

Althusser and us

Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, edited by François Mathéron, translated and introduced by Gregory Elliott, Verso, London and New York, 1999. xxii + 136 pp., £20.00, 1 85984 711 0.

Beginning – the philosophy and politics of a departure without precedent or guarantee – is the leitmotiv of this book, and readers do well to start just there. Althusser's title is one of those in which, as Adorno said of *Romeo and Juliet*, the conjunction is everything. The reading it announces and enjoins upon 'us' involves another 'return' – this time, to Machiavelli.

Students of early modern political thought will recognize the interpretive issues at the centre of the discussion. How, if at all, can the 'monarchist' *Prince* be reconciled with the 'republican' *Discourses on Livy*? What is the relationship between political *virtù* and moral virtue? These are perennial topics. Readers of Quentin Skinner and his co-thinkers will be quick to lay the charge of romanticizing 'anachronism': the 'and' of the title can only be disjunctive, surely. Niccolò Machiavelli was not the heroic solitary of Althusser's depiction. His preference for a 'composite' form of republican government, combining elements of monarchy, oligarchy and democracy, was unremarkable at the time, even if distinguished in its bias against the aristocratic interest. In his preoccupation with mercenaries as enemies of dependable military organization, he reiterated a commonplace of Florentine republican thinking. Seen in a context that included numerous works of the same kind, some bearing the same title, *The Prince* is not quite the 'modern' foundling of modern legend. But Althusser would not have been discouraged. His own interpretive tradition – that of Hegel, De Sanctis and Gramsci – values Machiavelli in a positively anachronizing spirit, for his 'actuality'. He 'grips' us, Althusser declares; there is something uncanny in his thought, for readers who come to recognize in it 'the true nature of the battle they were waging'. He asks us here to read 'in the mirror of Machiavelli'.

Althusser's Machiavelli is the strategist of an original historical project, and the original theorist of political practice. The project, as Gramsci and his forerunners had maintained, is Italian national unity. Althusser concurs, while emphasizing the most general historical meaning of the goal, and, in turn, its most general defining attributes.

It suffices to know the history of the constitution of nation states in broad outline to appreciate that Machiavelli does nothing but *think* the conditions of existence ... for that form of transition between feudalism and capitalism, which is *absolute monarchy*.

And the elementary qualification of that transition is a state capable of self-preservation, a state that can 'endure' and, as one condition of doing so, 'expand'. These general propositions ground Althusser's interpretive reconciliation of *The Prince* and the *Discourses*. While agreeing with Rousseau that *The Prince* is written from the standpoint of 'the people', he discounts the conclusion that it is, then, a 'crypto-republican' exposure of monarchic rule. Moreover, he pointedly dissociates Machiavelli from 'simple' republicanism, and emphasizes, with detailed illustration, that the Roman lessons of the *Discourses* concern republican and princely states alike. The reality, as Althusser perceives it, is that these texts are neither identical nor at odds with each other. Rather, they address distinct stages in a subjunctive historical sequence, for which they reason the necessary political strategy. The 'New Prince' is the monarch who founds a republic, the force that secures the conditions of possibility of the law *in libertà*.

There is an attractive Machiavellian boldness in this proposal, and a matching eloquence in the latter half of the book, where Althusser elaborates the rules of princely practice. Historical realism is less in evidence. Althusser's general construction of Machiavelli's project is doubly questionably. First, because the absolutist state was not 'transitional' in the sense that the interpretation clearly requires: as Perry Anderson has shown, it was a late form of feudal domination. Second, it is not clear that *The Prince* was theorizing that or any other kind of 'state' in the relevant sense, rather than the exigencies of successful personal rule – the signorial despotism to which his own Florentine Republic succumbed with the return of the Medici. However, we should not mistake these mistakes. Looking into the mirror of Machiavelli, Gramsci saw 'the

Modern Prince', the possibility of a politically capable revolutionary party. What did Althusser see?

Thanks to the meticulous scholarship of François Mathéron and Gregory Elliott, we have the textual history of the work to hand. Althusser's passion for Gramsci and Machiavelli was kindled in the summer of 1961. Six months later, he gave his first course on the latter. A second course followed a decade later, in 1972, yielding a manuscript on which he continued to work over the next fourteen years. As late as May 1986, Elliott reports, he had publication in view. In other words, Althusser's engagement with Machiavelli extended over the whole later life of historical Communism: from Khrushchevism and the Sino-Soviet split (the 'conjuncture' of *For Marx*, as he insisted), through the Brezhnev years, the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the Prague Spring, transitions throttled in Chile and frustrated in Portugal, to the days of Polish Solidarity and the military initiative that checked it, and then the deceptive finale of Gorbachev's reform communism. Read dialogically, in this setting, *Machiavelli and Us* modulates from the literal-historical into allegory. The motifs of a necessary but unscripted departure, a transition without guarantees, a state capable of endurance and expansion, the monarchy that founds a republic – all recall the same twentieth-century crux: socialist revolution. If Gramsci sought to elucidate the principles of political struggle, Althusser's preoccupation was with the conduct of revolutionary dictatorship, as conceived in the dominant Soviet tradition and confirmed in the image of the New Prince and the New Principality. (For a theory of inalienable popular sovereignty, including the precept of revocable mandates, he would have had to look in another mirror – that of the scholastics.) His account of the politics of military organization recalls the Red Army or its Chinese counterpart. Machiavelli's appreciation of 'tumult' as a political correction mechanism recalls the Cultural Revolution. Machiavelli's Prince was only a possibility; Althusser's allegory is likewise immersed in contingency, past as well as future. His Prince, the solitary figure who understands that he must 'root' his power in laws, who wins the 'friendship' and 'good will' of 'the people', inhabits the world of *what if?*: a Lenin granted twenty more years of life, perhaps, or the Mao of his own best hopes. In this respect, *Machiavelli and Us* is Althusser's counterfactual version of Stalin and his historical bequest.

For those who see in all this the signs of wishfulness, or sedentary voluntarism, Althusser has a ready answer: Machiavelli is precisely the philosopher of how things may be otherwise; he is the originator

of an 'aleatory' materialism of 'the encounter'. As such, he stands

completely opposed ... to the various registered materialisms, including the materialism commonly attributed to Marx, Engels and Lenin, which, like every materialism in the rationalist tradition, is a materialism of necessity and teleology, that is to say, a transformed and disguised form of idealism.

The encounter in question is that of the two great entities of Renaissance political ontology, *fortuna* and *virtù*. Italian humanists were agreed on the power of chance in worldly affairs, the essential fickleness of 'fortune'. In this they were already anti-teleological, attracting criticism from those who continued to uphold Augustine's providentialist understanding of human destiny. However, their standard assumption was that goodness would be rewarded by circumstance, that the steady practice of public *virtù* would tend to moderate *fortuna*; and in this way, their thinking was itself providentialist. Machiavelli made no such assumption. For him, the blessings of chance were as temporary as its blights were lasting. Political outcomes were settled in the variable encounters of *fortuna* and *virtù*; desired outcomes emerged from the adequate exercise of the latter in the given conditions. The reality of those conditions, including their horizon of possibility, would disclose itself only to 'experimental' inquiry involving careful historical comparison (with the Roman Republic, for example, or, closer in time, the career of Cesare Borgia). And *virtù*, the cardinal value in public affairs, was not reducible to 'virtue'. Here, for Althusser, is the moment of the break.

This Machiavelli is the pioneering theorist of 'the conjuncture'. In two senses: he acknowledges the operation of general 'laws' but does not centrally concern himself with them, knowing that they do not account for specific historical situations and their possible outcomes; and his practice of writing itself observes the discipline of one such situation and its political tasks, thus taking the form of a 'manifesto'. *The Prince* is recognizable in this account, even though the pages given to Machiavelli's philosophical reasoning seem wilfully over-complicated, and at times mistaken. It is tempting to say that this lengthy treatment of his theoretical 'dispositive' (*dispositif*) is itself a literary 'device' (one of the meanings of the French term) by which Althusser has Machiavelli illustrate, in his own writing procedure, the form of his substantive political recommendations. However, the theoretical heart of this discussion is the familiar concept of 'conjuncture' – familiar to any reader of Althusser,

but now also ambiguous, for one of the questions provoked here concerns the relationship between the Gramscian Althusser and his contemporary, the 'Althusserian' author of *For Marx*. The 'conjunctural', for Gramsci in *The Modern Prince*, designates only one aspect of a concrete historical situation, its quota of the 'temporary' and 'accidental'; the other aspect is 'organic' or structural, all that is relatively 'permanent' in it. Althusser's concept of 'conjuncture' is differently structured, having no parallel contrary. It emerged as an entailment of his basic theses concerning the structurally complex, overdetermined nature of the social whole, whose 'permanent' feature or 'law' is that it has no concrete existence except in the form of the conjuncture – a more or less original, more or less enduring, contingent state of the whole.

Here, arguably, was a stronger version of the position that Gramsci had sought to secure by distinguishing and binding the temporary and longer-lasting moments of the concrete situation. Its promise was that it might curb the twin errors of genericism and exceptionalism in political analysis, and fatalism and voluntarism in political practice, in an understanding that lay beyond simple reminders of the golden mean. Whether that promise has been enriched by the encounter with Machiavelli is questionable. The distinction between nature and *fortuna* has the basic merit of rendering historical change intelligible, as that between *fortuna* and *virtù* has the merit of rendering politics meaning-

ful. But such binary schemes are archetypes of the more familiar dualisms that Althusser had worked against in his published writings of the 1960s. The motif of the 'aleatory' is perhaps symptomatic. This was a late addition to the lexicon of the study, entering, as Mathéron makes clear, in a sequence of handwritten interpolations. Elliott shrewdly characterizes this development as 'exasperated'. In substantive terms, it is at least hyperbolic. And in so far as it is more than expressive or provocative, it is theoretically retrograde.

The Prince seems, as it were, to filter the strong, Althusserian concept of conjuncture, retaining only the pure liquor of 'situations' – the 'conjunctural' in Gramsci's strictly limited, because contrastive, sense. Structures can thus be discounted as the inert ground of agency, whose vital element is *alea*. This, in a putative last distillation, would be the metaphysics of voluntarism. Historical uncertainty and openness are the ordinary work of structured, structuring processes, not a primordial counter-force called 'chance': this was the apparent lesson of 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' (which, indeed, Althusser wrote not long after his first lectures on Machiavelli). But in that text too, it must be said, there were signs of theoretical instability – notably in the perverse declaration that 'the last instance never comes'. This Renaissance looking-glass only magnifies them.



Mastery of conjunctures depends on *virtù*, the crucial concept in this as in any evaluation of Machiavelli. The term as he uses it resists economical translation, above all because ‘virtue’, the literal rendering, is strictly unavailable. We now enter the shadow of Old Nick – or, as Althusser would say, continuing the long line of his admirers, the light of Machiavelli’s ‘science of politics’. *Virtù*, which encompasses ‘the subjective conditions’ of political capability, is an indispensable positive value that cannot be rewritten as a compound of personal or even civic virtues. That is Machiavelli’s fundamental proposition. It is not an argument for amorality: he acknowledges the moral reality of right and wrong and agrees that right is preferable. It is not an argument for pragmatism, which, in perfect consistency, he views as a tactical instrument, not a principle. ‘The Prince can be judged by only one criterion: *success*’, Althusser writes, but the meaning of ‘success’ is given by the nature of the historical task. ‘The result alone counts’, he continues: ‘but the *goal* is the sole arbiter of the result that counts.’ In this fine epigram, Althusser encapsulates his sense of Machiavelli’s importance, as the originator of a discourse on values that are not of the same order as the virtues, on a form of practical reason that is neither moralistic nor mere calculus – a discourse on the specificity of politics.

It is debatable whether we actually ‘need’ the example of Machiavelli. There is a kind of redundancy in the search for precursors, who become recognizable as such precisely to the extent that we already know, in one way or another, what we now have them teach

us. Neither Althusser nor Gramsci could have read *The Prince* as they did without the contextual presence of Lenin. But no one can simply unwrite such characteristically modern exercises in tradition – nor should anyone on the Left be too quick to try. Machiavelli has been recalled as a contemporary, and not without good reason. Any current reader of this journal of socialist and feminist philosophers has lived through all or part of a historic reversal; no one has been unaffected; many have worked to further the change. Over the past thirty-odd years, there has been a widespread conversion of sensibility on the radical Left, which, for now, might pointedly be captioned ‘the rise of the anti-Machiavellian principle’. The gist of this principle is that the forms of organization and practice of the Left should be embodiments of its animating social values, instantiations of its ends – in other words, that emancipatory *virtù* is virtue militant. The Machiavellian reprise is not that this is undesirable, or merely sentimental, but that it is self-contradictory. Politics is a specific and therefore (conditionally) autonomous form of social practice with a specific object – the maintenance or transformation of the ensemble of social relations in a given space – and specific norms of judgement, which are not reducible to the order of the moral. In an Althusserian term that Althusser might usefully have mobilized for his commentary, political practice is *non-expressive* in structure: *virtù* cannot simply and sufficiently embody any ‘virtue’, including the ones for which it fights. Here, for all his historical remoteness, as distastefully as ever, Althusser’s Machiavelli speaks to *us*.

Francis Mulhern

Elemental

Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1999. xiv + 1,073 pp., £24.95 hb., 0 674 04326 X.

The Arcades Project is a meta-history book, a book about books about the history of Paris. Or rather, it has become such a book. It existed as bundles of notes, index cards, diagrams until 1982, when it appeared as the two-part Volume 5 of Benjamin’s *Gesammelte Schriften*, with quotations and commentary intact in their language of origin. Now the German and French text scraps have been fused into English, homogenizing Benjamin’s macaronic and binding his floating texts into a single volume. It is no longer a collection of found parts.

Benjamin’s word booty was snatched from the stacks of the Bibliothèque Nationale. Photographs catch him in the act – Gisèle Freund used him as an extra in a magazine photo-series on the libraries of Paris in 1937. Benjamin was reassembling the Paris of the nineteenth century through text fragments. These pierced the past in two ways: providing data on the now submerged ‘capital of the nineteenth century’ and giving entry to a dreamscape of mythic, ideological, fantastic projections concerning Paris and the rule of capital in general. It is no surprise that Benjamin

spent more than a decade digging through the archives. As he notes, 'Few things in the history of humanity are as well known to us as the history of Paris. Tens of thousands of volumes are dedicated solely to the investigation of this tiny spot on the earth's surface...' But with his 'project', Benjamin was not aiming to synthesize those histories, written from antiquity to his present day. Rather, Paris in the nineteenth century was an *Ur*-place, a site to mine in order to find out about the mechanisms of bourgeois rule and the renewed attempts to oppose it. Dissent, alternative histories, 'creative destruction' and utopian forecasts are as much in evidence as details of technological construction in iron, glass and lighting design or the organization of wage labour, prostitution and literary life.

Paris is *the* capital of the nineteenth century because the echoes of the French Revolution – a revolution on behalf of the universe – reverberate through it in revolutionary wave after wave. There the contradictions of bourgeois class rule are most spectacular, as class alliances are formed and broken. Consolidated is the rule of capital alone. Benjamin's 1935 and 1939 synopses of the project ascend up to the revolutionary climax of class struggle. The Communards burn down the Paris that the 'artist-demolitionist' Baron Haussmann had built in his 'financial' and 'military' replanning of the city. But this negation of his negation is not sustained, and the class fighters allowed themselves to be, once again, misled by the bourgeoisie.

The 1939 synopsis – written to lure funds from an erudite New York banker, Frank Altschul (later to figure in various conspiracy theories) – concludes with putschist Blanqui's 'resignation without hope'. This Benjamin deciphers as ideological reflex of the century's failure to respond 'to the new technological possibilities within a new social order'. It was, after all, 1939, and war promised to wreak another round of demolition; proof, as Benjamin put it in his 'Work of Art' essay, that 'society has not been mature enough to incorporate technology as its organ, that technology has not been sufficiently developed to cope with the elemental forces of society'. Elemental is the *mot juste*. One of the striking aspects of nineteenth-century capitalism, as represented in Benjamin's harvest of quotations, is its simultaneous naturalization and mythologization of social and historical forces. This took various forms: Grandville's lithographs of over-lively commodities; the fetishistic language of stocks and shares and misconceptions of the value-form; the reiterated ideological succumbing to fate; the countless images of Paris poised on the eve of destruction. The proletariat, in conjunction with technologies, should

have erupted into Paris's already volcanic landscape, to cash in the promises of their masters. But they failed to become the final agents of destruction. The naturalizing, mythical effects of capitalism won out, when even the proletariat's own representatives enthusiastically embraced the natural, automatic role that it and the productive forces should play in the script of emancipation.

Haussmann had obliterated history when he cut the boulevards through old Paris. Into the evacuated space of historical consciousness descended the mists of fetishism and phantasmagoria. These were cultivated in the world exhibitions, out of which crawled the modern entertainment industry and the consumer's dreamy disposition with its attitude of 'pure reaction'. If Benjamin's synopses allow some coherent ordering of the material, then it seems that the fragments direct Benjamin to unearth things, impulses, objects, matter that has decayed – most importantly, the setbacks of revolutionary struggle, but also the withering of a world of imagination shared by all classes, as evidenced in the futuristic and utopian prescriptions for Parisian development. Decline and destruction – bodily and architectural – had prompted Maxime Du Camp's monumental study of 'Paris, Its Organs, Its Functions and Its Life in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century'. As he waited for an optician to prepare some lenses to aid his ageing eyes, Du Camp imagined a day when his beloved city would be gone. He feared it could be lost to knowledge, just as were the great cities of antiquity. Benjamin re-ran the exercise, not in order to preserve the past – and also not to outline a uniform 'period of decline' (hence the recovery of visionary schemes) – but rather as an effort to fill out the origins of the present.

For the materialist historian, every epoch with which he occupies himself is only prehistory for the epoch he himself must live in. And so, for him, there can be no appearance of repetition in history, since precisely those moments in the course of history which matter most to him, by virtue of their index as 'fore-history', become moments of the present day and change their specific character according to the catastrophic or triumphant nature of that day.

History must be rewound. Benjamin lived in a catastrophic epoch – though that was no occasion for melancholy. His riposte to Horkheimer, who had insisted in a letter in 1937 that history was a closed book and past injustice was injustice for ever, pointed out the role of remembrance in history, a theological moment that could 'modify' what 'science has

“determined””. If the history books could be opened again, then the image of the past could be transformed, rewritten – perhaps montaged together as a ‘construction’ – and these energies of reinterpretation discharged, like electric shocks, into the present.

In such a confusing and contradictory landscape it appears necessary to take a guide. (The publishers are quite taken with this idea of a guide, necessitated by the sheer monumental nature of the project, and so they provide not a glossary but a ‘guide’ to names and terms in the book, and also a ‘Suggested Reader’s Guide to Tackling the *Arcades Project*’, which reads like Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller*: ‘So where to begin, you’re asking yourself...’) Benjamin had found one in Franz Hessel, invoked in *Berliner Chronik* as one of the guides who taught him how to wander through the city and into the zones of the ‘dreaming collective’. Together they wrote a newspaper article, in 1927, on the Parisian arcades. This was a Surrealist paean to the out-of-time and kitsch objects that found their final resting ground there in a ‘past become space’. Later, the Benjamin of ‘wake up calls’, tooled up with his ‘whetted axe of reason’, would note that ‘only film’, the instant, urgent techno-futurist art

form of the masses, ‘can detonate the explosive stuff which the nineteenth century has accumulated in that strange and perhaps formerly unknown material which is kitsch’.

Slipping out from the arcades, Benjamin traced the streets that replaced them, insisting that these were less suitable for flâneuristic wandering. In the new boulevards pedestrians submit to the ‘monotonous, fascinating, constantly unrolling band of asphalt’. The new streets make the geography of class division unarguable and absolute. For the well-heeled, the sensuous shocks of the road consist only in the clashes of street names at corners, where saints meet philosophers or tradesmen (but merely as words, an urban lyric.

For what do we know of street corners, curb-stones, the architecture of the pavement – we who have never felt heat, filth, and the edges to stones beneath our naked soles, and have never scrutinized the uneven placement of the paving stones with an eye toward bedding down on them.

What did Benjamin know of a Paris reconstructed from books in which only rarely did those who knew its streets most intimately come to voice? Between the lines of the citations he listened for the rasping of

their breath. Nobody knows how the *Arcades Project* could have become a book. But in notes for his final word-paintings on the theory of history, Benjamin points out how nineteenth-century historicism depends on recounting the antics of glorious heroes of history in monumental and epic form, and is in no position to say anything about the ‘nameless’. For him, ‘historical construction’ is devoted to their memory, a pledge that Marx fulfilled in *Das Kapital*. *Das Kapital*, claims Benjamin, is an anti-epic memorial, pulsating in the present, impacting the relation between now and past, still insisting on redress.

It grasps the constellation into which his own epoch has entered with quite specific earlier moments of history. It contains a concept of the present as the now-time, in which are exploded splinters of messianic time.

For Benjamin’s study of the capital of the nineteenth century there could have been no more ambitious model.

Esther Leslie



Between Stalingrad and Stormont

Francis Mulhern, *The Present Lasts a Long Time: Essays in Cultural Politics*, Cork University Press in association with Field Day, Cork, 1998. 204 pp. £14.95 pb., 1 85918 225 9.

There are not many books which become more urgent in the course of the delay between publication and review. That this should be true of Francis Mulhern's essays is particularly remarkable given that the earliest of them appeared in 1981. The book addresses itself to the cultural condition of two islands – Britain and Ireland – and (less directly) to the relations existing between them. The period covered is, essentially, the years since 1945. Neither the story nor the storyteller is a happy one.

A majority of the twelve essays relate to English, or British, matters. Only two deal specifically with Irish affairs. Two were first published in *New Left Review*, but, emphatically, these are not the same two essays. From its foundation in 1960 to the mid-1980s, the premier journal of British socialism published perhaps ten or a dozen articles (in more than 150 issues) which deal (in some loose fashion) with the Northern Irish crisis. If one leaves aside a few cartoons by Paul Hogarth and three articles by Conor Cruise O'Brien (no later than 1967), what one finds in *New Left Review* is a deadening silence. One worker on the inky barricades confessed to me that 'We couldn't agree a line.'

In this light, Cork University Press's description of their author as 'for many years editor of *New Left Review*' calls for comment. Mulhern indeed served on the editorial committee, the locus (one assumes) of that striking failure to agree a line on the most sustained political crisis to afflict the United Kingdom in more than half a century. That Mulhern himself should be Irish-born and Irish-educated should lead nobody to specific conclusions. Indeed, one of the most refreshing moments in *The Present Lasts a Long Time* occurs (in an essay first published in *Radical Philosophy*) when he chastises Luke Gibbons's 'inability to think of Ireland except in terms of nationality, or of nationality in other than the special terms of nationalism'.

Chastisement of this gentle persuasion would hardly be recognized as such by veterans of the Literature and Sociology seminars at Essex University, where, year after year, delegates contended for prizes in anti-humanism and bad temper. If younger readers of *Radical Philosophy* wish to savour the mood of those now distant gatherings they should tune in to *EastEnders*. A great strength in Mulhern's book is its

cumulative anatomizing of the contemporary Left, in its chastened condition. From the gratuitous Labour victory of July 1945, the working class has been sold a litter of pups, always paying a high price in terms of its own culture and its political potential. In 'A Welfare Culture?' Mulhern deals at length with the different efforts of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams to understand and resist this process. Carefully picking his words, Mulhern points to 'reverse migration from the colonies' and 'the scarcely articulate faltering of Anglo-Britishness' as twin elements in the breakdown of consensual liberalism.

Taking this analysis into a more specifically 'cultural' arena, he observes that not only Bloomsbury but also (in their contrasting idioms) Leavis and Eliot collude in their distaste for a welfare culture. Mulhern's remarks on Eliot's *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture* (1948) are illuminating, but he might have explored the extent to which positive 'take-up' occurred in the Republic of Ireland rather than anywhere in the United Kingdom. The notion of 'community' – about which Mulhern is appropriately sceptical – had bedevilled the politics of Northern Ireland precisely during the years when *New Left Review* turned its back on that part of the Kingdom which made the term United so critical. Ironically, it is in one of the two *NLR* pieces reprinted here that Mulhern seems to lose focus on community. In 'Towards 2000', he wrote:

The Northern Irish civil rights campaign of the late 1960s, in which the traditionally nationalist Catholic minority massed under the banner of 'British standards of justice', shows just how explosive the appeal to bourgeois rights may be in the struggle against communal oppression.

This was not so much a misleading as an incomplete statement even in 1985. For the verb 'to mass' suggests a very different kind of politics from that envisaged by the organizers of the Civil Rights Movement, whose objective was to detach people from nationalism and to nurture a distinctly red socialism in Ulster – which the *NLR* abandoned in the confusion generated by the Provos with their own kind of 'explosive' appeal. Yet, within the pages of the *NLR*, Mulhern's remarks constituted a veritable underground movement. When general editorial silence was finally

broken, it was for such liberal endorsements as featured among the 'Themes' of January/February 1999 – 'Sinn Féin leaders have brought the republican constituency to accept a compromise.' In this Newspeak, armed resisters of the political are termed a 'constituency', with the result that – one year later – Gerry Adams is preparing his New Left audience of appeasers for a 'stab in the back' analysis of political failure in Ulster.

It is against such a background of violent contestation that Francis Mulhern's honest and deeply intelligent essays should be read. He is willing to classify himself as a Marxist, and Field Day is willing to include him in the Critical Conditions series which Cork University Press publishes on its behalf. Given what Mulhern has to say about *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (1991), here is evidence of considerable intellectual generosity on both sides. Certainly, the Hiberno-British tension, or fissure, invigorates what can be (at times) a stolid accountancy of what went wrong on the Left. The concept of 'intellectual corporatism' is less tellingly deployed than the revelation that Richard Hoggart's original project was *The Abuses of Literacy*. In this kind of discussion, Mulhern is incisive and engaging. About one Field Day editor's dismissal of 'the modernization project', he declares 'it is hard to say where ... opportunism sinks into sincere confusion'.

At the centre of the collection lies the problem of the nation-state, which Mulhern never avoids and never resolves. His long, and again central, essay 'Reading Althusser' explains the latter's 'appeal for the left in English literary studies' by declaring that 'the eventual scope of Raymond Williams's long revolution was as yet undiscerned'. This won't wash as history. *The Long Revolution*, to be crudely factual, had appeared as early as 1961. Nor is one satisfied with the laundry service of the succeeding sentences where Mulhern presents Lukács, Goldmann and the Frankfurt School as incapable of resisting 'the dominant tradition, with its watchwords of fidelity to the empirical record and the detailed life of the text'. What about the work of John Orr?

While these considerations may appear to stray far from a concern with the nation-state, Althusser's service to the *NLR* had been adequately summarized in the issue of November/December 1980 – his critique of the French Communist Party led him to emphasize its modular similarity to the state itself. His British followers were, as a consequence, free to ignore the crisis of the British state in relation to Ulster, and the suggestive coincidence of that crisis with a cultural



efflorescence. Mulhern comes close to dealing with this crux when he observes that, while Dublin is the capital of a (relatively old) nation-state, 'Derry is the symbolic capital of the Northern crisis'. What about the capitalism of Faber & Faber?

Much of the intellectual dandruff now wafting from 'Cultural Studies' (on which term Mulhern is crisply eloquent) should rest on the shoulders of the post-Althusserians and other dedicated followers of fashion. In these essays Hoggart (especially) and Williams receive dressings down which appear out of place. Both had a respect for the practice of history, which was shut off in the aftermath of Paris 1968. There are undeclared debts to be settled and accounts to be rendered, petty-bourgeois though that metaphor may seem to the professorial proletariat. Louis Althusser has faded in the constellations of theory and counter-theory, yet some readers will recognize in Mulhern's title an echo of *L'Avenir dure longtemps* (1992). Indeed, Althusser's name occurs more frequently than that of any comparable figure whom Mulhern invokes, most (but not all) of these citations occurring in 'Reading Althusser'.

It will fall to a younger generation fully to assess the extent to which the bad-tempered myopia of the New Left in the crucial decade of the 1970s derived from its devotion to Althusser, a task which will require a historian's sense of proportion. The special position of this focus for Mulhern is clearly indicated in a note to that essay which declares that 'these pages offer ... a theoretical memoir. Laying no claim to the systematic achievement of critical or historical reconstruction proper, they are more personal in background and perhaps idiosyncratic in balance and range. The text is also, and for that reason, somewhat Anglocentric.' *L'avenir* is not invoked.

W.J. McCormack

Combined and uneven

Fred Halliday, *Revolution and World Politics: The Rise and Fall of the Sixth Great Power*, Macmillan, London, 1999. xix + 402 pp., £47.50 hb., £15.99 pb., 0 333 65328 9 hb., 0 333 65329 7 pb.

Noel Parker, *Revolutions and History: An Essay in Interpretation*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1999. vii + 232 pp., £49.50 hb., £14.00 pb., 0 7456 1135 4 hb., 0 7456 1136 2 pb.

‘There are few things less becoming to the study of human affairs than the complacency of a triumphal age’, writes Fred Halliday in the introduction to his major new work on a phenomenon now invariably consigned to the dustbin of totalitarian prehistory. Whilst the sentence is Halliday’s, the sentiment is one shared by Noel Parker, who shrewdly observes that Fukuyamaesque apotheoses of liberal triumph pertain to the idiom of the very revolutionary (meta)narrative on whose grave they dance. If both authors come neither to bury nor to praise their subject, each in his way articulates the sense of an ending: a quietus to the modern revolutionary epoch that dawned with the taking of the Bastille and closed with the demolition of the Berlin Wall. But that historical verdict simultaneously affords an intellectual opportunity: the hour of reckoning has struck.

Parker’s modestly entitled ‘essay in interpretation’ warrants the encomium from Peter Burke carried on its back cover. Although the indicated ‘forest of literature’ at times threatens to overwhelm its guide, *Revolutions and History* can be recommended as both introduction and contribution – especially when Parker turns from explanations of revolutions to their hermeneutics, with a set of reflections on the evolution and function of the ‘revolutionary narrative’ in history. The conclusion at which it arrives – ‘now is no time to be making an enemy of the inherited, revolutionary idea of collective intrusions into history’ – should commend itself to readers of this journal. For a variety of reasons, however, *Revolution and World Politics* has the greater call upon our attention.

As Halliday notes, the bicentennial of the French Revolution confounded the expectations of both parties to the great ideological dispute of modern history, albeit asymmetrically; discomfiting for the Kremlin as it was, 1989 scarcely confirmed the prognostications of Kremlinologists. With a subtitle that invokes Marx’s nomination of revolution as a ‘sixth great power’ set to vanquish the European pentarchy of the mid-nineteenth century, Halliday’s ambition is to remedy their respective defaults. Through ‘an international study of revolutions’ (or ‘a combined study of the international and revolution’), he attempts a more accurate account

of the causes and consequences of revolution as an indissolubly international historical phenomenon – an account with which he hopes to enhance the analytical powers of what might strike outsiders as the dismal non-science of International Relations.

Intent, Thompson-style, on ‘rescu[ing] revolution “from the enormous condescension of posterity”’, Halliday does not proffer a history of the subject as such. Divided into three parts, thematically organized, and predominantly concerned with the central revolutionary tradition of the twentieth century – communism – his study moves from revolutionaries’ own theory and practice, to the ‘interaction’ between revolutions and the international system, before adducing some general conclusions. It proceeds in the spirit of a certain Marxism. A certain Marxism, because if classical historical materialism correctly rooted the revolutionary phenomenon in the combined and uneven development of global capitalism, it possessed two crippling theoretical defects, of crucial political import. Underestimating the durability of nation-states (and concomitant ideologies), more importantly, it fatally misunderstood capitalism, imputing to it a trajectory that necessitated its supersession by another, superior social formation, via an immanent (and imminent) process of ‘world revolution’.

What is the upshot for those whose practice was infused by some version of this theory, however deformed? With the spectre of communism exorcized in the core states of the international system, the great twentieth-century contest between advanced Western capitalism and backward Eastern communism, as two societal models with global pretensions, was an inherently unequal one. The ‘revolution against *Capital*’ staged in 1917, according to Gramsci, was consummated in converse fashion in 1991, when the ineluctable law of combined and uneven development avenged itself on the lethal admixture of autarchy and autarky into which the Bolshevik experiment had degenerated after the failure of revolution in the West. Wrong to deduce a prospect of ‘permanent revolution’ from that law, Trotsky had nonetheless divined its implications for a socialism in one or more peripheral countries that sought to buck the

trend of capitalist modernization. Far from catching up with their antagonist, let alone overtaking it, the Soviet Union and cognate states ultimately succumbed to the 'heavy artillery of commodities', which (as predicted by Marx and Engels) has 'batter[ed] down all Chinese walls' – or is in the process of so doing. Neither the aberration from modernity bemoaned by their opponents, nor the culmination of it celebrated by their partisans, revolutions have been central to the making and remaking of the modern international system. However, this has been fully reciprocated by the centrality of that system in not just the making, but the unmaking, of revolutions.

Such centrality was entailed by the very project of 'revolution' in the modern sense, involving as it did collective enterprises of comprehensive political and social transformation, with mass popular participation, whose goal was the reconstruction of social relations on a radically different basis. As such, successful revolutions have necessarily posed a challenge to the international system, one which they enthusiastically embraced under the rubric of an 'internationalism' envisioning eventual abolition of the division of humanity into separate states or nations. This 'internationalist engagement' supplies much of Halliday's subject matter. Most readily apparent in the Communist International's promotion of 'world class', 'world party', 'world revolution', according to him this commitment survived the Stalinization of Bolshevism and the consequent proliferation of 'national messianisms'. In an argument bound to ruffle the sensibilities of all self-respecting leftist critics of formerly existing socialism, he insists that its officialdom meant much of what it said about changing the world. Within the priorities dictated by *raison d'état*, and the restraints operated by international counter-revolution, Second World regimes pursued *raison de la révolution*.

The reaction against the Soviet Union's 'internationalist duty' that set in under Gorbachev indicates that, however cautious or distorted its implementation, a strategy of 'exporting' revolution had been prosecuted after the Second World War. Just as Brezhnev's USSR deployed its military and diplomatic weight to sustain revolutionary movements, and defend allied regimes, across three continents, so Cuba – at even greater domestic cost – backed insurgencies as far afield as Africa. Initially, this was impelled by the desire to increase the island's independence vis-à-vis USA and USSR alike, following the denouement of the 'Cuban Missile Crisis' (a misnomer since the relevant weaponry was Soviet and American, prompting Christopher Hitchens to remark that he vividly

recalled where he was the day President Kennedy nearly killed *him*). Revived in the 1970s, once bombardment of Allende in La Moneda had blockaded the reformist road in Latin America, Havana's militant internationalism bore its finest fruit in Nicaragua at the end of the decade with the overthrow of Somoza, in which it played a key logistical role.

Such disinhibitions were, of course, made possible by the altered correlation of forces in the conjunctural crisis of 1974–79 when, following Vietnamese victory, a string of revolutions occurred in the southern hemisphere. Western discomposure at this imperilment of its hegemony, eerily resembling the much-touted 'domino effect', issued in the second Cold War from the late 1970s onwards. As Halliday reminds us in a fine chapter, no less than revolution, counter-revolution has been an international phenomenon, equally subject to exportation. (Pinochet, inseparable from that latter-day 'doctor of revolutions', Kissinger, could have testified as much.) However chequered its record in the 1980s, when only the Grenadan regime was directly overthrown by force, counter-revolution scored a resounding success in the Reagan era. By checking the revolutionary wave and demonstrating the greater dynamism of capitalism, the First World rapidly reversed the domino effect, inducing the erosion – and then implosion – of the Second.

The *Internationale* has it that communism 'unites the human race'. True to the vocation assigned it in the *Communist Manifesto*, the bourgeoisie is in the process of 'creat[ing] a world after its own image'. For Halliday, the erasure of communism does not betoken the absence of any positive legacy. Whether in the destruction of the prewar fascist challenge, the acceleration of postwar decolonization, or the stimulus to political and economic reforms in the West itself, the red menace conduced to the transformation of its competitor, if not out of all recognition, then substantially. Accordingly, those inclined like Furet to reduce the communist experience to *The Passing of an Illusion* commit a fallacy of misplaced retrospection, neglecting the capitalist and imperialist realities to which revolutionaries were responding. Indeed, in conclusion, Halliday maintains that whatever the impasse of the revolutionary route to the realization of liberty, equality and fraternity, its agenda remains to be completed in a world of ever deepening inequality within and between states. Meanwhile, the reinvention of Fate that trades under the name of 'globalization' enjoys no exemption from 'one of those activities, the radical rejection of the given, that is central to the human condition': Halliday's final word.

The moral is well taken. Yet under the sway of globalitarianism, where are the organized forces of resistance to be found? It is here perhaps that a certain condescension of maturity to revolution in West, and complaisance to reform, may be discerned in Halliday himself. A leitmotiv of *Revolution and World Politics* is the assertion that the decisive turning point in the parabola of 'world revolution' was the failed upheavals of 1848, which conclusively proved the unviability of the revolutionary option in Western Europe, paving the way for the deferred triumph of the reformist prospectus a century later. Whatever our estimate of the substantive point, it is difficult not to feel that its author's mind-set of reality-instructor exacts a price. For if it insulates him, a single lapse aside, from such hypocritical pieties as 'the international community', with its intimations of a transnational

Ambridge (though not from other occasional dishevelments of prose), it renders him inattentive to Western *faits inaccomplis*, from Berlin to Lisbon. On this score his readers will draw a blank and will have to look elsewhere for illumination. One does not need to subscribe to Trotskyist tales of social-democratic or Stalinist betrayal to balk at the notion that the game was up in the West virtually before it had started.

As for the bruited 'reformist potential' secreted by modernity, where is it now? 1989 may have issued the death certificate of historical communism. A decade later, with German finance minister Lafontaine's abdication, European social democracy meekly signed the instrument of surrender presented to it by a triumphant neo-liberalism.

Gregory Elliott

An intellectual thinks

Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, trans. Richard Nice, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2000. 320 pp., £50.00 hb., £14.99 pb., 0 74562 054 X hb., 0 74562 055 8 pb.

Pierre Bourdieu's imposing corpus of work seems, finally, to be on the verge of getting the attention it deserves from philosophers, as attested by the recent publication of a collection of critical essays edited by Richard Shusterman (*Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*, 1999). This trend is likely to be given additional impetus by the publication in English of Bourdieu's most explicitly 'philosophical' work to date. This work, originally published in France in 1997, is in fact the long-germinating sequel to Bourdieu's celebrated *Logic of Practice* (1980; trans. 1990). The intellectual roots of Bourdieu's theory of practice in both Anglo-American philosophy (primarily ordinary-language philosophy and Deweyan pragmatism) and continental philosophy (Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty) have long been apparent, and *Pascalian Meditations* does not furnish any new information on this score. What it does provide, however, is a systematic reinterpretation of Bourdieu's social theory in terms of a critique of 'scholastic reason' – from Austin's 'scholastic view', in *Sense and Sensibilia*, which Bourdieu traces to the notion of *skholè* in Plato's *Theaetetus*. The Kantian inflection is deliberate: what Bourdieu intends is an investigation of the 'conditions of possibility' of intellectual inquiry. These are not, however, for Bourdieu, subjective conditions of knowledge acquisition; they are rather the social conditions which constitute those dis-

tinct microcosms in which theoretical comprehension takes place. The most important of these conditions, Bourdieu argues, are the suspension of economic necessity and the bracketing of temporal urgency. Bourdieu is thereby able to ground his well-known critique of 'objectivist' and 'subjectivist' forms of social theory in a sociologically reconstructed formulation of Kantian critique. Social theorists overstep the 'limits' of the scholastic point of view when they falsely project into the social world forms of understanding which are generated by the distinctive presuppositions of the scholastic situation – as in structuralism's account of social action as the execution of disembodied rules, and the model of conscious, self-interested choice of rational actor theory.

Why, then, does Bourdieu claim Pascal as the central inspiration for this work? And why Pascalian 'meditations'? If asked about his relation to Marx, Bourdieu claims, he would reply that 'I would rather refer to myself as a Pascalian'. What Bourdieu takes from Pascal is not a theory, but a form of suspicion with regard to the *hauteur* of philosophical knowledge, and its contempt for 'common sense', expressed in Pascal's dictum that 'la vraie philosophie se moque de la philosophie'. The reference to 'meditations' derives primarily from the fact that this work owes a great deal to Bourdieu's own personal struggle to come to

terms with his status as an 'intellectual'. Bourdieu confesses here to never having felt entirely justified to exist as an 'intellectual'. The critique of scholastic reason is thus, in a sense, a personal exorcism – an inwardly directed scrutiny seeking to eradicate the remaining personal traces of the complacent and self-assured philosophical intellectual.

Bourdieu puts his theory to work in a penetrating critique of contemporary political interventions from the perspectives of universal norms and 'difference', respectively. The target in the former case is largely Habermas who, Bourdieu argues, projects the scholastic situation of the free exchange of articulate opinions into the social world, whilst suppressing the question of the social and economic conditions which

suggest that social democratization is a task to be undertaken by elites for and on behalf of the under-privileged. There is, here as elsewhere, no hint of a genuine unity of theory and praxis in Bourdieu's work, and this deficit seems increasingly to be compensated by an encroaching elitism.

There are numerous rewarding detours and diversions in this book, not least among which is a fascinating critique of Sartre's *garçon de café*. The Sartrean figure of a *garçon de café* who 'plays' at being a *garçon de café*, Bourdieu suggests, derives from the projection of the scholastic situation of a distanced perspective on social roles into the mind of a social actor, producing a sort of 'social chimera, a monstrosity with the body of a café waiter and the head of a philosopher'. More substantively, there is a significant reworking, in the chapter on 'knowledge in the body', of the central Bourdieuan concept of habitus. Habitus is not portrayed here as a smoothly functioning mechanism. Bourdieu emphasizes, rather, the ever-present potential for discord and tension between the habitus and social practices, in which a sort of 'practical' (i.e. non-intellectual) reflection exerts itself. It is slightly disappointing that Bourdieu does not explore this idea of practical reflection further, since not only does it seem to rebut the oft-repeated charge that Bourdieu conceives social actors as 'social dopes', it also hints at a social ground for the interaction of (intellectual) theory and



would have to exist for anything like a communicative ethics to be possible. On the other hand, the appeal to respect cultural 'difference' (as in William Labov's attempt to prove that residents of black ghettos in the USA make theological pronouncements of the same refinement as Harvard graduates) fails to take seriously the fact that differences are always integrated into symbolic, social and economic hierarchies by which forms of power are reproduced. Bourdieu's 'third way' comprises what he calls a 'Realpolitik of reason'. This is a political practice dedicated to extending the social and economic conditions of universality beyond the specific social microcosms (scientific, literary, artistic, philosophic) of scholastic debate. We must fight, Bourdieu asserts, for 'universal access to the conditions of access to the universal'. Bourdieu's Realpolitik, however, seems to raise more troubling questions than it answers. In particular, it seems to

practice.

For those who have followed Bourdieu's work closely, the final chapter on 'social being, time, and the meaning of existence' is likely to be the most intriguing, and perhaps perplexing, part of the book. Here, Bourdieu attempts to complement his theory of symbolic capital with a view of the social world and its forms of subjectification as an effort to quell existential *Angst* and the underlying fear of meaninglessness. One significant effect of this is that it allows him to introduce a deeper psychology of motivation at the level of the struggles for the various forms of capital. Social agents are thus not merely interest-driven (according to the 'economistic' model which is often attributed to Bourdieu); they are searching to give meaning to their lives, and this meaning-giving power lies in social forms of symbolic classification. Hence, Bourdieu is now able to claim that the 'losers'

in the struggle for symbolic capital (that is, social recognition, since symbolic capital is other forms of capital when these are recognized *as* legitimate) also risk humiliation, denigration, even the loss of their 'humanity'. These are provocative suggestions, culminating in the reflection that Pascal's 'misery of human beings without God' is finally revealed as the 'properly metaphysical misery of human beings without a social *raison d'être*'. It is clear that Bourdieu's work is still in a process of dynamic development. It is clear, also, that it will no longer be possible for any socially critical philosophy to ignore Bourdieu's immense contribution to the critical project.

Roger Foster

Why Spinoza?

Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings*, Routledge, London and New York, 1999. 184 pp., £40.00 hb., £12.99 pb., 0 415 16570 9 hb., 0 415 16571 7 pb.

Warren Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power*, Verso, London and New York, 1999. 288 pp., £30.00 hb., 1 8598 4701 3.

Translations of Deleuze, Balibar and Negri, Christopher Norris's *Spinoza and the Origins of Critical Theory*, and the edited collection *The New Spinoza* (all published in 1997) offer ample evidence of the growing interest of Spinoza for 'continental' philosophy. Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd's *Collective Imaginings* and Warren Montag's *Bodies, Masses, Power* add to this body of work, following very different paths through Spinoza's writings but yielding some surprisingly similar conclusions.

Collective Imaginings sets out a case for the value of Spinoza's writing for the improvement (one is tempted to say emendation) of contemporary cultural self-understanding. Gatens and Lloyd argue that it is because of his strangeness, because his ideas are so refractory to mainstream philosophical thinking, that his writings are such an invaluable resource for rethinking contemporary political issues. *Collective Imaginings* is less concerned with offering an account of Spinoza's philosophy in its entirety, and more with setting aspects of his thought to work in the context of a new set of problems, particularly those posed in Australia by differends concerning native Australian land rights, and responsibility for the events of colonial history.

A cursory reading of Spinoza might suggest that his philosophy is not best adapted to the task of re-imagining responsibility, for his wholesale refusal of free will and his ontological secundarization of individuals go against the grain of our usual conceptions in this matter, which focus on the individual as a site of praise or blame. For Gatens and Lloyd, drawing their inspiration from Foucault's practice of critical history, such thought patterns, bearing within them a decidedly imaginary component, are precisely what Spinoza's ontological and political writings enable us to relativize.

The first half of *Collective Imaginings* focuses, largely though not exclusively, on elements of Spinoza's metaphysics, in order to draw out the distinctiveness of his conception of the imagination and the value of his critique of free will. Spinozist imagination is not categorically distinct from, or opposed to, reason; it thus has a positive, as well as negative, value (existentially, it is a vital component in individual *conatus*, but it is also the source of considerable illusions, of an individual and collective nature); as well as having a cognitive dimension, it also has an affective component, which makes it virtually indissociable from corporeality; and, by virtue of the 'intercorporeal' aspects of the constitution of individuals, imagination is (always already) collective in nature.

The primary illusion to which the imagination gives rise is, for Spinoza, that of free will. According to Gatens and Lloyd, imagining ourselves as free agents conditions the individualist understanding of responsibility. However, the Spinozist affirmation of both necessity and the necessity of understanding it is not a way of refusing responsibility. Gatens and Lloyd show how Spinoza transforms Stoic ideas about the importance of understanding one's place in nature, a place which becomes, to borrow from Balibar, always already socialized, if not necessarily sociable. The positive affirmation of freedom necessarily implies an understanding of the collective dimensions of our existence.

If the necessity which Gatens and Lloyd adduce for re-imagining responsibility lies in history, the possibility of so doing derives from the ways in which Spinoza enables us to rethink the links between individual and collective. Neither of these terms is completely fixed, and the idea of their categorical separation is itself only a consequence of a particular set of configurations of bodies. From this point of view, they argue, responsibility has a considerably more ontological dimension to it than the searching for causes in order to attribute blame might suggest: re-

imagining responsibility involves understanding who we are and how we got to be that way, in order that we can ascertain the ‘multiply collective dimensions of selfhood’.

The second half of *Collective Imaginings* shifts attention to Spinoza’s political writings. These raise a series of issues: how the equation of power and right, far from sanctioning tyranny, promotes a conception of the state–society relationship as reciprocal, if antagonistic; the difference between law and norm (a difference which has more recently confronted Lacanians and Foucauldians); and the ethological link Spinoza enables us to draw between ways of knowing and forms of existence. Moving on to discuss recent debates opposing liberalist and communitarian versions of political theory, Gatens and Lloyd ask if Spinoza’s political ideas result in the denial of difference and the negation of the individual. Hegel certainly thought so: on his reading the individual became a nothing in the face of the massiveness of substance. But as the first half of *Collective Imaginings* has already stressed, imagining the individual as somehow apart from the rest of nature ignores the ways in which one’s power, and hence capacity for autonomy, is facilitated by its relation to the collective, such that difference and diversity, could – potentially – flourish, given the development of other forms of sociability. Fittingly, *Collective Imaginings* ends with a brief discussion of the Mabo judgement in the Australian high court, leaving the reader free to imagine the rationality of the doctrine of *terra nullis*, the judgement overturned.

If Gatens and Lloyd’s work is motivated by the desire to develop the conceptual tools necessary to rethink our present, Warren Montag’s *Bodies, Masses, Power* is motivated by a desire to make sense of Althusser’s claim that ‘Spinozism can be said to be one of the greatest lessons in heresy the world has ever seen’ (*Essays in Self-Criticism*). The heretical nature of Spinoza’s philosophy is tracked by Montag via a series of theses: that there is no liberation of the mind without a liberation of the body; that there can be no liberation of the individual without a liberation of the collective; and that writing itself has a materiality. These three theses are not, today, particularly original, both from a general point of view and from the more specific standpoint of studies of Spinoza (indeed the first two could fairly reasonably be deduced from the major principles of the *Ethics*), but the distinctiveness of Montag’s work lies in his refusal to explore them through a direct examination of Spinoza’s metaphysics.

Montag begins tracking Spinoza’s heresy through a particularly close reading of the *Tractatus Theologico-*

Politicus, examining Spinoza’s unswerving insistence on sticking to the letter of the text, the materiality of Scripture, and his consequent refusal to attribute to it a supertextual signified. The materialist theory of reading which the *Tractatus* yields and which Montag practises, insists on the inconsistency of writing, an inconsistency which offers up symptoms of precise historical problems. In this regard Montag shows that some of the incoherence of Spinoza’s position in the *Tractatus* can be attributed to a thinly veiled polemic with Hobbes, itself the index of key political positions.

Notoriously, and despite the political implications of Spinoza’s materialism, the *Tractatus* ultimately appeals to the idealist solution of a juridical conception of rights as a way of solving the political problems it poses. Montag then asks why it is that Spinoza might refuse, or be unable to see, the revolutionary implications of the most forceful elements of his theory. The second chapter of *Bodies, Masses, Power* offers the elements of an answer through a discussion of Spinoza’s emphasis on the corporeal and his critique of free will and final causes, suggesting that the *Ethics*, far from offering a simple monist solution to the difficulties encountered in the *Tractatus*, is really engaged in a difficult (because endless) dismantling of dualism and the superstition it conditions. If Spinoza’s political theory is inconsistent, this is doubtless because everyone is subject to superstition. By focusing on what Deleuze saw as the ‘second’ *Ethics* (enveloped in the scholia) largely to the exclusion of the discourse of the concept, Montag is able to draw some persuasive philological links between the different parts of Spinoza’s writing, to indicate the importance of experience for Spinoza, and also to pick up again on the divergence of Spinoza from the liberal tradition of thought in other ways dissimulated in his writing.

The last two chapters of *Bodies, Masses, Power* investigate the reciprocity of individual and collective liberation and the extent to which early liberal philosophy was shaped by a fear of the multitude. The strong claim Montag makes is that Spinoza’s philosophy ‘addresses directly what haunts the others [philosophers of his time] as the absent centre of their political projects’. This claim is followed up through a discussion of the distinctiveness of Spinoza’s equation of power and right, and his consequent refusal of the juridical solution to political problems on which he elsewhere falls back. Of particular value here is Montag’s account of Spinoza’s interest in Roman history. Spinoza’s realism about the political affairs

of the Romans, demonstrating the necessary implication of the multitude in politics (its reciprocal, if antagonistic, relation to the state), makes it evident that following the ascetic path to freedom, the third kind of knowledge, and its associated beatitude, is by itself an impossibility. A symptom of the difficulty of acknowledging this position – in marked contrast to Hobbes and Locke, who, Montag argues, everywhere repress the presence of the multitude – is Spinoza's dream of a scabby Brazilian slave: synecdoche of a multitude excluded from, and yet constitutive of, the political.

Indirectly, both *Collective Imaginings* and *Bodies, Masses, Power* offer answers to the question of the contemporary relevance of Spinoza. Both have their shortcomings – indeed the strength of the one (analysis of the conceptual chains of the metaphysics, or the close, historically informed attention to the margins of the text) is, by its absence, the weakness of the other. And if both, happily, insist on the necessity of thinking with Spinoza, Deleuze's claim that 'one finds one is a Spinozist before one knows why' remains valid.

Andrew Goffey

Diagnosis: discipline

Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999. 334 pp., £37.50 hb., £13.95 pb., 0 5216 5075 5 hb., 0 5216 5905 1 pb.

For more than a decade, Nikolas Rose has been at the forefront of elaborating Michel Foucault's later writings on 'governmentality'. Such work has been characterized by a theoretical shift away from a unified notion of the state with its often presupposed monopolistic top-down exercise of political power. Instead, 'governmentality studies' have resituated the practices of the state alongside the more mundane regimes that make up our daily lives and inform our ways of governing others and ourselves. In adopting a genealogical approach to analysing specific problems of governing, Rose and his colleagues have tended to provide a 'diagnosis of the present' rather than articulate normative positions about the operations of political power. What distinguishes *Powers of Freedom* from previous work is that, in conclusion, Rose advocates opening up spaces for judging how political power restricts our current modes of existence. In working towards a 'genealogy of freedom', he recommends both a

diagnosis and an *evaluation* of the forms of life which particular styles of governing embody.

In its diagnostic project, *Powers of Freedom* draws upon previous empirical investigations to highlight the rationalities and techniques of governing conduct. Schematically, the book is divided into three parts, with the first part providing an overview of the conceptual tools used in questioning the nature of political power and challenging common understandings of freedom. Following Foucault, Rose illustrates how questions such as 'Who holds power?', 'In whose interests do they wield it?', and 'How is it legitimated?' have lost much of their potency when analysing certain contemporary political struggles. Moreover, by arguing against an understanding of political power associated with dichotomies such as domination/emancipation or coercion/freedom, Rose is able to explore the ways in which we are being governed not in spite of our freedom, but, more disturbingly, through our freedom. Suggestive of such practices are the expanding programmes of lifelong training and retraining, compliance with targets/budgets/audits and the growing need for codes/passwords to access areas of our own lives.

The second part of the book examines how populations are governed through three specific governmental strategies. Rose suggests that practices of governing associated with terms like 'the social', 'advanced liberalism' and, more recently, 'community' do not reside in the domain of any one political regime. Rather, such strategies are often made and remade as a consequence of whatever becomes the adopted *rationality* for governing at different times, in different places. In this way, a multiplicity of problems – with their own moralities, languages, conceptualizations, experts, solutions – are re-viewed through the particular rationality in question. For example, witness how left- and right-wing political arguments against the welfare state have given rise to an 'enterprising' rationality which seeks – through its own naming – actively to transform the 'unemployed person' into the 'job-seeker' and pitches practices of government as being about a 'hand-up', not a 'hand-out'.

Connected with such contingent political rationalities are the alternating techniques, and technologies, which are appropriated or invented by such strategies of government. In the third part of the book, Rose draws attention to the 'politics of numbers' in past governmental regimes, as well as the wide use of supposedly 'non-political' techniques of control associated with risk management. It is suggested that certain practices of control are being *designed into* the lives

of subjects of government, the places they occupy and the spaces through which they move. Thus, the Foucauldian picture emerging is one in which disciplinary techniques that attempt to produce 'normal' conduct are supplemented by regulating technologies concerned with the identification and ongoing monitoring of potentially 'high-risk' groups and spaces. Such disciplinary governing practices are indicative of the kind of treatment we are increasingly likely to be subjected to on entering, or being excluded from, certain circuits of existence.

Powers of Freedom concludes with a 'politics of minimal normativity' for evaluating our current modes of existence. Such a politics doesn't require subordinating oneself in the name of 'an external code, a truth, authority or goal'. Rather, it potentially opposes all that which is perceived as standing in the way of a person's life being its *own* telos or end. As such, governmentality studies are on the side of an 'active art of living' and aim to make the 'resources available to those who, because of their constitution as subjects of government, have the right to contest the practices that govern them in the name of their own freedom'.

Unfortunately, this slippage into the language of 'rights' belies the need for such normative gestures to be brought into sharper focus and recontextualized within what Foucault distinguished as 'sovereign', 'discipline' and 'governmental' relations of power. Additionally, being on the side of an 'active art of living' fails to account for the complex ways in which an 'actively aesthetic mode of existence' by one person (a sovereign self?) may limit the lives of other people, animals or the environment. Should this be restricted? If so, how?

Furthermore, if these other normative aspects are to be addressed, then Rose's 'aesthetic mode of governing the self' could benefit from an encounter with Levinas's work and the 'politics of friendship' hinted at by Derrida. Such dialogue might help to clarify the relevance of Rose's project for those who remain committed to achieving a larger-scale political reordering. It is to be hoped that the growth of such work will draw out other normative details that appear to complicate the political *self*-portrait presented here. Without such clarification, the normative spirit motivating Rose's somewhat restricted intervention is likely to continue to haunt governmentality studies.

David Hannigan and Joshua Mullan

Fallible animal

Bernard P. Dauenhauer, *Paul Ricoeur: The Promise and Risk of Politics*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham MD, 1998. 338 pp., £54.00 hb., £17.00 pb., 0 8476 9236 1 hb., 0 8476 9237 X pb.

Ricoeur's work occupies a peculiar position in contemporary thought. On the one hand, he is highly respected, well known and thoroughly established; on the other, he has somehow resisted assimilation. Something inhibits the spread of his influence. The meticulous density of his writing, his Christianity, and the moderate and reserved nature of his conclusions are all candidates. I suspect his 'mania for conciliation' is off-putting to many, though this would still leave open the fruits of the mania for those who don't share it. How many deconstructive critiques of representation, for example, deal with the revisionary work Ricoeur has done on Aristotelian *mimesis*? How many arguments for or against hermeneutical reason (irrationalism/relativism/nihilism vs. rationalism/objectivism/universalism) take on board Ricoeur's decisive contribution to post-Heideggerian hermeneutics – his insistence upon the necessity of distance in understanding? There is a growing body of literature on Ricoeur's work, but the spread of his influence is sometimes hindered as much as helped by its thoroughly expository character. Comparisons are made, but rarely with the same attentiveness to the alternative body of ideas as is paid to Ricoeur's.

Dauenhauer's work shares in this predicament to the extent that the great strength of this book is precisely his thorough exposition of Ricoeur's political thought, and its weakness his attempt to relate it to contemporary political theory, with special reference to the liberal–communitarian debate. For the most part, Dauenhauer's treatment of liberal and communitarian positions trades in snapshots, accurate only in so far as they are discussed outside the context of developing traditions of thought. Dauenhauer is perhaps repeating a problem found in Ricoeur's own *corpus*, at the point where he discusses Rawls in *Oneself As Another*. Ricoeur gives an account of the Rawls of *A Theory of Justice*, ignoring the revisions Rawls was in the process of making to his early conception which were to culminate in *Political Liberalism*. For his part, Dauenhauer only mentions the later book once, in a note, and then only to say that the treatment Ricoeur gives of *A Theory of Justice* applies also to *Political Liberalism*. The self-consciously contextualized and historicized, as well as definitely *not* atomistic or even

proceduralist, account of liberal theory which Rawls presents there should give pause for thought. Moreover, the distinguishing feature of *Political Liberalism* – its rebuttal of the idea that political theory is dependent upon a philosophical anthropology – does not register in Dauenhauer's treatment of Ricoeur's political thought. This is despite the fact that it is one of the key bones of contention between liberals and communitarians, and despite also Dauenhauer's attempt to demonstrate the centrality of Ricoeur's account of the human condition for his politics.

Aside from this, Dauenhauer has done a conscientious job in gathering together Ricoeur's political thought, from his postwar essays through to the political implications of the three ethical studies in *Oneself*. Dauenhauer also makes good use of several of Ricoeur's recent French texts – including *Le Juste* and *Lectures I: Autours du Politique*. The book has an elegant structure, treating Ricoeur's early work chronologically, the later work topically, making Ricoeur's hermeneutical turn the hinge between the two and his concern for philosophical anthropology the constant. Dauenhauer's treatment of Ricoeur in fact dovetails so well with his own political thought, as developed in

several book-length studies and a number of articles, that it is difficult to tell where Ricoeur ends and Dauenhauer begins, though he only briefly discusses his own work. In fact, Ricoeur wrote a highly approving 'Foreword' to Dauenhauer's earlier *The Politics of Hope*, in which he claimed a strong agreement between himself and Dauenhauer on political issues.

Of the twin themes that Dauenhauer picks out as central to Ricoeur's political thought – the paradoxical and the historical nature of political phenomena – it is the former which is the most suggestive. The idea of the historical embeddedness of practices and institutions, of subjects, and of theories, is not a distinguishing feature of Ricoeur's work. It is a staple of post-Heideggerian hermeneutics. As a part of his general position in this field, *distance* would have been a more Ricoeurian keyword – our ability to take a distance from the historical-political community in which we are embedded (or, for Ricoeur, to which we 'belong', in a fiduciary bond). We might also think of the distanciation or 'fixation' of political practices and institutions, as a complement to the distanciation achieved by the interpreter of these phenomena, following what Ricoeur calls 'the paradigm of the text'. This point might help to distinguish Ricoeur's work more clearly from communitarian writers, who – and this would be my own snapshot – seek the warmth of a disalienated political community without the cold of 'productive alienation'.

The irreducibly paradoxical nature of all things political remains the most compelling theme in Ricoeur's political thought, and perhaps even his most visionary: the fallibility of human being has politics as one of its domains. The theme is developed by Dauenhauer in two chapters on the coextensiveness of political fragility and responsibility. But where 'hope' is for Dauenhauer, in his earlier book, the best attitude to take towards the fragility of politics, this theme is sidelined here in favour of 'modesty'. However, I would see 'hope' as offering the more fertile ground, given its futurity – its motivation to responsible action – and the way in which the fragility of politics provokes, if not hope, then the vicissitudes of the couple hope/despair. To this complex of notions can be added Ricoeur's work on judgement in situation and initiative, both of which are responses to (not only or even primarily political) aporias. This suggests a fruitful comparison with Derrida's work on several themes – undecidability and responsibility, Heideggerian hope/despair, democracy to come – which might be the focus of further research in the area.

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