

"must" reading for all politicians aspiring to public office as members of political parties any distance to the Right of center; if read by those from the Left, it is more likely to induce apoplexy, and perhaps should be recommended for that reason.

One final comment, less a criticism than a suggestion (because this reviewer hopes and expects to read more of Davidson's work in the future), concerns the tactical point of view. *The Squeeze* is more than persuasive; it possesses a plethora of evangelical fervor. But it is just a bit too heavy on the Hell, fire, and brimstone side, and too light on the delights of Heaven and salvation. To quote an author to whom Davidson avowedly owes much:

...We must make the building of a free society once more an intellectual adventure, a deed of courage.... The main lesson which the true liberal must learn from the success of the socialists is that it was their courage to be Utopian which gained them the support of the intellectuals and therefore an influence on public opinion which is daily making possible what only recently seemed utterly remote.¹

Reading *The Squeeze* convinces me that its author is eminently capable of attracting converts. Perhaps he could be even more successful by greater emphasis on the rewards of virtue as well as by inveighing on the wages of sin.

Reviewed by ARTHUR KEMP

¹F. A. Hayek, "The Intellectuals and Socialism," *The University of Chicago Law Review* (Spring, 1949).

Progress or Providence?

History of the Idea of Progress, by Robert Nisbet, *New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1980. xi + 370 pp. \$16.95.*

ROBERT NISBET is a scholar and thinker of deserved distinction, but this ambitious work, despite much that merits commendation, does not qualify as one of his more impressive efforts. J. M. Cameron calls it "a scissors-and-paste job, and dull one,"¹ but this evaluation seems far too harsh. It is difficult to imagine how anyone could recount the history of an idea without substantial use of scissors and paste, and, by and large, Professor Nisbet's treatment is not dull. Nonetheless, the uneven quality of the book does invite objection.

The volume suffers from the absence of a single, clear-cut, comprehensive statement of the idea whose history is being addressed. A very general and rudimentary definition is given in the Introduction. The second chapter ends with a catalogue of "all of the really vital, essential elements of the Western idea of progress," and, in the ninth chapter, the author lists "five major premises to be found in the idea's history from the Greeks to our day." Since the "vital and essential elements" presented near the beginning of the book are by no means identical with the "five major premises" presented near the end, I shall combine "elements" and "premises" in the following attempt to construct a summary of the idea's constituents as seen by Nisbet:

1. The unfolding, cumulative advancement of mankind, materially and spiritually through time.
2. The idea of time as a unilinear flow, marked by stages or epochs, into which all civilizations, cultures, and peoples, past and present, can be compressed.
3. The conception of social reform rooted in historical awareness, with the notion of conflict of cities, nations, and classes as the motor-spring of the historical process.
4. The belief in the necessary character of history, and in the in-

evitability of some future end or objective characterized by affluence, equity, freedom, and tranquility. 5. Belief in the value of the past, and the conviction of the nobility, even superiority, of Western civilization. 6. Acceptance of the worth of economic and technological growth. 7. Faith in reason and in the kind of scientific and scholarly knowledge that can come from reason alone. 8. Belief in the intrinsic importance of life on this earth.

Nisbet's account contains surprises for readers who may be accustomed to regard the concept of progress as a distinctively modern development dating from the Renaissance: "No single idea has been more important than, perhaps as important as, the idea of progress in Western civilization for nearly three thousand years." Although he concedes that cyclical theories of history were prominent in classical Greek and Roman thought, Nisbet cites passages from numerous writers, from Hesiod through Seneca, to show that classical thinkers also emphasized the cumulative growth in time of knowledge, and the continued advancement of the arts and sciences—and, accordingly, of human well-being. To these beliefs, early Christian philosophers such as Eusebius, Tertullian, and especially Augustine added a notion derived from Jewish millenarianism but extended to encompass the whole of mankind: the ineluctable unfolding of a grand design culminating in man's spiritual perfection and a golden age of happiness on earth. These complementary strands of thought, which together form the two broad foci of the idea of progress, were continued through the Middle Ages. Nisbet, like an increasing number of contemporary scholars, finds that this period, far from being exclusively preoccupied with otherworldly concerns, was rich in artistic, technological, and even juristic creativity, accompanied by an awareness of its debt to the past and its contribution to the possibility of even greater improvement in the future. Medieval thought, moreover,

was captivated by visions of *earthly* paradise, ranging from the ecstatic prophecies of Joachim de Fiore to Dante's plan for a perfect universal monarchy.

It was in the Renaissance, Nisbet avers, that the idea of progress underwent a total temporary eclipse, and he presents a convincing defense of this initially startling judgment. Fundamental to the idea of progress is the premise of historical continuity; the Renaissance represents a radical break with the Middle Ages. Although fifteenth- and sixteenth-century humanists revered the *ancient* past, they had nothing but contempt for the thousand years that lay immediately behind them. Further, their almost slavish acceptance of the theories of cyclical recurrence found in some classical texts, their tendency toward intense subjectivism (*e.g.*, Descartes), and their fascination with fate and the occult made it virtually impossible for the idea of progress even to "exist, much less flourish, in Renaissance context." Nisbet's account of most of these matters, however much it may differ from the conventional wisdom, can probably be taken at face value. On the whole, he argues persuasively and buttresses his assertions with copious quotations. However, since he gives no clue to editions or page numbers, his documentation is not very helpful to the scholar who might wish to examine the quotations in their original setting.

With the Reformation the idea of progress resurfaced and gained new strength in both Protestant and Catholic circles (the latter exemplified by Bossuet and Vico). Nisbet places immense stress upon the influence of Puritan millenarianism in this revival, particularly in connection with the impetus toward the improvement of knowledge and the reform of society. This interpretation strikes me as one-sided. There is, of course, no question that millenarianism may, and in many cases did, encourage progressive activism. Yet it is not without quietist implications that have also had their impact, and has given rise, conversely, to violent, atavistic ruptures with tradition (as in Thomas Münzer and the "Zwickau Fanatics"). Moreover,

progressive activism was historically typical not merely of Puritanism but of Calvinism in general. As Troeltsch makes clear, the militant reforming nature of Calvinism can be accounted for simply as an expression of obedience to that which is understood to be God's sovereign will,² without recourse to millenarianism. In the entire *Institutes*, so far as I have been able to ascertain, the doctrine is mentioned only once, and that disparagingly.³

During the period 1750-1900, says Nisbet, the idea of progress reached its zenith; it became the dominant idea in Western popular as well as scholarly circles, providing the developmental framework for such perceived values as freedom, equality, and popular sovereignty. By this statement Nisbet means that each of these came to be seen, respectively, as not only desirable but "historically necessary, inevitable of eventual achievement." The force of the idea of progress thus lies largely in the fact that "any value that can be made to seem an integral part of historical necessity has a strategic superiority in the area of political and social action." Marxism is doubtless the most obvious case in point, but the author adduces many others.

In a chapter entitled "Progress as Freedom," Nisbet examines a line of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thinkers from Turgot through Herbert Spencer who, in one way or another, viewed individual freedom as the end toward which historical necessity is directed. Conservatives, although perhaps willing enough to accept individual freedom as the chief and possibly the only end toward which the functions of government are legitimately directed, will encounter difficulty in conceiving of it as the *ultimate* goal of the historical process. Freedom is an empty concept unless directed to the service of some further purpose. (In political life the key question is whether the directing is to be done by the individual or by some involuntary collective entity.) This stricture does not apply to all the theorists taken up here, but readers who recognize its soundness will be disap-

pointed by Nisbet's uncritical enthusiasm for the ones to whom it does apply.

It would be bootless for me even to list the many writers considered in this chapter, but I cannot resist commenting on Nisbet's treatment of Henry George. Dealt with, unaccountably, under the heading of "The Founding Fathers," George is rightly described as "brilliant" and "eloquent." As if to substantiate these plaudits, Nisbet trots out that rhapsodic passage in *Progress and Poverty* in which George identifies the anticipated blessings of his proposed reform with "the culmination of Christianity—the city of God on earth, with its walls of jasper and its gates of pearl!"⁴ — a passage that the more sober among his disciples have always admired more for its poetry than for its substance. Remarks Nisbet: "Joachim de Fiore, the Fifth Monarchy Men, Condorcet, William Godwin—all would have understood George's words and rejoiced." While the rhetoric in question does indeed lend itself to such an observation, I find no cause for rejoicing in seeing one of earth's greatest social philosophers thus placed in the company of exotic fantasists and shallow utopians. What makes all this ironic is that despite his evident appreciation of George and *Progress and Poverty*, Nisbet cavalierly dismisses its central thesis as inapplicable today, even as its current relevance is attested to by pronouncements from the Chamber of Commerce of the United States, the National League of Cities, the Tax Foundation, Milton Friedman, etc.

The following chapter, "Progress as Power," deals with a line of totalitarian-oriented thinkers who also tied their respective values to the notion of inevitable linear advance. Rousseau, Hegel, Saint-Simon, Comte, Marx, and Gobineau, who are among the major names in this tradition, serve to remind us that the idea of progress can be "united with faiths most of us in the West find repugnant and hateful." These "corruptions" of the idea of progress Nisbet attributes, in the main, to its separation from its religious roots and objects. But "there is no moral value," he states, "that is not susceptible to corrupt

use," holding that "in its oldest and broadest meaning the idea has been associated far more often with good than with evil." He is convinced that its loss would be a tragedy, for "this idea has done more good over a twenty-five hundred-year period, led to more creativeness in more spheres, and given more strength to human hope and to individual desire for improvement than any other single idea in Western history."

Perhaps. Yet if we learn from the mistakes of the past (and sometimes we do), advances in knowledge create occasions for new mistakes. Faith in the adequacy of human reason to solve all problems, stress on the unremitting growth of material comfort and technology—these components of the idea of progress have played a baneful role in the "revolution of rising expectations" and the pervasive *ressentiment* arising therefrom. The fact is that belief in progress, taken in itself, is neutral. Whether its influence is beneficent or malign depends entirely upon the goals to which it lends psychological support. Today, as the author himself concedes, the dogma of progress, waning in the free world to the point of moribundity, is "strong in the official philosophies or religions of those nations which are the most formidable threats to Western culture...." From this standpoint, Nisbet is, of course, right when he bemoans its dissolution in the West. The resuscitation of the idea in the free world cannot occur apart from a renewal of its spiritual wellsprings. Nisbet manages to hold out tentative hope that such renewal has begun, but his reasoning partakes more of wishful thinking than of convincing evidence.

As Russell Kirk has wisely said, belief "in the idea of progress...is not the same thing as believing in Providence."⁵ He who truly believes in Providence does not require the stimulus of temporal success, either in his own lifetime or in those of later generations, to keep him working manfully amid the encircling darkness. For he is committed to the proposition that, whatever the vicissitudes of history,

...behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow
Keeping watch above His own.

Reviewed by ROBERT V. ANDELSON

¹J. M. Cameron, "Sounding Off," *New York Review of Books*, April 17, 1980. ²Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, trans. Olive Wyon (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1931), pp. 576-691. ³John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, bk. 3, chap. 25. ⁴Henry George, *Progress and Poverty*, bk. 10, chap. 5. ⁵Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1953), p. 203.

Problems of Politicization

The Politicization of Society, edited by Kenneth S. Templeton, Jr.; introduction by R. M. Hartwell, *Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1979. 541 pp. \$10.00.*

IF THERE HAS BEEN endless theoretical uncertainty about the nature and definition of politics, it is hardly surprising that in recent years a multitude of meanings has been attached to the cognate term, "politicization." Although the essays in this volume reflect serious scholarly endeavor, they do not attempt to explore the full range of meaning of this elusive concept, but rather present one aspect or dimension of politicization. The result is a work that stands somewhat uneasily on the borderland between polemic and political science. Nevertheless, the ideological position the book represents is an important one, and it provides a useful starting point for considering the general problem of politicization and its significance for contemporary American politics.