

circles: the Libertarian rejects a nomological explanation of choice because it is incompatible with human freedom in his sense: the Determinist rejects the Libertarian view of freedom because it would allow no nomological explanation of choice. The author ends with a

plea for philosophical dialogue in such disputes, directed at uncovering fundamental differences of value, which would perhaps lead to a deeper understanding by both parties of the issues involved.

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LORD ACTON AND HIS TIMES, by David Mathew. *Eyre & Spottiswoode*, London, 1968. 70s.

It is fortunate that Dr Mathew is not inhibited from writing by his immense knowledge, whereas the subject of this book so clearly was. A mass of reviews, a volume of lectures, the respect of contemporary scholars, attest the enormous erudition of Lord Acton; he has some claim to be the greatest historian who never wrote a History of anything.

His erudition does not exhaust the interest he still inspires, a remarkable phenomenon, for his surviving works make very difficult reading and his one memorable statement, about absolute power involving absolute corruption, is nearly nonsense. But this remark affords a clue to his magnetism; his thought was prophetic. Power was, indeed, misused by the world he knew so widely, but it was for the twentieth century to exhibit the fullest consequences yet seen by mankind of power divorced from that Christian moral rigidity which was the *daemon* of this Catholic nobleman, politician and scholar.

No wonder that his Catholicism puzzled the Mannings among his co-religionists, the Creightons among his separated brethren. In the world of Hans Küng and Karl Barth, he would have found minds of his own Teutonic thoroughness, equally informed by the spirit of Faith. He would have shared with many learned Catholics in a doctrinal and sacramental certainty and indifference to the outcries of less mature minds. He belonged to the climate of Vatican II, not that of Vatican I.

Dr Mathew has fairly entitled this book *Lord Acton and His Times*, for he has sought primarily to illuminate the varied worlds in which Acton moved, while allowing the historian to speak for himself. It is in this that we are most fortunate, for the Archbishop's interests and insights are multiple and exact and, above all, articulate. We are therefore enriched by a whole gallery of portraits, landscapes and interiors, John Morley and Queen Victoria, de Tocqueville and Edward Creighton, the Bavarian lakes and the Shropshire marches, the Board of Admiralty and the Vatican. A noble landowner in England and

Germany, a sometime Member of Parliament and Lord-in-Waiting to the Queen, a power behind Gladstone's throne, Regius Professor at Cambridge, Acton moved among a number of the then centres of world-power.

He belongs, therefore, in time to the titans of the Victorian period; as a writer he moves few imaginations by his actual words, for, as Dr Mathew acutely observes, his use of English, especially of its adjectives, is curiously muffled and unappealing; he was more fluent in German. But his significance is great and contemporary. He was a cradle and a lifelong practising Catholic, despite the suspicion engendered by his attitude after Vatican I, and he did not find this incompatible with his immense knowledge of history, including ecclesiastical history, nor with an intense devotion to truth as revealed by historical research. He was a rigorous moralist; to him murder for political motives was still a sin against the Decalogue. He was a Liberal and planned a History of Freedom. Here, one would value his own monumental ability to distinguish between concepts, for Liberalism and Freedom are not synonymous though both, it would seem, demand definition by negatives. Despite this, the claim to be a Liberal denotes a positive attitude, a confidence in the triumph of truth and goodness, unjust restraints being removed. Acton, in fact, displays a massive confidence parallel to that of his great Victorian contemporaries. For them, perhaps, it was the material progress made during their lifetimes that inspired optimism. Acton, for his part, would seem to have possessed deeper and more unshakeable reasons. His affinities appear to lie with the outgoing assuredness of John XXIII that the core of the Church's teaching will always harmonize with the valid aspirations and discoveries of man. This, one surmises, is the secret of the historian's apparent imperturbability as he moves through the corridors of power and learning, here brilliantly depicted, towards his grave by the Tegernsee.

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