

despair, as all certainties—even the putative postmodern certainty of exposing all certainties—become steadily bereft of intellectual or existential justification. By contrast, Vico, though a “genealogist of modernity” not unlike Nietzsche, kept one foot resolutely in the Catholic-Augustinian tradition. This tradition supplied him with the normative intellectual resources to offer qualified esteem for both classical and modern thought, while also making him acutely aware of their limitations and overweening pretensions.

If the modern or “Enlightenment project” has failed, as a chorus of post-modernist voices tell us, then we are indeed left in a situation where we must choose a different path. However, for Miner that new path immediately forks and we must choose again, not necessarily between Nietzsche and Aristotle, as Alasdair MacIntyre famously claimed in his much-discussed *After Virtue* (1981) but rather between Vico and Nietzsche. For both, unlike Aristotle, have borne witness to modernity’s beneficial and baneful aspects. However, the two *unmodern* paths posited by Miner lead, finally, in radically different directions: to Rome or at least to the seat of the former Bishop of Hippo (in the case of Miner’s Vico) or to the sanitarium (in the case of Nietzsche).

These are of course grand claims for a slender volume, and one might naturally wonder whether Miner’s extensive time with Vico’s texts have led him to magnify their author’s importance beyond the pale of prudence. Is Miner himself guilty, in other words, of what Vico called the “conceit of scholars”? To a degree, perhaps. Still, Miner has given us nourishing food for thought, and this work deserves attention, not least for Miner’s meticulous scholarship. If it does not in the end convince one that Vico is humanity’s last best hope this side of modernity, it should at least rekindle an interest in this engaging, often neglected Neapolitan thinker. In particular, the book helps render intel-

ligible the theological underpinnings of Vico’s thought, the breadth and drama of his intellectual endeavor, and the similarities (and crucial differences) between Vico’s thought and those ubiquitous, corrosive strains of “genealogy” afoot today that we recognize as the offspring of Nietzsche.

Rethinking East German Education

Ewa M. Thompson

**Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse:
A History of Eastern German
Education, 1945-1995**, by John
Rodden. *Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002. xxix + 506 pp.*

THE FIRST PART OF THIS loosely structured book covers the years 1945-1989 and provides a running commentary on a series of policy undertakings in East Germany, the aim of which was to engineer men’s souls, to use Maxim Gorky’s phrase. The second part covers the liberation from Soviet occupation and brings the narrative to the mid-1990s. This second part is based on interviews with former East Germans, starting with intellectuals who had leadership ambitions, through engaging grandmothers who humanize German history for the reader, to those educated Germans whose goal had been to survive as respectable and well-to-do members of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) society. The narrative often branches out into East German intellectual history, although as Rodden himself admits, the

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cupboard was rather bare in this regard.

Rodden distinguishes several periods in East German education. After the Second World War, amidst the chaos and uncertainty of the post-war years, remnants of the traditional German education remained in schools, and some former teachers were allowed to continue teaching. A transition period followed: new teachers were recruited from social classes that had not previously aspired to teaching, and the older generation was let go under the pretext that they had served the Nazis. In the third period (1951-56) the grip on the schools tightened and the textbook industry was fully appropriated by the state. Rodden points out that among the immediate results was a high student failure rate (up to 30 percent) and a high teacher turnover rate (between 25 and 45 percent annually). The fourth period (1956-61) was characterized by a struggle between hardliners and reformers within the Party, and therefore within the educational system as well. By the end of the 1950s, the Party leaders felt sufficiently confident to proclaim an end to bourgeois democracy and the beginning of real socialism, with education oriented toward producing true communists ready to finish the building of socialist society. This new generation was supposed to be well versed in technology and fully capable of implementing socialist ideals.

Rodden further records the “changing of the guard” in the early 1970s, when the ailing Walter Ulbricht was replaced by Erich Honecker, the builder of the Berlin Wall. Under Ulbricht the GDR was admitted to the United Nations and achieved modest prosperity. In this context, gifted children and youth enjoyed special privileges. In return, these gifted youth became record-setting athletes or European-class scientists who were much in demand by their Soviet masters. Not much happened in East German education between the fall of the Berlin Wall and reuni-

fication—it sort of wilted away.

The narrative perks up with stories of East German intellectuals: Ernst Bloch, Wolfgang Harich, Alfred Kantorowicz. Rodden speaks with a measure of sympathy about such intellectuals, who often left the country when the revolution began to devour its own children. I cannot but remember that Bloch left when he was forcibly retired from the university; Kantorowicz, when a similar fate threatened him. Harich was sentenced to prison, but he recanted in a most abject fashion. Rodden credits Bloch with preventing total Stalinization of the East German universities. In his view, Bloch was “a great, outspoken humanistic professor” whose presence in the GDR kept alive “the flame of freethinking and disinterested scholarship.” Reconciling this praise with Bloch’s Stalinism (which Rodden does not deny) requires more finessing than I am willing to accept. Leszek Kolakowski, (incorrectly identified by Rodden as an unreconstructed Marxist), the author of *Main Currents of Marxism* (1978), summarizes Bloch’s political orientation in these terms: “his political sympathies were wholly on the side of Stalinism” and he seldom lost an opportunity of “praising the superiority of the new order.” In *Daz Prinzip Hoffnung* (1954-59), published in the GDR, Bloch spoke of “American murderers” and the imperialists’ desire to exterminate the unemployed; and he described capitalist freedom as “freedom of the workers to starve.”

The book’s imperfections stem from its narrow perspective. The narrative is divorced from the general picture of the Soviet bloc and from previous history: it unfolds in a curiously ahistorical vacuum where only Germans and, occasionally, Jews and Russians live. At times it becomes a summary of the German press with slogans and quotation from textbooks and educational publications added to it. Much of what the author says is generally known to students of communist systems,

yet it is suggested that the situation presented was unique to the GDR.

While the East German version of Soviet rule had its local color, a great deal of what it involved in education was routine in the entire Soviet-occupied area. Among routine policies was the firing of teachers and the replacement of them by hastily taught workers and peasants. Similarly routine were compulsory courses in Russian language, history, and literature, not to speak of Marxism-Leninism. The names of Pavlov, Lysenko, and Makarenko were imposed on all schoolchildren in Central and Eastern Europe, and not just on the Germans. Favoritism of the party members' children and exclusion from higher education of the former upper classes were likewise common. Sloganeering was present everywhere: in the classroom, in factories, in the streets, at rallies. High school students of both sexes had to undergo military training. Other widespread policies included the closing of schools run by religious orders, a slew of new state holidays, and the "Olympiads" for students of Russian and mathematics. Last but not least, shortages of consumer goods were chronic, but in East Germany they were comparatively mild. While suggesting that educational policies were particularly harsh in the GDR, the author passes over some important issues which made East Germany different from other "people's democracies."

The GDR had seven times as many informers per capita as had Nazi Germany. In 1975, 65 percent of all reports from Soviet bloc security services received by Moscow came from the Stasi. Party membership in East Germany was second only to Romania: as late as 1988, 14 percent of East Germans belonged to the Communist Party. Surely such figures are more significant than the various party proclamations which Rodden quotes in detail, and they should have engendered historical reflection on why the Soviets were more successful than elsewhere in impos-

ing Sovietization on the GDR. It is hardly possible to talk about East German education without taking into account the long history of the German *Drang nach Osten* grounded in that society's intolerance of those who lived east of the German border.

Another major difference between the GDR and other "people's democracies" was that the East Germans enjoyed access to West German wealth through family remittances (resembling those of the Cuban émigrés in Florida) and through policies of the FRG aimed at not leaving the eastern brethren too far behind (*e.g.*, in collecting road tax, West Germans treated the East German mark on par with deutschmark even though its value was a mere fraction of the deutschmark). This, in spite of the Berlin Wall. Rodden passes over in silence these significant components of East German prosperity and therefore education.

While the East Germans officially accepted the Oder-Neisse border (declared to be the Polish-German border by Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt), they bickered about it with the Polish government for decades. Sheldon Anderson's *A Cold War in the Soviet Bloc: Polish-East German Relations, 1945-1962* (2000) is a must-read in this regard. German nationalism was a significant element of East German education, and it included the worship of Prussianism, with its concomitant anti-Catholicism. Tracing the presence of this "religious" orientation in textbooks would have been useful. But Anderson's book is not even listed in Rodden's bibliography. There is no mention of the Europa-Universität Viadrina, a university created after German unification and meant to counteract the traditional German hostility to Poles.

There are some small errors and questionable identifications in the text; they too are a result of "screening out" subjects and problems. Stalin's alleged saying about socialism fitting Germany like a

saddle fits a cow is an embarrassing lapse. Stalin made this comment about Poland and not about Germany. Rodden does not seem to realize that Poland fought against Nazi Germany *and* against Soviet Russia in the Second World War. The book all too often takes for granted what should not be taken for granted, such as drawing an equation between the fate of the common people under Nazism and communism. The author asks, "What did it mean to live under communism—and, before that, Nazism?"—as if any equation could be drawn here. Nazism was Germany's own choice: they voted it in, they were masters in their own country, their regime was of their own making. Communism was brought in on the tanks of the Red Army. This elementary distinction often escapes American conservatives because the United States has never been occupied, let alone colonized, by a foreign power.

It is also debatable whether one can attribute the liberation of East Germany in 1989 to a spontaneous revolt. The East Germans were among the last to revolt. Let us rehearse the dates: after the March 1989 "round table" negotiations with the communists, Solidarity was re-legalized in Poland, and on June 4, 1989, semi-free elections took place in that country. Solidarity won 99 out of 100 seats in the Senate. In October 1989, the Hungarians dissolved the old Communist Party and likewise reached for freedom. The Berlin Wall fell in November.

The author's task was not an easy one. The history of East German education does not abound in dramatic events, heroic stances, or spectacular resistance to communism. It is to Rodden's credit that he fashioned a story out of this unexciting reality. The overall impression is that East German education was a sordid enterprise, unredeemed by post-hoc reflections of the articulate members of GDR society with whom Rodden conducted lengthy conversations.

Reverence for the Eternal

Jude P. Dougherty

Real Ethics: Reconsidering the Foundations of Morality, by John M. Rist, *New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. 304 pp.*

REAL ETHICS is a hard-hitting critique of contemporary moral theory from a realist point of view by John M. Rist, Professor Emeritus of philosophy and classics at the University of Toronto. His previous works include *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (1977), *The Mind of Aristotle* (1989), and *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (1997). Addressing what he calls the deception, equivocation, outright lying, and humbug that pass for contemporary moral discourse—humbug that extends from the universities into the marketplace, legislative assemblies, and juridical bodies—Rist offers a defense of traditional Christian morality grounded in classical metaphysics. In forceful language he writes that there is "no need to look in the public lavatory for the lowest common denominator." The habits of what was low life morality have become the norms of moral and political discourse. "In the wake of any clear sense of what 'low life' might suggest, intellectuals are becoming 'downwardly mobile' and while losing their grip on an overall concept of virtue, often see such a direction as in itself virtuous and high minded or sentimentally as solidarity with the marginalized or dispossessed."

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