

# Nothing but a commodity

Georg Lukács, *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness: Tailism and the Dialectic*, trans. Esther Leslie, Verso, London and New York, 2000. 160 pp., £16.00 hb., £10.00 pb., 1 85984 747 1 hb., 1 85984 370 0 pb.

I imagine that for Western Marxists (such as myself) *History and Class Consciousness* will have meant ideological analysis rather than what Lukács called ‘organizational problems’. This book will, in other words, have meant a breakthrough in the study of ‘the antinomies of bourgeois consciousness’ (subtitle of one of its most famous chapters) rather than those arguments organized around a consciousness ‘imputed’ to the proletariat without any empirical evidence whatsoever. From this perspective, then, Lukács is read as the philosopher of a Marxism produced by subtracting the Leninism from precisely that Marxism-Leninism that made its production possible in the first place. But is this not all to the good? And is not the current consensus based on the feeling that whatever the status of Marxism itself – dead or alive – it is Leninism which is historically dead for good: as witness the multitude of anarchist revivals flowing in to fill that void in current radical politics and activism?

For this reading, it is convenient that Lukács’s hero-worshipping *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of His Thought* should have been published separately, a year after *History and Class Consciousness* and a month after Lenin’s death. Convenient also that the earlier volume did not include any number of other, contemporaneous political essays, and that what Lukács called the ‘crucial’ in that volume – it is, as John Rees points out, ‘Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organization’ – be consigned to its end, where few will have reached it. But now yet another text from this same period has surfaced. (The astonishing resurrection of any number of early ‘lost’ texts of Lukács from out of their dusty bank vaults, or, as in this case, the Soviet archives, is an archeological adventure waiting to be told.) This new one, a reply to critics of *History and Class Consciousness* within the party and drafted in 1925 or 1926, reinforces the hitherto minority view, not only that the author of the philosophical classic in question was a Leninist, but that the text itself is not fully comprehensible except as a contribution to Marxism-Leninism. And thus, we almost hear Lenin himself murmuring, it happens that

for eighty years no Marxist has ever properly understood *History and Class Consciousness*!

But this is no mere biographical detail: whatever the historical destiny and fate of Leninism, it can be confidently asserted that it relegated to the past and to obsolescence the whole bourgeois tradition of political philosophy, whose revival today is little more than a pastiche, unless it is simply a joke. On the other hand, without some genuine philosophical and theoretical formulation – something a little less pragmatic and empirical than *What Is To Be Done?* – it has proved difficult to construct that alternative tradition which ought to replace it, and to substitute a reflection on collectivity for the exhausted one on political representation. Marxism-Leninism, in other words, never received its philosophical expression; or at least, not until now and retroactively, when we are finally able to perceive that *History and Class Consciousness* was not so much the philosophy that Marx himself never got around to writing, as it was precisely that ‘philosophy of the party’ that seemed missing from a later Marxism-Leninism. Whether or not this restores its actuality is another question; but it can safely be asserted that, however tarnished the image of ‘the Party’ in its Stalinist and post-Stalinist form, the organizational question will never be very far from people’s minds in a period of political effervescence such as we now seem once again to be entering.

The oddly named ‘Tailism and the Dialectic’ – splendidly translated here by Esther Leslie and contextualized by an introduction by John Rees and a conclusion by Slavoj Žižek (both of them stimulating and suggestive) stages a reply to and a counterattack on two critics – Laszlo Rudas and Abram Deborin – which usefully offer more general lessons in the dialectic itself. The reply is unfinished, and the unusual title (‘tailism’ – *chvostismus*, invented by Lenin from the Russian word for tail and designating the politics of those content to follow the masses rather than to lead them) is of a piece with the rather quaint and heavy-handed Leninist rhetoric of the period. (It might have been clarified somewhere before page 42.)

The lessons are twofold. The first, administered to Rudas, deals essentially with matters of class consciousness and in particular the problem of subjectivity and the notorious idea of so-called 'imputed' consciousness, or, in other words, the objective possibility for a given class to know a social totality which has, however, not yet been actualized subjectively. This is, then, the very opposite of the problematic of E.P. Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class*, which, as is well known, deals with gradual education of a class 'for itself' as it slowly becomes aware of its situation and its exploitation, along with its eventual powers and solidarity as well. Rather, Lukács's notion foregrounds the objective or structural conditions of possibility of such awareness.

Deborin's allegedly Menshevik critique is the occasion for a review of the problem of a dialectics of nature. I want to discuss it first, in order to demonstrate the continuing relevance of this old subject for us today. It is, of course, conventional wisdom to define so-called Western Marxism by distinguishing between historical materialism and dialectical materialism. The former limits the validity of Marxism to history as such, and adopts a properly Viconian scepticism: 'man can only understand what man himself has made'; nature then remains, if not unknowable, then at least accessible only through the appropriately restricted, Kantian categories (or, in other words, for us and not in itself, phenomenon rather than noumenon).

Dialectical materialism, however, invented by Engels on the basis of Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* and then promoted into a metaphysical Stalinism, posits the dialectic at work in the objective world itself. Marx and Hegel thus discovered the laws of nature along with the laws of history as such: and through this half-open door Lenin's notorious 'reflection theory' slips in, rejoining the age-old (and non-dialectical) notion of truth as the 'adequation' of concepts to things.

The newly revealed discussion in 'Tailism' now shows Lukács – identified by Merleau-Ponty as the very progenitor of 'Western Marxism' – to have been agnostic on the whole matter, and rather more reasonable than the metaphysical ideologues on either side of the issue. Whether the dialectic can really be applied to nature is here a problem which cannot yet be resolved, whether it will ever be or not. It is a historicist position, which Lukács considers to be a refusal of 'immediacy' very much in Hegel's own spirit: 'what my critics call my agnosticism is nothing other than my denial that there is a socially unmediated, i.e. an immediate relationship of humans to nature in the present stage of social development'. Significantly, he adds, 'I reject

getting into disputes over utopian future possibilities.' Lukács takes it on himself to correct Engels's misunderstanding of Kant, and thereby to disarm the more simplistic opposition between an alleged idealism and the equally alleged materialism (of Engels, but also of Lenin himself):

As a historical process, knowledge is only one part, only the conscious (correctly or falsely conscious) part of the historical development of that uninterrupted transformation of social being, which occurs likewise in uninterrupted interaction with nature.

The orthodox are then welcome to believe, if they like, that some day, under future utopian conditions, the relevance of the dialectic itself to nature will be objectively revealed.

However, this does not address a different set of problems which emerge when we shift from the axis of subject and object to that of scientific truth and historical relativism. Here Lukács's tactical concession solves nothing: 'Self-evidently the dialectic *could* not possibly be effective as an *objective* principle of development of society, if it were not already effective as a principle of nature before society.' For the problem now turns, not on nature itself, but on history and on historicity: 'insofar as we grasp the dialectical character of knowledge, we understand it simultaneously as a historical process'.

But how does history emerge from nature? The Marxian version of this evolutionary story turns on the concept of the mode of production (not really theorized anywhere by Lukács); it is a concept that would at once raise the question of the privileged relationship of science and capitalism. But even limiting ourselves to the two most recent and 'modern' modes of production – capitalism and socialism – it is obvious enough that even this limited relativism recalls the scandal of Lysenko and the hypothesis of the inheritance of acquired characteristics. Still, all these troublesome matters are implicit in the simple question: 'are also the categories in which objective reality is summarized for human knowledge at any one time determined by economic structure, by social being?'

The point I want to make here is that such ancient debates and the associations generated by slogans like 'proletarian science' and 'bourgeois science', which ought long since to have disappeared into the ashcan of postmodern oblivion, are still very much with us, albeit under different names. The current debates are filed under the rubrics of gender and science studies; and Evelyn Fox-Keller's arguments for a feminist natural science are very consistent with the central problem-

atic of *History and Class Consciousness* (whatever role they reserve for social class). Meanwhile, science studies itself, whose names range from David Bloor and Bruno Latour to Isabelle Stengers and Barbara Herrnstein Smith, very much reawakens all the anxieties about relativism that a Marxist orthodoxy felt some eighty years ago, but now in the bosoms of Western traditional hard scientists, who do not want to open any doors onto the troublesome question of possible relationships between concrete historical situations and the discovery of 'timeless' laws of nature which took place within them. These consequences are perhaps more frankly acknowledged in Lukács's responses here, than in the original text.

As for the first part of 'Tailism', it will now become clear that the issue of so-called 'imputed consciousness' with which it deals is very much related to the issues of natural science and relativism. The peculiar term – *zugerechnetes Bewusstsein*, about which Lukács admits that he might have chosen a better one – evokes something like an epistemological privilege for that social class called the proletariat. It is necessary to situate Lukács's idea in a significant current of so-called Western Marxism and then to resituate the new problematic among some very contemporary thoughts indeed, before we look at the original theory itself.

Western Marxism has often been identified as the philosophical space in which a new attention to consciousness and subjectivity was developed within Marxism, from Gramsci's conception of collective pedagogy and the cultural overcoming of subalternity onwards. This new tradition wished to avoid the three-fold dangers of (1) historical inevitability in the spirit of the Second and Third Internationals; (2) the stewardship of the Leninist party; and, on the other hand, (3) the spontaneism and anti-intellectual populism of a well-nigh religious belief in the wisdom of the masses and their instinctive revolts. Clearly, the new tradition will make a place for culture as such which cannot be present in the other three positions.

In his reply to his critics, Lukács insists strongly on the importance of subjectivity in *History and Class Consciousness*. He has in mind the old theological dilemma of determinism and free will, now played out in the revolutionary dialectic between the objective conditions (are we in a genuinely revolutionary situation) and the subjective will and preparedness of the revolutionary class itself: a conjunction which can presumably only be judged after the fact. Lukács points out, in one of the most illuminating moments in 'Tailism', that it is not the facts – famine statistics, or some index of proletarian dissatisfaction – which

are variable here, but rather the categories of subject and object themselves. The 'objective situation' can fully as much be seen as a subjective assessment as revolutionary subjectivity can be grasped objectively:

The dialectical interaction of subject and object in the historical process consists in the fact that the subjective moment is, self-evidently as I stress again and again, a product, a moment of the objective process. It works back on the process, in certain historical situations, whose emergence is called forth by the objective process (e.g. HCC, p. 313), and gives it direction. This working back is only possible in praxis, only in the *present*... Once the action is completed, the subjective moment slots back into the sequence of objective moments.

This particular lesson in dialectics strengthens the requirement for political appreciation and intelligence, rather than allowing the subject/object problem to be an excuse for dogmatic formulas. I will only mention two other such insights, which are here necessarily undeveloped, but clearly rich in insights. One has to do with ideological analysis: "false consciousness" too can be false in a dialectical and a mechanical way'. (This points us back to Hegel's original notion of the interrelationship of truth and error.) Meanwhile another remark – 'for a dialectician, the concept of consciousness is necessarily inseparable from its content' – usefully wards off Kantian formalisms and puts us on the track of a dialectic that is as practical as it is formal. But none of these discussions raises the issue of culture, and it is at this point, I think, that we must distinguish Lukács's positions in *History and Class Consciousness* from the misunderstandings of those positions from which so-called Western Marxism may well have sprung.

We do not have to spend much time on the stupider objections to the idea of 'imputed consciousness': that is to say, the empirical ones, reflected in such questions as, in that case, why are not construction workers more intelligent than (bourgeois) nuclear physicists? Imputed consciousness is a structural notion, closely related to that other (much-maligned) structural concept, the social totality. At some very basic level, that 'aspiration to totality' which is perhaps the most famous phrase in *History and Class Consciousness* simply means making connections. It does not imply that anyone out there – Lacan's 'subject supposed to know' – sees all the social relations and has some privileged knowledge from above. (If anything, the proletariat's knowledge is a knowledge from below.) Rather, it dramatizes the overcoming of two kinds of fragmentation: that of the academic disciplines (in



which what counts as scientific knowledge is divided up into a multitude of specializations); and that of social experience, in which the various classes and class fractions or subgroups are systematically roped off from each other, in a reciprocal ignorance scarcely relieved by media stereotypes. Both of these forms of fragmentation are intensified in present-day capitalist society well beyond anything Lukács (or Lenin himself) could have imagined.

The notion of 'imputed consciousness', then, was the prelude to Lukács's hypothesis that the 'standpoint' of the proletariat, from below, offered an epistemological approach to the social totality unavailable in the other class or group positions. But it is precisely this central hypothesis which is today everywhere challenged, not merely in the movement away from class analysis and class consciousness, but above all in the emergence of the various group identities so often summed up under the slogan of identity politics. In fact, Lukács's notion of an epistemological 'standpoint' has much of interest for any consequent identity politics today, and it is rather different from the Lukács-inspired question of the identity of some new revolutionary 'subject of history' that dominated the theoretical debates of the 1960s. Yet as far as I know, only a socialist feminism has appreciated the usefulness of Lukács's contribution here, and we owe it to Sandra Harding to have developed a notion of 'standpoint theory' in which the collective experience (and the collective traumas) of the various groups can be politically assessed, and

in which forms of group identity can be grasped as forms of resistance to specific, yet structurally distinct, forms of oppression.

Beyond 'identity politics', to be sure, lies something else, for which hybridity and queer theory are not altogether satisfactory designations. This is the point at which construct-edness once again rears its head; and the constructedness of the scientific truth of nature rejoins the construct-edness (or 'performativity') of social identity itself. The dilemma facing any philosophy of constructedness is of course that of the resistance of the raw material itself. Can one really become anything? The objection is a caricature of the more fundamental ontological problem of any absolute idealism, whether that of Fichte or Sartre, namely the constraints that we know from experience but that do not seem to be reflected in the terms of the theory. Lukács's standpoint theory would seem to offer at least one way out of this dilemma, by theorizing the structural limits of a situation within which a range of existential and epistemological choices are available.

This serves to remind us that *History and Class Consciousness* remains an open book, and an unfinished project. But it is right to conclude, as both John Rees and Slavoj Žižek do, that it is an open Leninist book, and that wherever else it sends us, it also ought to send us back to the fundamental *philosophical* problem of the party itself, and in particular of the Leninist party. Rees also recalls that it is the very notion of 'imputed consciousness' which secures the vocation

of that party and the role of its intellectuals, in so far as there remains a structural gap between what the proletariat can potentially know, and what it empirically knows, most often in the form of 'economism' or trade-union politics. Lukács argued, Rees tells us, 'that the combined effects of class location, the commodity structure of modern capitalism and the class struggle shaped class consciousness'. It is an excellent formulation; only I feel that Rees tends, in his otherwise useful introduction, to flatten out the analysis of what I have called the 'epistemological privilege' of the proletariat and to draw its dialectical sting, to dissipate everything paradoxical about a position for which it is the very commodification of the proletariat which gives it that special privilege. It is not because the proletariat has to struggle against alienation that it can learn something significant. We all do that and we all learn something

or other. It is rather because the proletariat has become nothing but a commodity (the commodity of labour power). It is because the proletariat is literally nothing, owns nothing, has no identity, that it can learn, not just something, but everything. This is Lukács's epistemological version of those 'radical chains' celebrated by the young Marx; and whatever we may think of this idea – whose notion of *dénouement* Benjamin might have called 'theological' – it was a stunningly original philosophical leap for him to have made, in political exile in Vienna, after the failure of the Hungarian revolution; and we ought not to deprive him of that originality. Here too, perhaps, in that return to theories of commodification imposed by a new global consumerism and Americanization, Lukács's old book may still have something to teach us.

**Fredric Jameson**

## *L'exception française*

Julia Kristeva, *The Sense and Non-sense of Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Jeanine Herman, Columbia University Press, New York, 2000. 243 pp., £22.00 hb., 0 231 10996 2.

Dominique Lecourt, *The Mediocracy: French Philosophy since the Mid-1970s*, trans. Gregory Elliott, Verso, London, 2001. xv + 240 pp., £18.00 hb., 1 85984 793 5.

The two books are very different. Their authors come from very different backgrounds, and operate within very different theoretical parameters. And yet their concerns, worries and fears are broadly similar. Both Julia Kristeva and Dominique Lecourt are rightly concerned with the present state of French intellectual life, and fearful for its future. French culture is, they complain, mediocre, lukewarm, media-dominated and consumerist in the extreme. It is also threatened by the effects of a neo-liberalism that is closely associated with 'Anglo-Saxon' hegemony. The 'influential technocrats', writes Lecourt, are 'absorbed in their servile admiration for the triumphant Anglo-Saxon world'. 'Anglo-Saxon' is never used with kindly intent in French, and it does not refer to *Beowulf*. It actually means 'Anglo-American' and appears to preclude any possibility of a European Common Intellectual Programme. *L'exception française* must, it would seem, remain intact. It is hard to imagine any leftist on this side of the Channel beginning a book with Lecourt's declarative: 'I love my country.'

Kristeva's pessimism is even more apocalyptic. Contemporary France gives her the impression that she is living at the end of the Roman Empire, but there is no new religion on the horizon. We live, she claims, in a 'normalized' society in which power is hidden and in which punishment has been replaced by regulation and normalization. Is revolt (she does not speak of revolution) still possible in such a society? Is it still possible even to think? Has the traditional European hope of renewal through formal and metaphysical revolt been extinguished? Kristeva, who is Eurocentric to a fault, sounds at times like a deeply pessimistic Foucault, but she is in fact talking about Debord's society of the spectacle, though her proposed remedies are not his. Nor are they Dominique Lecourt's.

Lecourt is probably best known, in both France and enemy 'Anglo-Saxon' territory, as the author of important studies in historical epistemology and of the Lysenko affair. He has also been a significant figure in educational reform. He was a co-founder of

the Collège International de Philosophie, established in 1978 to remedy certain of the university system's 'deficiencies' by outflanking it, and also of the Fondation Diderot. Most of his recent work has been devoted to exploring the philosophical dimension and political implications of scientific thought, and to encouraging exchanges between philosophers and scientists. A pure product of the Bachelard–Canguilhem tradition of rational epistemology, he was close to both Althusser and Foucault and much of *The Mediocracy* is an attempt to recapture the intellectual excitement of the much-maligned period of the 1960s and early 1970s. The appendix on 'Dissidence or Revolution', first published in 1978, is a furious piece of polemic directed against the so-called 'New Philosophers' of the day. The tone is brutally Marxist, and whilst he does not use such much-loved expressions as 'imperialist lackeys and capitalist running dogs' he comes close to it. As they say, it takes you back.

Largely forgotten outside France, the 'New Philosophers' were a loosely knit group of former leftists who, having read Solzhenitsyn, suddenly discovered that the 'truth' of Marxism was the Gulag, and promptly dismissed the entire Hegelian-Marxist tradition as totalitarian. They then went their different ways. Some, like Christian Jambet, now immerse themselves in Islamic mysticism. André Glucksmann and Bernard-Henri Lévy are senior media pundits and all-purpose pontificators. They defend the West against everything from Stalinism to the Islamic fundamentalism of girls who dare to wear headscarves to school: such girls are the advance guard of Algerian terrorism (and too bad if the girls involved in the original headscarf affair were in fact Turkish). Glucksmann's latest opus is simply entitled *Good and Evil*: the horrors seen in Rwanda are not the aftereffects of a particularly vicious and divisive colonialism, but simply a manifestation of human Evil. And if that is the case, there is obviously no need to investigate dark rumours about French government collusion or even complicity.

Not surprisingly, Lecourt greatly prefers Foucault's 'specific intellectual', who speaks on the basis of his or her sectorial knowledge, to 'universal intellectuals' who speak in the name of Big Principles, though he ought to have added that Foucault was not always innocent of the sin of universalization. Lecourt's charge against the mediocracy is that 'thinkers' like Glucksmann have abandoned the thought for which they have been assigned responsibility, that they have forgotten the need for 'the labour of thought'. The latter phrase is pure Canguilhem, and it is hard not to recall that angry old man when Lecourt denounces

Vattimo's 'weak thought' and talk of the end of epistemology, or dismisses theories of postmodernity as 'chic anarchist music for the jet set'. His proposals are modest: rational, responsible thought; rigour; the defence of real human rights; and what used to be called the concrete analysis of concrete situations. Modesty is still a virtue.

Kristeva needs little introduction, but she is generous enough to provide one herself. *Sense and Non-sense of Revolt* is based on a transcript of her seminar, and the bulk of the text is a good introduction to her concepts, should another one be needed. Anyone familiar with her work over the last thirty years will learn little from it. Her notion of 'revolt' stems from the fable of the father and the brothers of *Totem and Taboo*. The brothers band together against their tyrannical father, who has a monopoly on women, kill him and eat him. Commemorated in the totem meal, the primal murder is sublimated as culture and the exchange of women becomes possible. So far, so Freudian. But revolt has a price: the brothers exclude women (or rather 'the feminine'; Kristeva always has little to say about actual women) from the social sphere and repress femininity. This repression is not entirely successful; the repressed is still there in the form of the maternal and the semiotic, or the rhythmic, bodily proto-language that lies beneath and underpins the symbolic, or rational language and thought. It is the avant-garde's ability to tap into the semiotic, at risk of psychosis, that gives it its immense power. This has been the argument ever since *La Révolution du langage poétique* of 1974 and it has never been entirely convincing.

Kristeva's original avant-garde consisted of Rimbaud and Lautréamont. Throughout the long years she spent working on *Tel Quel*, it expanded to include Céline, Artaud, Barthes, Joyce, and a variety of others. It now includes Barthes, Aragon and Sartre. Barthes, of course, is a familiar figure, but Aragon and Sartre are unlikely candidates for canonization. Sartre's refusal of the Nobel Prize is described as emblematic of the ambiguities of revolt: in the name of his individual freedom, he rejects a prize awarded by the West, and unwittingly traps himself into supporting a repressive Soviet Union. In Sartre's plays and novels, revolt is closely associated with the motif of the bastard who, in the name of freedom, is willing to risk the destruction of freedom. True, but it needs no Kristeva to tell us this; British undergraduates have been writing essays on the 'bastard' theme for a very long time.

Aragon's case is rather different. He is, according to Kristeva, a shape-shifter, in constant revolt, constantly refusing to be identified with any definite cause (or,

in his last years, any definite sexuality). This, surely, is romanticism writ large. That the young Aragon (1897–1982) was one of the great poets of surrealism cannot be doubted. That he constantly reinvented himself is not in dispute. Indeed, the surrealist reinvented himself as a hyper-Stalinist, then as a mystical nationalist and Resistance poet, then as commissar for art and literature, and so on. The anathemas he pronounced in the name of Socialist Realism during the 1940s and 1950s destroyed many a name and many a reputation. Aragon regularly turned his back on his former friends and comrades. Some revolt.

Kristeva's habitual style is the peremptory, and she has always been stronger on assertion than on proof. At times, the style leads her to make pronouncements that border on the hilarious. To suggest that the exchange of women takes place outside the sphere of the social and the symbolic is to overlook the obvious fact that marriage ceremonies do – and must – take place in public. A certain degree of amnesia is also in evidence here. As Lecourt notes, it is somewhat odd for Kristeva to complain about the Americanization of French culture: it was she and Tel Quel who, in the mid-1970s, discovered in the USA a society without repressive structures. The Black Panthers were not asked for their opinion. The basic claims put forward for the avant-gardes are equally weird and wonderful.

According to Kristeva, 'the intensity of avant-garde movements, their impact of political debates, as well as on the desires of youth, has lent it the value of a mass movement'. This inevitably conjures up a hilarious vision of massed ranks of bearded Mallarméans storming the barricades, of surrealists seizing power, gun in hand. At some point, Aragon will change sides. No matter. The revolution will be textual, or it will not be.

Guy Debord once added a caption to a photo of a Californian supermarket that had been set ablaze in a riot: 'Critique of the consumer society.' Tonight, this weekend, tomorrow, cars will burn in the suburbs of Paris. There will be nothing 'normalizing' about the police response: it will be as brutal as it ever was. This is not revolution, but a symptom, the obverse of what Lecourt sees as the greatest threat to democracy: the passivity of its citizens, which is now being organized on a planetary scale. Modest proposals for political mobilization around rights and freedoms seem to have rather more to offer than calls for a new revolution in poetic language.

**David Macey**

## No *logos*

Christopher Norris, *Minding the Gap: Epistemology and Philosophy of Science in the Two Traditions*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2000. 296 pp., £37.00 hb., 1 55849 255 0.

I read *Minding the Gap* with great interest and enjoyment. Norris's admirable aim is to bring together approaches to the epistemology of science from 'analytic' and 'continental' philosophical traditions. The field certainly needs writers who attempt an overview, given the number who have ploughed deep and narrow. But I enjoyed disagreeing with Norris, too.

The book is a collection of related essays, and it is a virtue, in a way, that many chapters are relatively self-contained, though thematically related. Norris lays out the fruits of his wide, non-partisan reading to great effect, covering, *inter alia*, theory change, the Quine/Davidson/Rorty axis, Husserl, Bachelard and Derrida, quantum theory, McDowell, Thomas Nagel and Wittgenstein. You might almost think there was a 'God's eye view' of philosophy, until you notice the lens changing on his expository camera in order

to make equally good sense of writers who disagree at the deepest level.

Norris rightly identifies Quine as the originator of the crisis in 'analytic' epistemology of science, and defends a version of 'realism' to save us from the sceptical, relativistic morass into which much modern Anglophone, post-positivist philosophy seems to have fallen. Wittgenstein is castigated even more than Quine for his sceptical relativism. Bachelard, Derrida and, more prominently, Husserl, are cited as writers from whom Anglophone philosophy of science can learn. While I think it can, I don't see 'realism' helping.

How does Quine differ from his great predecessor (and model) Hume? Locke famously held that 'Nature, through the senses, writes the book of knowledge on the blank slate of the mind', and that, from the input to the senses, we could 'abstract' the relevant pat-

terns needed to understand it – patterns that are *really there* in nature. Building on Berkeley's doubts, Hume showed no such things could be *found* in experience. He took them to reside instead in mere habit, since only empty 'relations of ideas' are true of necessity, because self-contradictory to deny. Kant countered that the underlying basis for understanding nature (space, time, causality, quality, quantity, etc.) must be *imposed* on experience by the mind; but 'must be' only out of a weak *a priori* necessity, through their being conditions for the very possibility of gaining knowledge through experience. He thereby created a special kind of necessary truth (synthetic *a priori*) – not self-contradictory, but merely self-defeating to deny.

Throughout this development the stability and reality of *meanings* remained unquestioned. Quine rejects this point of agreement between Hume and Kant – the analytic/synthetic distinction, resurrected in logical empiricism – by showing that no sentence is immune from revision in the light of experience, but that, by the same token, ascribing truth to *any* sentence will make *some* contribution to the meaning of the terms it contains. If we cannot definitively separate those (synthetic) sentences whose truth turns wholly on experience from those (analytic) sentences whose truth turns on meaning alone, then each sentence's truth turns in part on both, and all are thus inseparable parts of a single fabric.

In response to Quine's critique, 'Analytic Truth' could not be rescued, but merely saved relative to a given conceptual scheme, because no way can be found to specify the identity conditions for meanings (synonymy) *outside* the languages people actually speak. By the same token, referring cannot carry with it any extra-linguistic guarantee that just what we refer to is *really out there*. So there is nothing 'real' about 'meaning' beyond the relations between words and actions in the transient human activity of meaning something.

Quine and Wittgenstein converge on this. 'Meaning' (the present participle), as we actually do it when we mean something, yields a gerund – 'the meaning' – which, like any gerund, is *the doing* of the action described by the verb (not the supposed object of the intransitive verb 'to mean'). Sure enough, it has



a character, a way of being done, but this resides nowhere but in the relations between the expressions of the language as they are used by speakers to refer to those things they can only pick out as such by using those expressions – hence Wittgenstein's equation of meaning and use. Language and its auxiliary activities are all we can use to refer, so a thing must always be referred to *as a 'something-or-other'*.

Frege was right: 'What do you mean?' is ambiguous. It could be used to ask about the things to which you refer, or to ask you for another way to put what you have said or written. But Quine's arguments (and many of Wittgenstein's) confound Frege's project to reify the latter, the 'sense' of an expression, as the supposed reference of that expression when found in reported speech. If 'senses' do not exist beyond the relations between the uses of expressions in a language, still less do they have an existence prior to, independent of, or more fundamental than that linguistic activity in which they are displayed. We may only identify 'meanings' by equating expressions, and we may only refer to things under a description. There is no final determinacy to either exercise, hence

Quine's twin theses of indeterminacy of translation and ontological relativity. Dummett argues that they equally apply between the idiolects of two speakers of the same language.

So much for Kant's claim that there is a single necessary conceptual scheme which we impose upon experience. 'Of necessity', we must impose *some such scheme*, because some such scheme or other is a precondition for making *any* sense of the world, but there is nothing necessary about the sense made by any particular scheme. Kuhn's paradigms and the like are just successive, historically contingent conceptual schemes, each of which plays the role Kant requires. (Look at the changing role of teleology in Western metaphysics since Aristotle, or that old chestnut, the demise of Newtonian absolute time and space.)

This unwelcome conclusion has led many philosophers to distinguish 'external' and 'internal' perspectives on a framework of belief. As Norris puts it:

Thus for Rorty, as likewise for Davidson and Quine, there is no sure route – perhaps no route at all – from a naturalized (causal) epistemology to a theory of rational belief formation that would take due account of this process and the normative values it brings into play. These latter belong to the 'inside view', that which we occupy in our role as self-conscious, reflective subjects for whom the word 'true' is a 'term of praise' applied to beliefs which optimize our sense of overall purpose and coherence. From the externalist viewpoint, conversely, 'true' is a term which properly applies to just those utterances or items of belief which display the right kind of causal history as tracked by a Quinean 'radical interpreter' with access to the relevant information sources but lacking any privileged epistemic warrant ... as Rorty puts it, we should resist the 'urge to coalesce the justificatory and the causal story,' since they involve entirely different (incompatible) orders of truth-claim.

Norris defines his 'realism' in opposition to this warning from Rorty. But the whole *point* of Quine's account of the 'radical interpreter' is to show that experience cannot contain the wherewithal to compel either a unique interpretation of meaning or disambiguation of reference: there is no 'right kind of causal history' to accomplish this.

A few pages further on Norris approvingly quotes William Child: 'the idea that a normative interpretative story is itself a causal story is essential for understanding the form of reason explanation'. Moreover, 'it is also essential for understanding the simple realist thought, that it is possible for us to have thoughts

about, and knowledge of, "an objective public world which is not of our own making"'. The last phrase is Davidson's, but the 'realism' it upholds is not. For Davidson the world may be not of our own making, but the meaning with which we imbue it certainly is. I think claiming that it is 'essential' that the causal and the normative 'stories' coalesce rests on a deep double confusion.

Dummett repudiates Davidson's version of 'realism', rejecting 'recognition transcendent truths' in favour of 'warranted assertability'. That there should be such truths is a consequence of Davidson's truth theoretic account of meaning which implies the existence of states of affairs '*in virtue of which*' truths are true but which are beyond our cognition – this is, moreover, the assumption on which the principle of bivalence in logic must rest. Dummett's anti-realism and Norris's (and Child's) realism arise from placing a causal inflection upon '*in virtue of which*'. This is no part of Davidson's thesis, and, I think, quite unsustainable, into the bargain. A state of affairs *makes* the true statement about it true, and the assumption that Dummett rejects is that states of affairs *outside* the range of our cognition can possibly accomplish this, so constraining the range of what warrants assertion. Norris, on the other hand, wants to ignore Rorty's warning and hopes that somehow it is the world our statements are *about* which *makes (causes)* them to be true. But the *whole point* of the relation on which bivalence depends – of *making true* – is that this sort of 'making' is *not an accomplishment*. Everything in the past existed before the descriptions were coined which now allow us to refer to them. 'Makes' complements 'about': if this sentence correctly describes what it is about, that makes it true. 'That' refers, of course, to 'the sentence correctly describing what it is about', not the Fregean *reference* of 'what it is about'; for example, the state of affairs 100 million years ago on Earth. So 'makes' here does not signify any causal connection, akin to Locke's 'writes' in 'Nature, through the senses...'

This, however, addresses only half of the 'double confusion' above. A state of affairs would not need retrospectively to acquire the causal power of making the sentence about it true if the *proposition* the sentence expresses were always true (i.e. true of the past now in the same way it was true of the future 100 million years ago). This half of the confusion is the view that a 'God's eye view' of nature (or, as Thomas Nagel has it, a 'View from Nowhere') is the constitutive ideal of objectivity.

This ideal embodies the key assumption that *intelligibility* is an intrinsic feature of reality, independently of there being human minds to comprehend it. That is, that making propositions true is an aspect of the intrinsic nature of states of affairs in the world, irrespective of these propositions being expressed in the sentences of any (human) language. So the sentences of an objective science express a subset of the propositions made true by what the world has, does and will contain; and the totality of true propositions hold without regard to time and place, both preexisting and indefinitely surviving the circumstances which make them true – in short, the inventory of the knowledge of omniscient God. This prior intelligibility of the world is its *logos*, and human reason is the ability to discern the mental or conceptual representation of things that they *already contain and exemplify*: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...’

The weakest chapter of *Minding the Gap* is the last, in which Norris seeks to rebut Thomas Nagel’s approach to this issue. Nagel seeks to show how the appearance of arbitrariness or conventionality apparently ushered in by rejecting the ‘God’s eye view’ depends on one’s still clinging to that very notion (in just the way Dummett does). If the ‘view from nowhere’ is incoherent (which it is – deeply so) then there is no unfavourable contrast to make at the expense of convention. Conventions and signs *are* arbitrary, but in respect to the *agreements* from which they stem, which are not. This is the specific point (in his discussion of Nagel’s agreement with Cora Diamond) where Norris’s otherwise exemplary capacity for sympathetic reading deserts him.

If propositions are the meanings expressed by sentences, then, by Quine’s arguments, they no more exist independently of the relations between the uses of expressions in a language than the senses of the individual referring expressions they contain. This supports the altogether more reasonable supposition that the intelligibility of the world is a human artefact, like every other part of our culture and technology. Nature is not a puzzle with a meaning already there to be discovered. In so far as there is a meaning, we have put it there. It is not ‘found’, ‘discovered’ or ‘given’, but invented, made, constructed and fashioned. But it has not been constructed out of *nothing*. It has arisen through the concrete practical agreements we have achieved as material beings.

‘But don’t those agreements rest on the senses? Haven’t you come back to Locke? Don’t we agree on what is red because red things, for instance, appear red

to us because they affect us in the same way, which they do because they themselves are the *same*?’ And don’t we agree on what is sweet because sweet things (e.g. sugar and saccharine), appear sweet to us because they affect us in the same way, which they do because *we can’t tell the difference*? No. There is all the difference in the world between *starting* somewhere because you have no choice, and *resting* your epistemology on that starting point. This is not to deny that there is a ‘mind-independent reality’, but to recognize that, as such, it is not *intelligible* and that such intelligibility as it has *is* mind-dependent, and *post hoc*.

I enjoyed this book quite as much as I enjoyed disagreeing with it. The issues are important, the range of literature surveyed provides a valuable juxtaposition of perspectives, and perhaps best of all is the service Norris renders to the cause of the unity of philosophy.

**Roger Harris**

## The Lewontin test

Jonathan Michael Kaplan, *The Limits and Lies of Human Genetic Research: Dangers for Social Policy*, Routledge, New York and London, 2000. 240 pp., £50.00 hb., £13.99 pb., 0 415 92637 8 hb., 0 415 92638 6 pb.

This is a book that should be read by anyone concerned with the privileging of genetic explanations of human actions. Kaplan systematically undermines the claims that there are, for example, ‘genes for’ intelligence, committing crimes or homosexuality. He also makes clear the limited nature of contemporary human genetic research. However, his main concern lies in challenging the ways in which claims about the supposedly genetic causes of human behaviour and physiology get used in political and legal decision-making.

Kaplan goes about this task in two ways. First, he looks at precisely how genetic explanations are supposed to account for differences in humans, and carefully points out the limits of these explanations. Second, he explores the genetic research done in six different areas. In some areas Kaplan urges that we should reject the genetic explanations because the research cited as supporting the explanation simply doesn’t do so. At other times, even if the research is technically impeccable, he argues that it emerges out of a perspective that is itself questionable. Kap-

lan's case studies form the bulk of the book. But let me begin with the main limitation to human genetic research that he identifies.

Almost everyone who writes about genetics claims that they are not a 'genetic determinist'; that is, everyone denies that our genes alone determine our behaviour and physical attributes. Rather, it is held that these phenotypic traits, as they are referred to, are the result of the complex interaction of both our genes and our environment. To ask, for example, what fraction of a person's height is the result of their genes is akin to asking what fraction of the area of a rectangle is the result of its length. The answer in both cases is none: a rectangle's area is the product of *both* its length and its width and, likewise, a person's height is the result of *both* their genes and their environment. This 'interactionist' consensus runs from Richard Lewontin to Richard Dawkins.

However, many of those who claim to be interactionists do so against a background of deep confidence in the importance of genetic research for understanding

and controlling phenotypic traits. Thus, while few ask how much of a trait is the result of our genes, what is often asked is what fraction of the variation of a particular phenotypic trait is attributable to genetic variation. For example, in a population with an average height of, say, 58 inches, it might be asked how much of the variation from that 58 inches is the result of variation in the genetic make-up of the population. This is the 'heritability' of the trait. (That there is no widely used term for that proportion of variance due to the environment is in itself telling.)

Kaplan is at pains to stress that heritability faces a serious conceptual limitation: namely, it is a local measure; it depends in large part on contingent features of the population in question. In other words, it is a measure that depends upon features of the population that can, and often do, change over time. The heritability of a trait within a population depends on the current genetic make-up of the population, the current environment that the population is in and the way various member organisms of the population are

distributed within these environments. Change any of these things and the heritability of the trait in question can, and often does, change as well.

It is for this reason that heritability alone is not useful for predicting what a change in the genetic make-up or environment of a population will have upon the physiology and behaviours of that population: 'the heritability of a trait within a population will not permit you to make predictions about what will happen if changes occur in either the environment, the genetic distribution, or the way that the population is distributed with respect to the environment'. And from this Kaplan's main point follows: given the limited nature of the heritability measure we must look to other considerations – many of which speak in directions different from the genetic – to shape our political and legal decision-making.

Kaplan's consideration of the conceptual limitations of herit-



ability is clear and well argued, but it is his consideration of specific areas of research that will prove most interesting and useful to the general reader. In turn he considers: intelligence, criminal behaviour, homosexuality, mood-affective disorders, obesity and, lastly, surrogate pregnancies and parenthood.

In *The Bell Curve* Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein claim that an individual's social standing is based on how intelligent they are, which in turn is supposedly confirmed by performance in IQ tests. So, for example, differences in social standing between blacks and whites are supposedly due to differences in intelligence. While you don't need to read Kaplan's book to know that this is nonsense, he does provide the detailed evidence to show just how bankrupt and biased IQ testing is. He notes that blacks who are told that they are taking an IQ test significantly underperform compared to those who are not, and that merely being asked to state one's race lowers the average scores of blacks but not whites.

The search for a 'criminal gene', Kaplan argues, reinforces the idea that violence and criminality are problems of the individual. Similarly, the creation of depression as a genetic disease suggests that depression is solely the result of a biochemical disorder of the brain and entirely disassociates it from society at large. The point here is that if criminal behaviour or mental illness are the result of our genetic make-up, if they are internal to the individual, then social relations cannot be to blame for their prevalence, nor held responsible for doing something about them.

Dean Hamer et al. famously found a marker on the X chromosome (around q28) that was highly correlated with male homosexuality in the population he considered. However, Kaplan points out that a 1999 study failed to confirm Hamer et al.'s results. Further, despite the strength of the supposed correlation, no gene has been located, let alone a biochemical pathway by which it is supposed to have its effect. Kaplan also criticizes the homosexuality 'marker' on the conceptual grounds, noted above, that it is a local measure. Because of this it provides very little support for the general claims that are implied by talk of a 'gene for' homosexuality.

In 1998 Americans spent around \$50 billion on weight-loss-related products, specifically diet foods, programmes, books. This is despite the fact, Kaplan notes, that the current standards for 'the aesthetic ideal' in women requires a weight well below that which produces fewest health problems and lowest

mortality rates. Further, the recent medicalization of obesity runs the danger of treating 'too many perfectly normal, and potentially desirable, body types as being conditions in need of treatment'. Kaplan's main concern here is less to challenge the genetic explanation of weight than to question how notions such as ideal weight and obesity come about and why they are the subject of genetic research in the first place.

This last point is part of a more general theme of the book. Kaplan is keen to understand why researchers have been inspired to spend time and money trying to account for certain traits that vary but not others. Why it is seen as perfectly reasonable to seek a genetic explanation for homosexuality, for example, but yet, as Kaplan notes, 'trying to find a biological "cause" for, say, heterosexual men who enjoy having their anuses manipulated ... during sex would be considered bizarre in the extreme'.

The final research area that Kaplan considers is that of surrogate pregnancy and genetic parenthood. Kaplan charts a trend towards making the law compatible with an extreme emphasis on the genetic defining of parenthood. However, Kaplan argues that this privileging of the genetic is unjustified and excludes many other legitimate forms of parenthood, which stress its social nature.

Kaplan clearly demonstrates that it cannot be our genes alone that explain why people commit crimes or fall mentally ill; why it's seen to matter whether people sleep with the opposite sex or their own; or why different ethnic groups fare worse than others. Given the limits of what present genetic research can tell us about what it is to be human, Kaplan argues that we should look elsewhere for guidance in setting policy – to the social nature of these issues. However, a weakness of the book is that Kaplan only briefly outlines what this means. Nor does he suggest how the social nature of such issues could be made central to political and legal decision-making. This is a shortcoming when, as with obesity, transnational capitalism makes billions of dollars' profit from the fact that obesity is seen to be an individual's problem, and hence so is its solution. At times the book feels as if one is reading Lewontin and not Kaplan. But to be fair to Kaplan he does acknowledge his debt and he rightly notes that if 'more people had read and understood [Lewontin's] seminal work on these issues ... this book would be unnecessary'. However, they haven't, which is why Kaplan's book is so important.

**Terence Sullivan**

# Kant without tears

John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, edited by Barbara Herman, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA and London, 2000. xxii + 384 pp., £30.95 hb., £13.95 pb., 0 674 06296 2 hb., 0 674 00442 6 pb.

Few recent works of philosophy have had a greater impact than Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, first published in 1971. It revitalized the whole area of moral and political philosophy and led to a revival of interest in questions of justice and right. A strong Kantian influence is evident in it, but the full extent and depth of Rawls's study of Kant is only now revealed with the publication of these lectures. They were given at Harvard, where Rawls taught philosophy from 1962 until he retired in 1991. As well as Kant, the lectures dealt with a varying selection of other philosophers drawn from a list which included Hume, Leibniz, Bentham, Mill and Hegel. The course evolved but concentrated increasingly on Kant. Rawls's lectures were dense and difficult. Early on he took pity on the students desperately trying to scribble down his words and distributed duplicated notes. What we have here is the final version of these notes for the course given in 1991, very lightly edited. They retain much of the dryness and roughness of teaching materials, but they are of philosophical interest for all that.

Philosophical problems are often taken to be eternal and unchanging. The history of philosophy is then treated as a timeless debate in which one can argue with the great philosophers of the past as if with a contemporary. This approach has been particularly influential among analytical philosophers. Rawls's approach could hardly be more different. It is guided by two principles: to pose problems as philosophers of the past 'themselves saw them'; and 'to present each writer's thought in what I took to be its strongest form', because 'I always took for granted that the writers we were studying were much smarter than I was.' Hume is portrayed as primarily a naturalist rather than a mere sceptic; he gives a psychological account of moral reasoning, but has no normative conception of moral reason. Leibniz is presented as a moral 'perfectionist' who maintains that there is a divinely ordained moral order ('the best of all possible worlds') of which we can have *a priori* knowledge and to which we should aspire.

These positions provide the main poles in relation to which Kant's ethics are situated. There is a detailed analysis of Kant's various formulations of the Categorical Imperative and of the ways it is applied in moral deliberation. Rawls has no time

for the common view, first voiced by Hegel, that the Categorical Imperative is a purely formal and empty principle. He deliberately plays down the role of the formal and *a priori* in Kant's philosophy. Instead, he stresses the themes of autonomy and freedom. Arguably, however, Kant is a much more rigorous, formal and systematic thinker than Rawls wants to admit or than is Rawls himself.

The contrast with Leibniz is used to present Kant as a moral 'constructivist'. For Kant, reason is autonomous. It cannot take its ideal ready-made from God or from any other external source. Reason must construct its ideal for itself; only then is it acting freely and morally. Again Rawls tries to avoid engaging with the philosophical system in which Kant's ethics is located and which underpins it. However, some discussion of this is unavoidable. Kant talks of the two 'realms' of phenomena and things-in-themselves, but according to Rawls this language is misleading. Kant's position should not be interpreted as a form of dualism. The scientific and moral, theoretical and practical, perspectives 'are not points of view on different worlds, nor are they points of view from different worlds: they are points of view for asking different questions about one and the same world'.

Rawls warns against interpreting Kant as a 'Manichaean' who holds that 'we have two selves: one is the good self we have as intelligences belonging to the intelligible world; and the other is the bad self we have as natural beings belonging to the sensible world'. Kant's idea of autonomy implies instead an 'Augustinian' picture. According to this the self is completely free and 'the origin of moral evil ... lies not in a bad self with its natural desires but solely in the free power of choice'.

Although Rawls thus addresses some of the larger themes of Kant's philosophy, he prefers to stick narrowly to Kant's moral ideas and avoids engaging with Kant's metaphysics in so far as he can. Kant the logical and systematic philosopher quietly fades from view, and instead we find ourselves in the company of a judicious and wise pragmatist offering sage and kindly moral guidance. This makes for a sympathetic picture, to be sure, but one cannot help feeling that it is more applicable to Rawls than to Kant.

For it is Rawls who wants to stick to ethics, be pragmatic, and avoid metaphysics. Kant, however, sees ethics as an integral part of a larger philosophical system (so, too, do Hume, Leibniz and Hegel for that matter). To imagine that one can have ethics without metaphysics is illusory. This comes out again at the end of the book, which concludes with a couple of very compressed lectures on Hegel in which Rawls's main concern is to stress his social conception of ethics. Unusually, but illuminatingly, Rawls interprets Hegel's philosophy as a form of liberalism, and thus as a precursor of his own 'political not metaphysical' and liberal conception of justice.

Rawls's account is reminiscent of *A Theory of Justice*, with its fundamental idea founding principles of justice on what a reasonable person would choose in an 'original position' behind a 'veil of ignorance'. The Hegelian objection, that this presupposes an atomistic rational agent, an 'unencumbered self', who exists prior to and independent of social relationships, is forcefully argued against Rawls by communitarians like Sandel. Rawls's interpretation of Kant seems vulnerable to the same objection, but unfortunately he does not say enough to show how it might avoid this Hegelian criticism.

For all its problems, however, Rawls's non-metaphysical reading of Kant gives a remarkably kind account of his ethics which admirably brings out his continuing relevance. For that, and for the light they shed on Rawls's own views, these lectures are important.

**Sean Sayers**

## New paternalism

Jacques Godbout, *The World of the Gift*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2000. xvi + 250 pp., £22.95 hb., £18.50 pb., 0 7735 1751 0 hb., 0 7735 2136 4 pb.

It is not clear from the acknowledgements in *The World of the Gift* whether Jacques Godbout has children. But treated abstractly they provide the moralizing core of this work: 'to have children is also to give back what one has received from one's parents, and it is the most beautiful gift one can offer them: to "make them" grandparents.' While Messrs Taylor have recently sought to encourage a fuckfest for the future (*Prospect*, June 2001), this latter task is motivated by a desire to ensure sufficient numbers of potential

'progressives'. (There is a strange inversion here of the Augustine quotation provided by Monique Schneider in *RP* 106: 'the proletariat were those whose task it was to bring children into the world'.) Godbout, on the other hand, has a heightened goal: it is through birth, 'the quintessential gift in all societies', that transcendence ('grace') can appear in this modern world. It appears through the creation of freely chosen obligations: 'The only way to combat this [existential] anxiety is to make oneself indispensable to someone or to something, a child, a cat, a cause.'

Godbout's project is presented as a corrective to Marcel Mauss. The gift is contrasted to commodity exchange in that it is marked by an absence of immediate equivalence in a circulation of deferred, asymmetric returns. Despite his exemplary research into the gift, Mauss was 'too timid' in that he banished the gift to archaic societies where it is seen to function as a form of exchange in the absence of money. Instead, Godbout undertakes to devise a 'scientific and philosophical alternative to utilitarianism', which would allow two truths to be seen: (1) The gift is as relevant to the structuring of modernity as it is to archaic societies. Its logic is transhistorical. (2) In humans, the drive to give is as important as the drive to profit. Sociologists should therefore give priority to social ties in creating explanatory systems.

There are therefore two levels to Godbout's analysis. One would focus on the functional role of the gift in society, highlighting the areas where an economic explanation is insufficient. The second would address the intentional dimension of social ties, the better to understand motivation. Godbout, however, chooses not to keep these two strands apart ('in this debate cognitive and normative categories are mixed together and it seems impossible to separate them'), or rather arguments drawn from an intentional or ethical perspective are constantly allowed to tell against functional theories. As he writes:

Many are now trying to reverse this trend towards objectification. Ethics is now more in demand than sociology. Sociologists as important as Etzioni have launched new movements such as 'socio-economy,' in order to oppose 'American cynicism.' Our reflections on the gift are part of that effort.

This resistance to 'objectification' is most apparent in his criticism of Marx's theory of surplus value: the workforce cannot be 'reduced to merchandise'; 'Marx here allowed himself to be misled by the very appearance he wanted to demystify.' Godbout's humanism balks at any functional moment, including one necessary to understand the workings of capital. Godbout's

work is therefore primarily a critique of sociology and social theory that would privilege the abstraction of humanity over humans qua individuals. As a consequence, his reading of Mauss transforms the tripartite structure give–receive–reciprocate by privileging the first moment of giving. What in Mauss is a functional definition of the way in which primitive societies are organized and perpetuate themselves becomes a moral theory of interpersonal relationships.

Adapting Perroux, *Economie et société* (1963), and Kolm, *La bonne économie* (1984), Godbout presents modernity as formed by three fields: the market, ‘ruled by self-interest’; the state, which is typified by central government planning; and the social system of the gift. The book attempts to circumscribe the interrelation of these fields while insisting that the sphere of the gift has its own implicit ‘logic’ that is not reducible to the utilitarian logic of immediate equivalence.

The characteristic tension here results from an insistence on the primacy of the gift, as sought for its own sake, while detailing the ‘gift-destroying’ tendencies of state and market. In its provision of universal services, the state replaces some of the functions previously left to the family without creating a social bond; the market creates the ‘exit’ conditions through which an individual can exist without dependence on a network of social relations. It seems compelling to view modern developments of the gift – blood and organ donation, gifts to charity – as the colonization of the niches left to it by the institutions of market and the state (and hence to see the field of the gift as secondary). Godbout’s ‘primacy’ of the gift appears as mistaken in so far as it fails to appreciate the historical forces working against it. ‘The market has little influence on the system of primary relationships: the family, the kinship, the village.... These will be transformed later by industrialization and the physical dismantling of communities.’ This separation of the market from ‘industrialization’ is supported by no historical argument, yet:

Birth, engendering, is really the foundation of every gift, whatever the society. And all the differences between modern and archaic society are explained by modern societies’ indifference to the appearance of life, this source of everything, and to creation, which has been replaced by production, the primary undertaking of industrial civilization.

Without an account of this process of industrialization, the analysis is unconvincing. In truth, the framework, abstractly contrasting modern society with archaic, is fundamentally ahistorical. Moreover, within Godbout’s own presentation, the development

of the modern gift depends on the changes brought about by industrialization and the expansion of state provision. For, with the dissolution of the obligatory ties in non-industrialized society, the gift is liberated from necessary reciprocation. Emphasis is then on the ‘free’, ‘spontaneous’ act of giving and the gift, as the negation of exchange becomes a moral phenomenon. The modern gift is more precarious because it no longer operates within given institutions. Yet at the same time this voluntary character gives a transformed value to these relationships. The modern gift becomes the catalyst through which a re-enchanted sociology could overcome a materialist and utilitarian modernity. By insisting that the gift is not alien to modern life and mobilizing it to articulate a social theory, this book seeks to supplement a communitarian political theory by factoring the importance of social ties into policies framed on a narrow pragmatism. The task is to ‘reinvent social freedom though social obligation based on a relationship of *voluntary* indebtedness’. Voluntary institutions formed by like-minded individuals, which extend social networks beyond the family, provide the model for this political programme (the paradigm of which is Alcoholics Anonymous). The isolated modern individual is transformed in a network of ‘ensouled social ties’. The gift would be the manifestation and cementing of such relationships.

In effect, Godbout has provided the abstract social theory to underpin the transfer of state provision to local, voluntary organizations. Explicitly opposed to privatization, Godbout references several interesting studies on the impact of professionalization on charities and the Canadian health sector. However, one is not convinced by an argument that would reduce these developments to the merits of unbureaucratic, immediate social relations over state provision. While organizations such as Case Con complained about the professionalization of social work in the 1970s, this reflected a militancy opposed to continuing inequalities in society of which impoverished social ties were a result. Volunteering rather than pursuing salaried work will not resolve these deeper issues (something he fails to recognize in his advocacy of unsalaried domestic labour). It is difficult to imagine how a health service could be run along the lines of Alcoholics Anonymous. Further, workers in education and health complain of inadequate funding for facilities, administrative systems and support workers – dismissed by Godbout as bureaucratic ‘intermediaries’. The immediate problem expressed by GPs is not that their work within the NHS is mediated but that they have on average only eight minutes to see each



patient. Public service provision incorporating local not-for-profit enterprises and faith organizations, as mooted by the new Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, puts at risk the ideological basis of universal provision. A 'new progressive politics' which 'marries the liberal and the social democratic traditions' has positioned efficient management of services as the end and disregarded any historical task; Godbout quite explicitly relinquishes any Enlightenment aspirations to universal justice, thereby clarifying the conservative tendency in this tradition.

The market enables us to pursue exchange under conditions where the gift is *neither possible nor desirable*.... Thus between two people or two societies that share no values, the only possible basis for understanding is self-interest.... Utilitarianism is the only possible morality that two strangers always have in common and it is pertinent to all relationships *where one wants the other party to remain a stranger.* (my emphasis)

Voluntary organizations express the interests of their members; not-for-profit organizations are often primarily focused on self-preservation – those interests determine the inclusivity of both. Alcoholics Anonymous requires those who join its group to 'recognize that the capacity to find a solution comes from outside'.

Godbout does not himself recognize that the success or otherwise of AA has no bearing on the validity of the belief in a higher power. A cynical reading would see this binding belief as a reversion to a mythical moment, a connection between the archaic and the model for a transformed modernity. As the importance of the bond takes precedence over commitment to universal ideals, so the question of exclusion comes to the fore. This is not just a problem for Godbout but for any theory that founds its ethics or justice on shared interests, shared conceptions of the good or consensus. Such considerations gain extra weight in the UK where the advent of Best Practice (and other regimes that place the tender at the heart of service provision) demands an analysis of services lost. From this perspective, we can witness the objective *production* of the 'stranger' concomitant with New Labour's vision of meritocracy. Formulated in opposition to this monolithic 'citizenship', 'multiculturalism' has a radical core divorced from the liberal hypostatization of tolerance rightly targeted by Žizek. Any commitment to the former would be wary of the exclusive structure of Godbout's communitarianism. Similarly the Strangelovian logic of the Taylors' response to declining birth rates is haunted by the spectre of immigration.

**Andrew McGettigan**

# Art and affect

Peter Osborne, ed., *From an Aesthetic Point of View: Philosophy, Art and the Senses*, Serpent's Tail, London, 2000. 184 pp., £12.99 pb., 1 85242 668 3.

Nowadays, among those professionally involved with contemporary visual art, two quite separate ways of relating to artworks can be found: one is oriented to aesthetics, the other to politics. It is as if there are two different camps. Most curators and artists are in the first camp. Most academic critic-historians are in the second. The former are concerned with comparative judgements of the quality of artworks as art. The latter – drawing to a greater or lesser extent on the Cultural Studies critique of aesthetics as ideological – are concerned with what would count as progressive cultural practice, or progressive reform of the conditions in which cultural practices are produced and received. The two camps coexist within a single state-sponsored academic–curatorial institution, of which, from their different perspectives, they are both highly critical.

If the split between these perspectives has widened again recently, this is partly because of the way that the Cultural Studies critique has tended to understand artworks as signifying rather than affective objects. Those who deal with an artwork's affect are now obliged – and rightly so – to take account of its conditions of production and reception. However, the terms of the Cultural Studies critique have not allowed them to articulate *at the same time* how the work made them feel. As a result, two incompatible discourses are at work: there is an anti-aesthetic politics of representation; and there is a default aesthetics of subjective taste and professional expertise. The incompatibility is twisted in a number of ways. One example is the way in which part of the art world manages to see itself as a critical subculture in relation to the parent culture of the museum or academy; elitism mixes with parochialism.

From an art point of view, therefore, the task of aesthetics is to recover and re-establish a deeper, subtler sense of affect in relation to contemporary art; and to explain – with reference to contemporary art – how the aesthetic and the political are intertwined. *From an Aesthetic Point of View* seems to adopt this task as its own. It asks: 'What is the place of the aesthetic in the experience of contemporary art?' And – quoting now from Peter Osborne's introduction – states: 'It is within this more expansive context [of culture as broader socio-historical processes and practices] that the question of the sense of the "aesthetic"

most relevant to the comprehension of contemporary art must ultimately be addressed.' Only one essay in the collection seems to take up this task directly: Jay Bernstein's piece on Cindy Sherman. Most of the others are concerned instead with reactivating elements of a philosophical tradition – continental aesthetics from German Idealism to Adorno and Deleuze – in such a way that they become available for understanding the historico-philosophical context to which contemporary art belongs; *but without at the same time reflecting on what that art does*. However, none of these contributions demonstrates much sensitivity or attention to contemporary artworks. The only essay to do so – and it does it with wonderful care and consideration – is also the least philosophical: it is David Batchelor's piece on the too-easily-missed complexities of the monochrome. It is the only essay to demonstrate a sensibility rather than articulate the place of sensibility within a system.

Perhaps the reason why *From an Aesthetic Point of View* does not get very far towards a philosophical reflection on contemporary art is that it has its origins in a rather different problematic. It is the book of a conference entitled 'Where Theory Ends, There Art Begins', held at Middlesex University in 1998. The intention of the conference, as Osborne explains, was 'to explore the notion of aesthetic as that constitutive excess which marks art off from other kinds of intellectual production' – that is to say, philosophy or theory. Clearly, this notion can be approached from either of two sides: from philosophy or from art. We can ask about the place of art in philosophy or about the place of philosophy in art. However, it is the former that provides that basic orientation of the book and, one must assume, the conference.

Nevertheless, it is in accord with the two sides of the question that the book is divided. The essays in the first part – by Jacques Rancière, Christophe Menke, Jonathan Rée and Alexander García Düttmann – are concerned with the meaning of aesthetic experience for thought, and of art for philosophy; or more specifically for *continental* philosophy. The continental tradition is seen – by Osborne in the Introduction – as pretty much defined by its concern with the cognitive status of the aesthetic after Kant. If analytical philosophy views the world from 'a logical point of view' (in

Quine's phrase), and denies the cognitive status of art, 'continental philosophy, one might say, views the world from an aesthetic point of view'. Exploring the aesthetic is taken to be central to exploring the limits of reason in an expanded sense. So *From an Aesthetic Point of View* presents itself as book about the meaning of art in continental philosophy. It is as such that it is most effective and at ease with itself.

Several of the contributors underline a distinction between a modern, aesthetic regime and a classical, but now maybe postmodern, poetic regime oriented to representation and communication. Rancière does so in just these terms. Menke locates the distinction in a discussion of subjectivity. Rancière's contribution is particularly interesting: while keeping its focus on the meaning of the aesthetic for philosophy, it suggests original ways in which philosophical aesthetics might annex art practices often seen as arbitrary. His account of the heterogeneous, reflexive sensible proper to the aesthetic regime draws on Deleuze, but is equally reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty. Although, like Merleau-Ponty, Rancière returns in the end to thinking about the nature of painting, his most thought-provoking passages concern theatre. His treatment of scenography – the art 'inherent in the aesthetic regime of the arts, while also being an allegory of this regime' – makes it seem possible that various forms of installation, projection and performance could be included within an expanded aesthetics.

Rancière gives us a conception of theatricality in art based not on the explication of literal space – the standard use of the term – but on the fiction-sustaining effects of electric lighting. The essays in the second part – by Sylviane Agacinski, Bernstein and Batchelor, with short responses by Mandy Merck and Howard Caygill to Bernstein and Batchelor respectively – treat aesthetic experience more concretely in relation to particular artworks. Part Two is more awkward, not because the essays are in themselves less interesting, but because the book as a whole is conceived from the standpoint of the first part. So if there are two tasks broached by this project – taking the conference and book together – only one is well treated. It is not a book that provides much help in understanding how, with reference to contemporary art, aesthetic categories – above all, judgement – can and ought to apply. Importantly, however, it does provide theoretical resources for arguing that aesthetic judgement is irreducible to the object of the Cultural Studies critique.

**Dominic Willson**

## Discrimination

Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2000. 399 pp., £16.99 pb., 0 745 62228 3.

A new concern for cultural, religious and sexual diversity has emerged among political philosophers since the beginning of the 1990s. An increasing number of political philosophers, building on and criticizing the work of Charles Taylor, Bhikhu Parekh, Iris Young, James Tully, Will Kymlicka and others, have sought to find ways of grounding social integration in the recognition and accommodation, rather than the suppression, of differences. Even John Rawls rearticulated his own theory in order to face the now unavoidable challenge of pluralism.

Brian Barry, well known for his radical egalitarian views, thinks that the 'multiculturalist' turn is misguided. Having overlooked the fact that political philosophers introduced the question of diversity into their reflections on justice when the voices of marginalized groups – women, immigrants, aboriginal peoples and members of minority nations – came to their ears, he claims that 'the problem is invented out of nothing by multiculturalists' and 'multiculturalism [in theory and in practice] is a sideshow that should never have got the main billing'. Most of the problems 'invented' by the theorists of diversity can be solved from within a 'difference-blind' and egalitarian conception of liberalism solely preoccupied with redistributive justice.

For those who think that polemics, lampoon and caricature are efficient and constructive argumentative devices, *Culture and Equality* should be entertaining. I do not wish to discuss Barry's rhetorics here. I will instead address some of the more contentious aspects of his approach to political philosophy.

One of Barry's most important mischaracterizations lies in the conception of culture he attributes to the theorists of diversity. Barry writes, approvingly quoting from Alison Jaggar, that ethnic groups

are seen by multiculturalists as 'self-evident, quasi-biological collectives of a reified culture'. In much the same way, it has been suggested, 'the logic of Young's proposal for group representation seems to require an essentialized and naturalized conception of groups as internally homogeneous, clearly bounded, mutually exclusive, and maintaining specific determinate interests'.

Barry acknowledges in a footnote that Young explicitly repudiated this notion of culture in *Justice and the*



*Politics of Difference*, but nevertheless he uses that hermetic and reified conception of culture throughout his book in order to depict the ‘multiculturalist’ position. This is a serious travesty. Perhaps some communitarian thinkers have relied on such an understanding of culture, but we must acknowledge that it is the theorists of diversity who argued that the complex, heterogeneous and fluid character of culture was an issue that political philosophy needed to address. For example, in his book *Strange Multiplicity*, Tully writes that,

as a consequence of the overlap, interaction and negotiation of cultures, the experience of cultural difference is *internal* to a culture. This is the most difficult aspect of the new concept of culture to grasp. On the older, essentialist view, the ‘other’ and the experience of otherness were by definition associated with another culture.... The experience of otherness is internal to one’s own identity, which consists in being oriented in an aspectual intercultural space constituted by the features mentioned above.

Only by ignoring such complexity is Barry able to ‘show’ the moral and political ‘weakness’ of the multiculturalist position.

Not only does Barry misinterpret elements of the theorists of diversity’s positions; he amalgamates his (mis)interpretations and uses his unrepresentative reconstructions to exhibit the ‘flaws’ of the arguments in favour of the recognition and accommodation of differences. In Chapter 7, for instance, Barry discusses Tully’s, Taylor’s, Alasdair MacIntyre’s, John Gray’s, Young’s and Nancy Fraser’s ideas without ever acknowledging the differences in substance and focus of their respective approaches. Barry is well aware that this methodological strategy will be seen as a dubious by some (‘multiculturalists will no doubt complain that I have been unfair to them because nobody is in favour of every single element in the programme’), but he considers such reservations to be ‘irrelevant’.

Elsewhere Barry uses ‘free association’ as a form of reasoning – a process which seems to work better in psychoanalysis than in political philosophy. Free association leads him to ‘slip’ from multicultural policies to ethnic cleansing, strident nationalism, the Ku Klux Klan and Nazism. The same process would lead to (absurd) references to Stalin and the Gulag in a critique of egalitarian liberalism. More generally, Barry’s approach to political philosophy is highly normative and somewhat Platonistic. The political philosopher is put in the shoes of the legislator. The philosopher sets up, in a monological fashion, the liberal framework most appropriate to the conditions of our time, and the citizens then deliberate about redistributive justice from within that preestablished framework. Barry often goes further and decides the legitimacy of particular public policies and political frameworks. Political philosophy, Barry argues, ‘is not about what we may think it would be nice for people to do but what, at any rate in principle, they can be made to do’. This approach is encouraged by Barry’s beliefs that there are criteria of validity and worth ‘external to the culture in which the practice is embedded’. Barry, however, remains silent on the content of these meta-norms. Interestingly, this legislative approach has lost many of its practitioners in recent years and has been criticized even by Kantian thinkers such as Rawls and Jürgen Habermas.

There is no reason to cast doubts on Barry’s egalitarianism. Discrimination is, however, a multifaceted phenomenon and Barry’s monistic approach cannot account for the complexity of that problem.

**Jocelyn Maclure**