

inated by corporations is one in which most individuals are “employees rather than independent producers.” Hayek never demonstrated how capitalism, which presupposes the continued vitality of an entrepreneurial class, could survive in such an adverse environment.

Perhaps most timely is Gamble’s observation that “the apartheid regime in South Africa in the 1950s and 1960s could have been defended on Hayekian principles.” That the regime lacked democratic or moral legitimacy is of little matter; it was capitalist, after all. No wonder the American Left never devoted much time to refuting Hayek’s ideas. It understood that an exclusively economic argument in favor of bourgeois society leaves that society defenseless against its radical critics.

—Adam Wolfson

THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVING.

By Lin Yutang. Morrow. 462 pp. \$26

Lin Yutang (1895–1976) was a lazy fellow from Fujian Province who smoked too many cigarettes and, after abandoning his parents’ devout but narrow Christianity, spent the rest of his life loafing with friends from Shanghai to Cambridge (Massachusetts), Leipzig to Beijing, New York to Taipei. He also wrote or translated some 80 books, founded three magazines, and invented the first Chinese typewriter. Published in 1937, this most seductive of Lin’s works became a best seller in the United States years before the Beats took up Zen or the swingers tackled the Kama Sutra. But this introduction to Chinese philosophy is no compendium of inscrutable wisdom from the mysterious Orient. Instead, it offers sweet and salty musings on such topics as “On Having a Stomach,” “The Cult of the Idle Life,” “On Being Wayward and Incalculable,” and “Good Taste in Knowledge.”

One of Lin’s main concerns—which he shares with Confucian and Taoist thinkers going back 25 centuries—is the arrogance of pure intellect. “Philosophy in the Western sense seems to the Chinese eminently idle,” he writes. “In its preoccupation with logic, which concerns itself with the method of arrival at knowledge, and epistemology, which poses the question of possibility of knowledge, it has forgotten to deal with the knowledge of life itself. . . . The German philosophers are the most frivolous of all;

they court truth like ardent lovers, but seldom propose to marry her.” In the Chinese tradition, the point is not to “have a great philosophy or have a few great philosophers”; rather it is “to take things philosophically”—to live in a way that makes life not only bearable but delightful.

Delight is Lin’s true subject. Should we read books to improve our minds? No, he replies, “because when one begins to think of improving his mind, all the pleasure is gone.” Sitting upright at a desk will not help. Conversely, “if one knows the enjoyment of reading,” one can study anywhere, “even in the best schools.” And when school is out, one can follow “the famous Ch’ing scholar, Ku Ch’ienli, . . . ‘known for his habit of reading Confucian classics naked’ in summer.”

The lesson Lin teaches is that delight is neither as easy nor as hard to attain as people think. The easy part is agreeing that warmth, vitality, and the capacity to experience pleasure are among the necessary conditions. The hard part is accepting that they are not sufficient. “Because life is harsh,” Lin cautions, “warmth of soul is not enough, and passion must be joined to wisdom and courage.” At the word “wisdom” we balk, picturing Chinese sages with wispy white beards on impossible, cloud-covered peaks. We’re not about to climb those peaks, so why bother to seek wisdom?

Not to worry, assures Lin, bringing us gently back to earth. It’s the little things that count: the quotidian business of “eating and sleeping, of meeting and saying good-bye to friends, of reunions and farewell parties, of tears and laughter, of having a haircut once in two weeks, of watering a potted flower and watching one’s neighbor fall off his roof.” We are human beings, not gods.

Or ants. One test of Lin’s durability is his quick distrust of totalitarianism. In 1937, he took a dim view of Hitler and Mussolini—but then so did most intellectuals. More striking is his wisecrack that the ants must be “the most completely rational creatures on earth,” because for a million years they have lived in “a perfect socialist state.” Lin’s only error was to predict that such ant-idiocy would never succeed in China. But since his real point was that totalitarianism contradicts human nature, he was more right than wrong. And about everything else he is as right, and fresh, as spring rain.

—Martha Bayles