

Kusssmaul is to be congratulated on her stimulating handling of a problem-beset topic. She is well-served by her editors and there are few misprints, though "freed", rather than "feed" (p. 72), suggests a more servile status than young servants actually held. Her book is a welcome addition to the literature on labour and society in early modern England.

Pauline M. FROST  
*Vanier College, Montreal*

\* \* \*

JOHN McMANNERS. — *Death and the Enlightenment. Changing Attitudes to Death among Christians and Unbelievers in Eighteenth-Century France*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1981. Pp. vii, 619.

In the last chapter of his magnificent book, John McManners finds himself in agreement with Samuel Johnson who said that most people, to his knowledge, did not think about death. In his personal testament which opens the book, McManners cites one of André Malraux's characters for whom the knowledge that he was going to die was of greater importance than the fact of death. Indeed, for him death's existence was measured by man's personal knowledge of it; and that can never be known by the living. These opening and closing statements give a precious unity to McManners' masterly study. It is a rare example of historical erudition exploding with an equal zest for ideas and the incredible volume of information which we have been accumulating about the social history of France over the past generation or so. Neither has overwhelmed its author. He continually charms and intrigues us as he reviews, comments upon, and weighs the evidence on the state of medical thought and practice; life expectancies; the musings and treatises on the nature of the soul and the glories, terrors, or non-existence of the afterlife; the commonest and the uncommon preparations for the last scene; the prolonged or unceremonial funerary preparations; the disposal of bodily remains which became a matter of hygiene as well as public outrage; the question of death imposed as the test of political sovereignty; and the problems posed by self-imposed death, which, by asserting supreme sovereignty over one's self, disturbed the brightest and profoundest minds during the century.

Life may not have obsessed most people, as thoughts of death consumed a host of clerical experts in dying. Yet the opportunities for and the problems of living claimed the energies of most other individuals at either end of the mortality scales and in between. Experience of life, above all its manifold risks, even though few died satiated with it, probably made most French men and women the unconscious heirs of Montaigne, whose love of life in an even more threatening and insecure age prompted his defiant conviction, "But you do not die because you are sick, you die because you are alive."

McManners' study is therefore as much about life as it is about death. It is a nearly flawless treatment. It is reflective in its tone and its wisdom is never strained. Expressed in impeccable language, it reviews and analyses the ambiguous meanings that were given the mysteries of life, most of all its absurdity. If it is customary to think of death as the greatest absurdity of all, what we contrive to do, and what our forebears in the eighteenth century as well as many others who lived before that highly critical age did, is to try to extract some purpose from the contemplation of the juncture of existence and non-existence. While, to be sure, he

devotes a significant chapter to fugitive thoughts and some of the more lurid descriptions of the afterlife, McManners is as much concerned with the devices people in this life invented to put off the question. Individuals might have their fearful or stoical eye fixed on a life without end. For the believer, it was expected to exceed either the most exquisite pains or pleasures encountered in this life. For the stoically minded, the prospect of life after death was less pressing, at least in its Christian forms. The same was true for Deists, skeptics, and others who had strayed from orthodoxy, felt the laxity of Jesuit doctrines opportunistic if more sophisticated, or reacted with contempt at the rigorism of the Jansenists. Apart then from those whose lives were overwhelmed by the austere Pauline view that death is the coin in which we pay for our worldly sins, most people could not turn their backs on life, which was the only certainty they possessed. It would be rash indeed to ascribe more to the achievements of technology and science than to the expectations from either, but there is no reason to doubt that they had something to do with the minimal benefits that some sectors of society were beginning to gain from improved material conditions and the changes in attitudes that were prescribed to ensure a future better than the past. By the time the century drew to its close, the afterlife for the most dedicated apostles of the new sciences of man had been superseded by a blasphemous belief in some form of human perfection, not without rousing the indignant tones of populationists and shocked clergymen. McManners alludes to the secularization of immortality, but he does not give enough thought to the processes within Christian doctrine and non-Christian ideas by means of which the confidence in an eternal life was displaced by an even more confident conviction that life itself was the supreme standard, the highest good.

Until that development assumed a more concrete existence, the range of emotional and intellectual responses to the institutions associated with dying and death was impressive, even if it was not uniformly profound. At some levels it trailed the scent of theological pedantry. On the other hand, it roused some ingenious minds to provide answers to such embarrassing questions as the resurrection and the overpopulation of the universe. There was a lot of proverbial wisdom. Common sense mixed with traditional religious beliefs was the *via media* for the solid body of *honnêtes gens*. We can only infer what the humble believed. We know better how they died in times of mass sickness than how they prepared themselves and waited for death, though country surgeons reported that they did so silently. McManners accepts the propriety of distinguishing between the laicization of the *ancien régime* and the de-christianization of the revolutionary period, but he cannot say much directly (nor can anyone else) about the invasion or evolution of non-religious beliefs and practices in the non-literate or semi-literate worlds, except to hint at the probability of a correlation between the adoption of contraceptive practices and the decline, not necessarily of belief, but of clerical influence.

In taking up this problem, he is not assimilating it to his discussion of the non-believers in French society, who embraced notions which Lucretius would have found most congenial. The belief that when we shall be nothing, nothing will have the power to stir our senses, was taken further in the eighteenth century than ever before. There is still much to be done in locating the traces left by the *libertins*, the pantheistic and materialistic beliefs of the radical Newtonians, and their connections with freemasonry. They must be fitted into the environment which produced, among others, d'Holbach, La Mettrie, and the abbé Meslier who offered their speculations on physical and non-material existence to the debate. The comte de Caylus maintained to his very end that he had no soul and that no one could intimidate him into believing he had one. Presumably he encountered death with massive indifference to the fate of a substance (*sic*) or a concept he could not fathom.

My review cannot do justice to the enormous power of Professor McManners' reach. I hope it will touch every scholar who has thought about the eighteenth century.

Harvey MITCHELL  
*University of British Columbia*

\* \* \*

HARVEY CHISICK. — *The Limits of Reform in the Enlightenment: Attitudes toward the Education of the Lower Classes in Eighteenth-Century France*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981. Pp. xvi, 324.

Although Chisick deals with ideas rather than social conditions, his study should have considerable appeal for social historians. First of all, it is not a history of ideas in the tradition of Lovejoy, but a more modern genre, the social history of ideas. Before examining what the enlightened thinkers in eighteenth-century France said about education of the lower classes, he analyses the social origins, professional connections, and membership in learned academies of each of his authors. The results of this analysis are summed up in a revealing table. He also uses definitions of "le peuple" in contemporary dictionaries and encyclopaedias effectively to trace changing views of the role of the common people in society. These definitions show that there was a growing awareness among intellectuals of the services which the common people provided as agricultural workers, artisans, and soldiers.

Against this background of social connections and attitudes, Chisick then analyses the outpouring of educational treatises, tracts, and articles in eighteenth-century France. Although he gets his basic list from Buisson's *Dictionnaire de pédagogie et d'instruction primaire*, published in the late nineteenth century, a list which is not by any means complete, his graph of output year by year is extremely informative. He shows that from 1715 to 1759 there appeared just over one book or pamphlet a year. By contrast, from 1760 to 1790 there were over five per year. Moreover, there were many articles and letters to the editor in journals which are not included.

Chisick finds various reasons for this accelerated discussion of education, some of which are obvious. Suppression of the Jesuit Order left many colleges without teachers, which in turn called forth many proposals about what to do. Rousseau's *Emile, ou de l'éducation*, published in 1762, provoked a number of replies. Also Lockean sensationalist psychology, with its implications of the malleability of the human mind, produced an exaggerated belief in the power of education. However, Chisick argues convincingly that a deeper reason for the flood of writings on education was the belief in a crisis in France. This was not the socio-economic crisis described by many modern historians which contributed to the coming of the revolution. Rather it was belief in a moral crisis which was supposedly creating depopulation, immorality, sloth, and pursuit of selfish interests. Education was seen as a cure to this alleged social malaise.

Some historians of the eighteenth century have argued that the faith of the Enlightenment led logically to belief in education for the masses. Peter Gay, for instance, writes that the *philosophes* wished "to transform silent subjects into self-reliant citizens". Chisick argues forcefully that the enlightened community did not