

BOOK REVIEWS

THE MEANING OF HUMAN HISTORY. By Morris R. Cohen. La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Co., 1947. Pp. x, 304. \$4.00.

Morris Cohen's volume is an application of his realist philosophy to the field of history. Who first perceived the possibility of the realm of speculation known as the philosophy of history is a matter of dispute; but since the appearance of Vico's writings on that subject it has been impossible to deny that a legitimate domain of inquiry has been marked out. The subject from the latter part of the eighteenth century onwards has been investigated by important Continental thinkers in all countries, and its bibliography is now extensive. It has had little or no attraction, however, for English and American students. Until the recent work of Oakeshott and Collingwood the English attitude toward the field has been typified by Bosanquet's belief that history was not a valid mode of thought. In the United States, apart from the studies of Teggart and Henry and Brooks Adams, none of whose volumes was put forward from the point of view of technical philosophy, there has been little else save attempts to popularize Hegel, Spencer, and Comte.

On the philosophical side Cohen brought to his task in the present volume an equipment unexcelled by any other American thinker of his generation. He wrote little political, economic, and social history, but his writings are full of appeals to those realms, and the lessons he draws from them show the degree to which he had mastered their processes. In the field of history proper his specialty was the history of science from the point of view of the import of scientific ideas and the meaning of their interconnections. In the present volume Cohen has made abundant use of this equipment. His book is full of productive reflections, like the great study of Herder, which, in that respect, has never been surpassed. His argument, moreover, is developed always with due regard to system, and with the most careful scrutiny of his own assumptions. We are thus presented with an entire view of the subject, based on a foundation that was worked out with unusual care during a lifetime of reflection.

As a subject of inquiry the philosophy of history attempts, in Cohen's view, to answer such questions as: "What is the nature of historical knowledge?" "What kind of reality should we attach to the categories of history, *e.g.*, temporal events and their causes?" "What is the significance or meaning of the human drama as it unfolds itself in the course of historical studies?" The special point of view that distinguishes the philosophy of history, in Cohen's opinion, is that it represents an understanding of the whole course of history, seen as a continuous unitary play, in which the successive generations or eras have their roles. This conception was unknown to the early Greek historians, who were the first to think of history as a science, *i.e.*, a form of controlled inquiry. Herodotus believed that the forces operative in history were the product of divine intervention and were unintelligible and unpredictable. Aristotle thought of history as a chronicle of events which occurred in an order in time but with no necessary connection between them.

Cohen traces the root idea of the contemporary conception of history to the Biblical account of Jahveh and the creation of the world as part of a divine plan. However this may be, it is generally held that the idea of universal history developed from Alex-

ander's conquest in the fourth century B.C. and was encouraged by Stoicism. This opinion is supported by the works of Polybius and Diodorus of Sicily. Polybius wrote universal history in the sense that he concerned himself with all the events in the classical world contemporary with the Roman world conquest, which was his central theme; Diodorus' universal history was even more inclusive and extended back to mythical times. It is from the fragments of Diodorus that we can estimate the knowledge of the Orient possessed by the classical peoples. It has also been suggested that under the influence of the idea of eternity the Christian mind was drawn inevitably to the theory of universal history. It is certainly true that the theory of universal history is found in the writings of St. Paul, who divided history into the three periods of Adam, Moses, and Christ, and who thought of it as a plan worked out by God even to the extent of devising the Roman Empire as a necessary causative force in a larger scheme. By the time of Eusebius, the most important of the early church historians, the idea had been fully developed; history was shown on a universal scale, and its processes were revealed as parts of a carefully worked out plan.

Although the question is not free from doubt, we can assume that the object of history is to tell us what happened and why. As a form of research it thus leads to knowledge and is, therefore, in the Platonic tradition, valuable on its own account. Has it an additional value? Cohen answers that it widens our horizons and supplies data on the basis of which we are able more intelligently to appraise the assumptions of our age, both ethical and factual. Gibbon tells us that the great Theodosius broadened his experience by reading history. The greater the perspective in which we see our present difficulties the more likely are we to see them in their true character. This view in substance was first suggested by Kant and has not been seriously challenged, except at the metaphysical level, since he proposed it. Metaphysically it is argued that the historical experience is subjective, a personal experience of the historian's own mind, and therefore events, as the subject of historical knowledge, are not objective and hence are not knowable. To Cohen such a view is completely untenable. Elsewhere he has set forth fully his grounds for believing in the reality of abstractions, and here he only touches upon the subject. He admits that the historian's picture of the past is man-made but only to the same extent as a photograph is man-made. Since the perspectives of historians are not the same, their accounts of particular events will differ, just as photographs of a mountain taken from various points will differ. This is no reason, however, to deny objectivity to the mountain or to the subject matter of history. To hold, Cohen observes, that my great-great-grandfather exists, gets born, marries, enters business, dies, only when I think of him is an absurdity.

Cohen takes up one by one the major problems of the philosophy of history—its relation to metaphysics, the role of importance and possibility in history, the place of causation, the geographic, biologic and "great man" factors, the institutional approach, patterns of historic development, and the connections between history and ethics. Apart from his learning and the acuteness with which he reveals the alternative answers, the great value of the discussion is the systematic manner in which the field is treated. Each problem is seen in relation to the others and the proposed solutions make a consistent whole. Although Cohen always regarded himself as much nearer in his outlook to Aristotle than to Plato, the present volume shows his close affiliation with two marked Platonic traits. As in some dialogues of Plato, Cohen's discussion is apt to end, if the evidence is confused and the arguments inconclusive, with a tentative answer. To Mill this critical and negative side of Plato was the important one, and no one in our own time has stressed more strongly than Cohen the danger of over-hasty dogmatism. Again, Cohen, like Plato, was the foe of the rigid system. He was himself, he said "a stray

dog unchained to any metaphysical kennel." This did not mean, any more than with Plato, that he did not have pronounced metaphysical views. He only believed that the flux of things was too varied to be caught within the net of any single formula; that some of the most opposed philosophies had each of them some vision of at least an aspect of the truth.

Although some of the answers suggested by Cohen to the problems of the philosophy of history are admirably provisional, others have important consequences. He views with suspicion the idea of laws peculiar to history, of the type which asserts an invariant series of stages comparable to the stages in the growth of an organism. Nevertheless he holds that a conception of causation as equivalent to the sum of necessary and sufficient conditions is an indispensable idea in history. This view results in what Cohen calls the "linkage of human events" and is directly opposed to the theory which holds that history consists of a series of isolated facts. The Cambridge ancient, medieval, and modern histories were constructed on the latter assumption, and the various sections of it were accordingly handed over for writing to historians of many shades of opinion. The facts they reported were assembled by the board of editors very much as if they were a jig-saw puzzle. But since there was no dominant point of view, no attempt to link the events, the parts of the histories never fell into a consistent pattern. From Cohen's position this type of historical writing, whatever else it might be, was not history.

Cohen retired from New York City College in 1938, with plans for the publication of ten books. Before his death in 1947 two of them had appeared, *A Preface to Logic* (1944) and *The Faith of a Liberal* (1946). *The Meaning of Human History* is the first to be printed posthumously and six or seven more are projected. The scrupulous editorial care given to the present work is assurance that the succeeding volumes in the hands of the same editor will meet the meticulous standards that Cohen himself never failed to apply.

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THE CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN FAMILY. By Ernest R. Groves and Gladys Hoagland Groves. Chicago: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1947. Pp. 838. \$4.50.

This is an absorbing, well-written, comprehensive, carefully documented volume, perhaps a bit overwhelming in its wealth of detail and thoroughness of execution. In 1934 the authors published *The American Family*, of which this book is a rewritten edition.

The object of the book is "to give the reader an understanding of American family life that will help him to handle his own problems whether they are associated with pre-marriage, marriage, or parenthood experiences." It is the continual realization by the reader that the problems are his own that makes the book disturbing and yet engrossing. The reader is no mere aloof observer. He is a participant inevitably contrasting his own experiences with those under discussion. Yet at the same time "the family as a social institution has been lifted out of emotional controversy and has become for serious men and women a subject deserving scientific interpretation and objective study . . ." The appendices supply material in the following categories: "Literature Illustrating Family Experiences"; "Topics for Reports and References"; "Suggestions to the Instructor"; and bibliographies.

The comprehensive nature of the text can best be indicated by a few brief references to the four parts:

Part I, "The Development of the Family," traces the family's social significance and