a woman." When one knows that Butler judged his weak and stupid mother as severely as he judged his stubborn and selfish father, one can see that the remark about Butler's interpretation of the *Odyssey* is irrelevant; and a first-hand knowledge of Butler's painstaking scholarly argument shows that whatever it may be called, crotchety is inadequate. Still, at that point in Brinton's narrative, some "relief" was needed—and supplied.

Without suggesting that these repeated intrusions of the modern, the ironic, the derisive are flaws to be removed, one may properly ask whether the work as a whole justifies its title and if so, whether it is a contribution to or a mere reexposition of the subject.

Perhaps the subject is an impossible one to treat. The needed materials are lacking, and a consistent handling of those available is very difficult. I, for one, start persuaded of this difficulty and near impossibility, and Brinton's book, I think, confirms the view. Whereas up to the end of the Middle Ages, Brinton deals in broad strokes with conduct and its premises in codes and religions, thereafter he sinks deeper and deeper into the magma we now call Culture. It is then ideas and philosophies that chiefly occupy him—Darwin, Weber, and Toynbee—rather than the behavior of groups and representative men.

It is only fair to add that at intervals throughout the book one encounters sections upon the sexual morality of the period. But as the author is the first to say, a true account of morals in this limited sense is hard to come by. And he is aware that the rules governing the appetites form but a small part of the domain of conduct. If literature, despite its preoccupation, gives us but an imperfect view of the relations of the sexes, we can hardly hope to find in either our ordinary or professional reading the evidence we seek about political, social, financial, intellectual, and spiritual morality. Or I should

rather say: no one has yet begun to reread the sources with these subjects in mind. Letters, diaries, state papers, business records must be consulted anew before we can say that we know or that we cannot know how people generally behaved in these matters at any time or place.

Meanwhile, Brinton's book will have to serve as a general introduction to the terrain and its pitfalls. The author's colleagues will point out some errors of fact (for example, Shaw's ascribing the poverty of the poor to a deficiency of the Life Force), some neglect of special studies (for example, Percy Scholes on the Puritans and Music), and some lapses of judgment (for example, the supposition that Matthew Arnold wrote "in those rosy Victorian times"). But accepting the effort to write a history of morals in the same spirit of courageous modesty as the author's, professional and lay readers alike must recognize in Brinton's book the first outlines of a great subject. If Lecky's similar work covering a relatively short span gave historians some notion of what could be done, Brinton's gives, by its oversights as well as its merits, an equally good notion of what ought to be done.

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American Universities and Federal Research. Charles V. Kidd. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1959. xii + 272 pp. $6.

The expansion of federal support for scientific research is inevitable. The reason is that the traditional functions of government — maintaining order, providing for national defense, and promoting general welfare — can no longer be carried out without a vast understructure of scientific knowledge. The federal government undertakes to secure a large part of the scientific knowledge it needs by contracting with the colleges and universities of the country to carry out research projects. This book addresses itself to the central problems created by these contractual relationships—problems of reconciling the federal government's need for scientific knowledge with the traditional nature and activities of higher education.

These contract relations have been sources of anxieties both to government agencies and to universities, and a number of inquiries and reports have addressed themselves to the subject. It is no disparagement of the previous studies to say that this book, itself profiting from its predecessors, supersedes them and will become a starting point for all future discussions of the subject. Kidd writes with the authority he has gained not only from his associations and contacts with such government agencies as the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, and the Department of Agriculture, but from extensive contact with universities and from travel and observation abroad. In addition to this basic equipment of confident knowledge, the author brings to the discussion a refreshing degree of courage and candor, infusing with stimulating opinion and observation the statistics which are so often the lifeless material of such studies.

It would be difficult to improve on the author's statement of the central problems created by federal support of research in the universities. Such support, he believes, has "set in motion irreversible forces that are affecting the nature of universities, altering their capacity to teach, changing their financial status, modifying the character of parts of the federal administrative structure, establishing new political relations, and changing the way research itself is organized." No one would deny that these are formidable consequences, and that the author is justified in saying "the wisdom with which these forces are guided and controlled by the universities and by the federal government will have a major influence not only on the capacity of the nation to defend itself, but on the economic growth of the nation and the preservation of the essential values that underly our society."

To the exploration of this thesis Kidd brings logical analysis and organization, as well as a vast amount of pertinent information. Here are some of the questions he undertakes to answer: What research does the federal government want done? What funds does it have to support such research, and how and by what agencies are these funds distributed? What conditions are imposed upon universities which seek or accept grants, and are these conditions compatible with proper university functions? What is the effect on universities of their growing dependence upon federal research support as reflected in their teaching, their independent research, and their self-direction? How does the flow of federal funds into universities affect university finances generally? What is the effect of federal research contracts on university organization and operation? What are the consequences of federal support for graduate students, and how does such support affect the supply of future scholars? How does the favoring of science affect other sections of the curriculum? How, above all, is the relationship affecting the freedom of the universities?

Everyone in government or in the universities who is concerned about such matters can only be grateful to Kidd for the factual data, the considered opinions, and the actual experiences which have been assembled to answer not only these broad questions but dozens of others more specific. The university administrator who has been worried about the effect on teaching of the emphasis on research, the distortion of faculty salaries, and growing overhead costs will find his problem clearly stated here, as well as some worthwhile observations for his comfort or guidance.

An outstanding feature of the author's treatment is the concern he shows for the basic values of our society, democracy, equality of opportunity, and particularly intellectual freedom, as these values may be affected by the changing relations between the federal government and the universities. Kidd regards freedom as the one characteristic which makes universities different from all other research organizations. Policies, either from within or without, which have the effect of restricting freedom can only be suspect. Indeed, one gets the impression that Kidd is a little more concerned about the freedom of the universities than he is about whether the federal government secures the fruits of scientific research—a conclusion which, if correct, can only be entertained when the needs of government are not overwhelmingly urgent. Fortunately, says Kidd, the policies governing the administration of federal research programs are no great threat to the freedom of the universities. These policies, however, as Paul E. Klopsteg says in this book's excellent foreword,