

# Reviews

## Half a Critique

Jean-Paul Sartre, Critique of Dialectical Reason, trans. Alan Sheridan Smith, ed. Jonathan Ree, New Left Books, 820pp, £15.00

Pietro Chiodi, Sartre and Marxism, trans. Kate Soper, Harvester Press, 162pp, £6.95

Ian Craib, Existentialism and Sociology: A Study of Jean-Paul Sartre, Cambridge University Press, 237pp, £6.95

Sartre's monumental essay in phenomenological Marxism, the Critique of Dialectical Reason, Volume One, was written in the euphoria of the early days of de-Stalinisation. It appeared in French in 1960, and the English translation is published this month. The fifteen years that have passed between the French and English editions have seen great changes in Sartre's reputation. He was a guru of some sections of the students' movement, with Laing and Cooper as his ambassadors to Britain at the 'Dialectics of Liberation' conference. But renewed capitalist crisis has overtaken the politics of 1968, and Sartre's reputation as a Marxist. In addition, the French structuralism of the last ten years can be seen as essentially a campaign against Sartre, though it seldom mentions him. These developments will have prepared a strange reception for the Critique: like that which would await a new edition of Confucius in China.

The object of the Critique is to define the nature of historical knowledge. Echoing Kant, Sartre assumes that historical knowledge exists - specifically, that it is embodied in works by Marx and by such historians as Bloch, Braudel and Lefebvre; and, through discussions of particular historical phenomena, he tries to explain how it is possible. Volume One is designed to answer this question in completely general terms, and is normally referred to simply as 'The Critique' on the well-founded assumption that the projected second volume, which remains unfinished, will never be published. The idea of Volume Two was that it should outline the actual course of human history.

The Critique is notoriously badly written. It was composed in great haste, at a time (1957-60) when Sartre was preoccupied with campaigning for the liberation of Algeria, and - as Simone de Beauvoir records in the third volume of her autobiography - when he was desperately trying to ward off exhaustion with whisky and drugs. 'It was not a case of writing as he ordinarily did, pausing to think and make corrections, tearing up a page, starting again; for hours at a stretch he raced across sheet after sheet without rereading them...' (Forced of Circumstances p397). And the French edition, whose chapters, paragraphs and sentences are bewilderingly long, really is all but unreadable. It is perhaps for this reason that readers of the book have tended to see it as, at best, a collection of brilliant analyses of particular historical phenomena, such as class hatred in nineteenth-century France, racism in Algeria, and the Terror in revolutionary France, and to regard these as strung out over an abyss of theoretical confusion on an insubstantial thread of philosophical rhetoric.

One of the features of the English edition is that it imposes an orderly system of chapter headings and paragraph divisions on the book, and simplifies the

sentence structures; this should make the connecting argument of the Critique stand out more clearly - but since I myself edited the translation, I shall not give an opinion of it. What, then, is the connecting argument of the Critique?

### 1 From Individual Praxis to Class Struggle

Sartre starts from a basic assumption which he shares with the entire tradition of Western historiography since the Enlightenment - including the works of Marx. This is that natural events lying beyond human control do not belong to the province of historical knowledge, or at least that they do so only to the extent that they impinge on human action and experience. This assumption allows Sartre to identify the theory of history with the theory of human action in general ('praxis'), and it is on this basis that he outlines what he calls a 'structural anthropology', in which the entirety of human experience is supposed to be captured in a comprehensive view of human history.

From Sartre's point of view, the main problem for a theory of history is presented by historical explanations which refer to such 'practical ensembles' as factories, currencies, states, laws, moralities, profits, kinship systems, and, above all, to classes. The problem is that such ensembles present themselves to individuals as though they were non-human natural facts, whereas it is obvious that in fact they are part of developing human history. The purpose of the Critique is to develop concepts of such ensembles which will avoid treating them either as the aggregate effects of individual actions (individualism) or as 'hyper-organisms' independent of individual action (organicism).

#### (i) Individual Praxis

Sartre starts his investigation from what he holds to be the most easily explained form of praxis, which he calls individual praxis. Individual praxis is essentially a struggle for self-preservation against an indifferent, inert, 'other' environment. Spurred by need, the individual endows his environment with purposes or meanings: fetishistically, he sees the world as focussed on himself, dividing it into helps and hindrances to the satisfaction of his needs; he unifies his world into an ordered whole - as Sartre puts it, the individual totalises the world. To explain human action as the level of individual praxis is simply to show how it serves purposes of the individual as they appear within her totalisation of the world. For Sartre, all historical explanations are simply developments of the explanation of individual praxis; and the Critique is an extended attempt to demonstrate this point by unravelling all the complications and reverses which affect individual praxis as it inscribes itself in the natural and the social world.

Individual praxis is always embodied in some form of matter - words, human beings, machines, buildings etc - and once embodied it escapes the control of its author, flying away like a released bird and living a life of its own. In this way, praxis and the world external to it mingle together, and matter becomes 'worked matter', praxis 'the practico-inert'. It is initially through the practico-inert that human relations are constituted - for instance a configuration of rooms where I live and where I work, of books, of papers, of things I have done in the past, etc all combine to define me - whether I

like it or not - as a petty bourgeois intellectual. Similarly, different forms of machinery produce different kinds of social relations in the factory, different forms of union organisation, etc. People come to be dominated by their products, or alienated in them.

#### (ii) Series

Individual praxis alienating itself in the practico-inert - this is the source from which Sartre tries to derive a comprehensive range of social concepts. First he introduces the concept of the series (or collective) which describes individuals united in mutual dependence in such a way that each sees the others as other, rather than as comrades in a common undertaking. Moreover, according to Sartre, social relations are - as a matter of contingent fact - formed under conditions of scarcity, where there are too many people for too few resources. Consequently each member tends to totalise the others as threats to his own existence, and the series is founded, in the end, on violent competitive antagonism.

Sartre gives various examples of seriality, and discusses them with mesmerising skill: the processes of racist violence, and of panics such as the Great Fear which swept the provinces of revolutionary France. Others - in which the violence is less apparent - are the processes of price determination in a free market, of selection of records for the 'hit-parade', etc.

The characteristic of a serial process is that it leads to a practical result which from one point of view looks like the outcome of deliberate planning - a lynching, a riot, a price change or a shift in popular musical taste etc - but which in fact does not issue from the intentions of anyone. The patterns which establish themselves in serial processes result from the interference of individual totalisations, but do not correspond to any of them: they are patterns without an author, imposing themselves on people as though they were a natural fact beyond human control. The unity of serial processes, as Sartre puts it, always lies elsewhere.

#### (iii) The Group

The basic alternative to the series as a form of social ensemble is the group (or community), which is discussed in the second book of Volume One. What distinguishes a group from a series is that its unity is internal to it and to each of its members; instead of seeing each other as other, they see each other as the same: they all participate communally in a single praxis, a single totalisation. Sartre's example is the Parisian crowd which stormed the Bastille: initially its unity was serial - it was unified from outside, by the geographical configuration of Paris, by hunger, and by the army; but on July 14th it was transformed into a fused group (groupe en fusion). But this kind of 'molten' unity, as Sartre describes it, is always impermanent and unstable, and the greater part of the Critique is devoted to the elaboration of various kinds of group which develop as the fused group 'cools'. A division of tasks is instituted, and serial structures begin to emerge within it. In this context, Sartre is able to discuss an enormous range of phenomena - committees, trade union organisations, states, purges, bureaucracies etc. Finally, he constructs a concept of class.

Sartre's concept of class uses all the conceptual resources accumulated in the course of his argument, in order to explain how the serial unity of a class (defined by its relation to means of production) breeds various kinds of group within the class which can, in specific ways, act for it - though constantly

threatening to solidify into 'bureaucracies'. The advantage of this conception of class is that it encompasses both the idea of class as determined by economic relations, and the idea of class struggle being waged in organised politics, and avoids treating the politics as a simple expression of the economics, or losing sight of the fact that violent antagonism is integral to classes at the economic as well as the political level.

The way Sartre constructs his concept of class draws attention to one of the most significant and beautiful features of the Critique: its order and method of exposition. The investigation (experience) pursued through the Critique is presented as a journey from the abstract (individual praxis) to the concrete (class struggle). But social formations, as conceived by Sartre, comprise different, and possibly conflicting, layers, each corresponding to a certain level of abstraction. Thus the journey through the Critique is both an approach to increasingly complex social concepts, and a penetration to deeper and deeper layers of social reality. The sequence of exposition itself represents an order of reality. In one sense of that ambiguous word 'dialectic', this feature of the Critique makes it a classic of dialectical thinking. But when Sartre explicitly discusses dialectic in the Critique, he usually has something else in mind.

#### 2 Sartre and Dialectic

Sartre's intention in the Critique was to rescue Marxism from what he saw as the deadly embrace of Soviet style 'dialectical materialism', which is seen as deriving from Engels as distinct from Marx. In an opening section entitled 'Dogmatic Dialectic and Critical Dialectic' he mocks Engels's attempt to state 'laws of dialectic' which would apply uniformly to the whole of reality, social and natural alike. Engels tried to define the basic dialectical concepts of negation, negation of the negation and transcendence or synthesis in relation to inanimate nature, and only subsequently to apply them to human history. The result, according to Sartre, was that both dialectic and history lost their sense. Dialectic came to appear as a brute and inexplicable natural law, based (precariouly) on empirical investigation, and human history, as part of nature, was supposed to obey the laws of dialectic just as it obeys the laws of electricity or of gravity.

It is easy to see that such an 'external dialectic', as Sartre calls it, is useless from the point of view of the problem of conceptualising the different levels of human history, in that it is incapable, in itself, of defending Marxism against the 'organicism' of general laws of history in which individual action and experience never get a look in. Sartre avoids the Engelsian 'external dialectic' by simply identifying dialectic, or at least the dialectic of human history, with praxis, and to define the basic dialectical concepts on this basis. The agent's purposes become the fundamental dialectical thesis, obstacles to them are the negation, and the agent's response is the negation of the negation. These definitions are outstandingly clear and straightforward, and obviously avoid making dialectic 'external' to human history; but what exactly are their philosophical implications, and how do they relate to the positions of Engels?

Sartre's discussion of this issue has three elements. The first is the distinction between dialectical and analytical reason. The basic contrast is that analytical reason treats its objects as unchanging and externally related, whereas dialectical reason 'sets them in motion', seeing them as developing and interacting. For Sartre, the chief examples of

analytical reason are technocratic bourgeois economics and scientific management and the structuralism of Levi-Strauss, while the chief examples of dialectical reason are the works of Marx, revolutionary proletarian thought in general, and (though unwittingly) the writings of certain bourgeois historians and sociologists. This distinction possesses a certain rough clarity, but it obviously lacks precision (as Levi-Strauss demonstrated in his remarks about it in the closing chapter of *The Savage Mind*). Sartre attempts to sharpen the distinction by associating analytical reason with the 'rigidity' of mathematics, but this attempt is strikingly unsuccessful; it depends on an extremely metaphorical description of mathematics, and has the unfortunate result of condemning dialectical thought to innumeracy. A brief footnote reference to cybernetics and games theory towards the end of the book suggests that he may himself have developed doubts about its correctness; and perhaps the attempt is best forgotten. This leaves the distinction between dialectical and analytical reason rough but still serviceable.

The second element in Sartre's discussion of the implications of his concept of dialectic is an ontological distinction between human praxis, characterised by freedom, and the natural world, characterised by determinism. Contrary to what Sartre supposes, the purposive behaviour of 'totalising' agents does not constitute any kind of breach of causal determination in nature; on the contrary, it is simply a form of natural determination. And one need only think of biology, ecology, animal psychology and artificial intelligence to recognise that purposiveness is not a monopoly of human beings. The distinction between purposive and non-purposive processes is one thing, and the attempt to open an ontological gulf between human action and nature another: and the former is all that is presupposed by Sartre's social concepts, while the latter is a kind of superstitious hangover from the existentialist metaphysics of his earlier work, *Being and Nothingness* (1943). The dualism of human freedom and natural determination is a piece of ideological baggage which the social concepts developed in the *Critique* have no obligation to carry.

The third element in Sartre's discussion of his concept of dialectic is that he tries to align the two distinctions I have just described, claiming that dialectical reason applies only to free human praxis, and that analytical reason is fully adequate to the description of the natural world. Thus in his anxiety to vindicate an anti-positivist account of social science Sartre accepts without question a positivist account of natural science (see Peter Ruben, *Problem und Begriff der Naturdialektik*, in Giese & Laitko, eds., *Weltanschauung und Methode*, Berlin 1969).

Altogether, Sartre's explicit discussion of dialectic is a very unsatisfactory mixture of imprecision and unnecessarily implausible metaphysics. But this does not mean that there is anything wrong with the social concepts with which Sartre attempts to describe the dialectic of human history; on the contrary, it means that he misinterprets their implications - in particular, that he mistakenly thinks that his attempt to root the dialectic of human history in human praxis presupposes that human praxis is ontologically unique. Indeed, it is not even in direct opposition to Engels's concept of dialectic: it is, rather, an attempt to define the specificity of the dialectic of human history, which is a matter which Engels simply left open. It might have been better if Sartre had allowed

his concept of dialectic to speak for itself.

### 3 Sartre and Individualism

Sartre's procedure of defining social concepts on the basis of individual praxis has the obvious advantage of encompassing the manifestly absurd dualism of the individual and history, and related dualisms of the psychological and the social, etc. But Sartre's solution is often reproached for being 'individualistic' (see for example Ronald Aronson, 'Sartre's Individualist Social Theory', *Telos* Summer 1973). Three bases for the accusation can be distinguished.

The first is what might be described as Sartre's psychologism. Sartre's social descriptions are emphatically psychological, in that when describing social phenomena, whether at the individual, serial or group level, he gives extensive coverage to how the situations are experienced by the people involved in them. But these descriptions are offered only as accounts of one specific level of a complex formation: Sartre does not try to reduce practical ensembles to their psychological level. For instance, in the case of serial ensembles, people's experiences, as described by Sartre, are systematically at odds with the serial processes in which they are participating. Moreover, Sartre's theory of psychology, even in his pre-Marxist works, is firmly anti-individualistic, in that the contents of the individual psyche are always presented as the interiorisation of a social situation. And in the *Critique*, social ensembles (groups and series) are defined as creating forms of behaviour which would not be possible for isolated individuals, and which are irreducible to individual praxis. Thus there is not anything individualistic about Sartre's psychologism.

The second basis for the idea that the categories of the *Critique* are individualistic is Sartre's insistence on the errors of 'organicism', that is, of treating social ensembles as though they functioned independently of the individuals in them. Consequently he insists that all kinds of social processes, even though irreducible to the behaviour of isolated individuals, must be conceptualised in a way that makes it clear that they are nothing over and above the actions of real people. By any standards, this is a reasonable stipulation. Furthermore, by insisting on it, Sartre manages to bring into relief an important category of social phenomena which are individual as opposed to social, in the sense that they depend on the boundaries of the individual biological life. In particular, he emphasises the historical importance of the fact that, even if a class may survive for centuries, the individuals in it do not. He uses this to illuminate the difference between the first and the second generation of industrial capitalists in France, and to explain how the Nazis related to the German defeat in World War One essentially as something inflicted on different individuals, a

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different generation. If such observations are individualistic, then Sartre's individualism is a strength.

The third basis for criticising Sartre as individualistic is the fact that the basic category of the Critique is 'individual praxis'. However, Sartre also emphasises that there is no one-to-one correspondence between individuals and praxes: one person can be involved in many praxes, even conflicting ones, and some praxes belong to groups or series rather than to individuals. For this reason, 'individual praxis' is really a misnomer. Sartre's basic category ought really to be called 'simple praxis' - corresponding to the 'simple exchange' and 'simple commodity production' from which Marx develops the concepts of Capital. With this modification, the accusation of individualism becomes baseless.

#### 4 The Critique, Philosophy and Sociology

The systematic character of the argument of the Critique makes it hard to allocate separate elements of the work to different academic disciplines - the metaphysics to philosophy, the social concepts to sociology, and the particular descriptions to history. Some of the problems of trying to organise such a conceptual carve-up are illustrated by two recently published books on Sartre, each of which is an attempt, by a Marxist, to appropriate Sartre to a specific discipline - the first, to philosophy, the second, to sociology. Pietro Chiodi's Sartre and Marxism (which appeared in its original Italian version in 1965) is an attempt to set Sartre in a homogeneous philosophical tradition leading through Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, Husserl and Heidegger, and the value of this translation is the unfamiliarity of this perspective to English readers. However, there is a danger that the book will enjoy an undeserved popularity (in fact it is favourably reviewed elsewhere in this issue): it is essentially a brusque dismissal of the claims of the Critique to represent a contribution to 'Marxist philosophy' and English readers may well be grateful to it for providing a rationalisation for not reading such a long and difficult book as the Critique. For Chiodi, 'Marxist philosophy' is a meditation on the themes of 'praxis', 'commitment', 'determination', 'objectification' and 'alienation', and the characteristic of Sartre's system is that it 'identifies alienation with objectification', which, according to Chiodi, proves him to be no Marxist since it was precisely this identification which Marx attacked in Hegel, and which created conceptual room for the idea of objectification without alienation (socialism). Apart from ignoring all the problems of defining a 'Marxist concept of alienation', this comparison of Sartre and Marx depends on a truly astonishing identification of different meanings of 'alienation'. It is true that Sartre holds that when praxis inscribes itself on the resistant, inert material world, it is always liable to be falsified, diverted or appropriated: for instance, that once my plan of making a table starts to be embodied in some bits of wood, it becomes liable to all kinds of changes over which I may have no power, like destruction in a fire. And although Sartre himself does not use the words 'objectification' and 'alienation' systematically in this sense, there is nothing wrong with describing this conception as an identification of alienation and objectification. However, if this is done, then the Critique must be interpreted as proposing distinctions between several varieties of alienation - under the three main headings of individual, series, and group - and the only Sartrean concept which could plausibly be identified with 'the Marxist concept of alienation' is that of serial-

ity - whose disappearance is certainly a possibility envisaged in Sartre's system. And if socialism really presupposed the abolition of alienation in the comprehensive sense, socialism would mean a kind of cosmic apotheosis in which the individual disappeared into a homogeneous universe, in which there was no gap between desire and object, between need and fulfilment - in other words, where desire and need were no more; a primal scream. It is just as well that Sartre is not committed to the idea of an end of alienation which Chiodi treats as a central tenet of 'Marxist philosophy'.

Chiodi regards the Critique as a purely philosophical book; he does not consider any of the problems in social theory that Sartre was trying to deal with. Ian Craib's unpretentious and constructive Existentialism and Sociology does a lot to make good this deficiency. He writes as a professional sociologist bringing Sartre's philosophy to the aid of his discipline, and his book consists of a number of accounts of Sartrean notions in Being and Nothingness and the Critique. These accounts are short and simple, though sufficient to bear out Craib's contention that there are fundamental similarities between the two works. They are interleaved with criticisms of modern sociology, in particular of writings by Gouldner, Garfinkel and Goffman and with discussions of the sociology of sociology. This interleaving may make the book more acceptable to professional sociologists, but it has unfortunate effects on the sort of theoretical discussion that the book is able to encompass: it prevents Craib from offering an integrated account of Sartre's aims, concepts and principles from the point of view of social theory, and also means that he tends to merely juxtapose sociological theory with Sartre's philosophy, without really showing how concrete sociological concepts might be formulated on the basis of the avowedly abstract arguments of the Critique. Nevertheless, for its comparisons between broadly Sartrean social descriptions and modern sociology, this book presents a useful perspective on Sartre and performs a useful bridge-building role.

#### 5 Sartre's Idealism

In spite of their power and coherence, Sartre's social concepts contain a crucial area of blindness. The origin of the blindness is Sartre's mock-Kantianism: that is, the fact that his objective is to specify the conditions for understanding any praxis, regardless of its content. This enables him to move imperceptibly to the assumption that the content of human praxis simply is its form, so that the aim of praxis becomes simply the preservation of its own purposiveness as against 'otherness'. This elision leads Sartre to the belief that the whole of human experience can be laid out along a single dimension, between praxis and the other, between dominion and subjection. It involves the same kind of abstraction as an economic theory which operates purely in terms of value, and never in terms of use value. It makes Sartre rule out the possibility that, say, the water and the sunshine, the wine and the conversation, could simply be enjoyed because - for some contingent material reason, and as a matter of brute fact - they satisfy your needs and desires: for Sartre, enjoyment is simply success in the struggle to realise oneself against otherness. (Sartre's one concession to the importance of material factors in historical explanation is his concept of scarcity; but this refers to a purely quantitative relation between human needs and the means to supply them, rather than to their specific material qualities.)

But if Sartre's emphasis on the struggle for dom-

ination of the other is an irrational abstraction, it is not incomprehensible. The struggle for domination. (like the pursuit of value independent of use value) is not the necessary structure of all praxis, but it is certainly an important historical form of it. On some definitions of politics, it is the fundamental form of the political. Seen in this way, Sartre's abstraction corresponds to a purely political view of history - a view which abstracts from the material conditions of life of different classes, and concentrates exclusively on their power-relations. And this indicates the specific political location of the social concepts developed in the Critique. They belong with the political aspirations of 1968: with Debray's 'revolution in the revolution', with the idolisation of Che Guevara, with the theory that student occupations of educational premises might constitute 'revolutionary foci' or 'red bases', and with the analysis of the Chinese cultural revolution as pure spontaneous mass sovereignty. (cf Sartre's political analyses in 'France: Masses, Spontaneity, Party', in Between Existentialism and Marxism (NLB))

Assuming that the idealism of the Critique can be corrected, what is Sartre's achievement worth? The simplest and most attractive answer is given by a recent French attempt to rehabilitate Sartre. In an article in Le Magazine Littéraire 103-4, September 1975 (reprinted in Politiques de la Philosophie, ed. Grisoni, Grasset 1976), Dominique Grisoni argues that 'Sartre's undertaking is a direct and radical transcendence of structuralism'. His argument is that the Critique develops both the concept of struct-

ures (which correspond to series and can be grasped by analytical reason), and the concepts of human action and historical development, and that structuralism, in the name of a rigorous concept of science, simply concentrates on the former and forgets the latter.

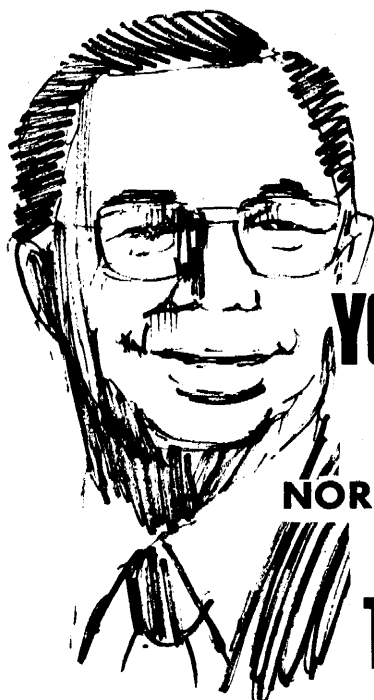
This attempt to engineer a detente between structuralism and Sartre has a lot to recommend it. For one thing, Sartre's system contains many 'structuralist' ideas - for instance, the specificity of the principles governing different social ensembles; the relative independence and the different temporalisations of the different levels of a social formation, and history as a process without a subject. For another, as everyone acknowledges, the concepts of historical transition and of human action and experience are extremely difficult to conceptualise in structuralist terms.

From this point of view, structuralism appears as filling in one section of the grand Sartrean scheme - the plan of an integrated social, political and psychological theory inspired by the idea of history as the product of human praxis. But Sartre's scheme remains little more than a hopeful sketch: however coherent Sartre's social concepts, they remain so abstract that they can scarcely be brought to bear on any concrete political, historical or sociological controversy. And Sartre would no doubt agree: for this task was reserved for Volume Two of the Critique. The question is, why was he unable to finish it?

# THE CREATOR! OUR CREATION!

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Affirmative: Dr. Thomas B. Warren  
Negative: Dr. A.G. N. Flew  
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# Alienations

Pietro Chiodi, Sartre and Marxism, trans Kate Soper, Harvester Press, 1976, £6.95

Sartre and Marxism is a critical exposition of the later phase of Sartre's thought, as expressed in The Problem of Method and The Critique of Dialectical Reason. It situates that thought in relation to three philosophical tendencies - those of Hegel, 'primitive' (pre-Sartrean) existentialism, and Marxism, and one of its principal concerns is to disentangle the uses of certain terms common to these tendencies, notably 'alienation' and 'objectification'. This task of disentanglement is carried out masterfully, and the strongest parts of the book are those devoted to it.

Chiodi's book has many advantages over other writing on Sartre's relation to Marxism. Non-Marxist admirers of Sartre generally take one of two attitudes to his attempt to unite existentialism and Marxism. Either they see it as a regrettable lapse from his earlier 'individualism' and love of freedom, or they see him as conferring on Marxists the privilege of having a great philosopher to sort out their insoluble theoretical problems. It is seldom suspected that there might be intellectual resources within Marxism which Sartre could use to sort out some of the difficulties of his own earlier philosophy. Marxists on the other hand too often accept the idea that Sartre's thought is 'individualist' and therefore non-Marxist, without noticing that the term 'individualism' has too many senses to be much use, or that no one emphasized human interdependence more strongly than Sartre in Being and Nothingness. Once again this leads to Sartre's approach towards Marxism being seen as a leap in the dark rather than an intelligible development.

In Chiodi's book we can see, from a Marxist perspective, both the continuity and the development of Sartre's thought. Much of the book is an exposition of Sartre's progress, and I sometimes found it difficult to discover to what extent Chiodi agreed with Sartre, given that he obviously approves of the direction in which Sartre's thought has moved. Sartre set out both to correct the errors of Being and Nothingness and to renovate the ossified Marxism of the time. He made some progress in both matters. Negatively, his criticisms of Marxist theory in the Stalinist era were direct hits -- the economism and 'suppression of particularity' that was content with saying 'Flaubert was a petty-bourgeois', and forgot that not every petty-bourgeois was Flaubert. So far as his own existentialism was concerned, the most important change in Sartre's position since Being and Nothingness, other than the change

in subject-matter from individual to collective history, is that which led him to introduce the notions of 'needs' and 'scarcity', and give them a fundamental role in his analysis of human existence. Sartre never believed in an unlimited or unsituated freedom, but he did, in Being and Nothingness, believe in an unconditioned and unmotivated one. Certainly he recognised that one does not desire just anything at any time, but his theory made it impossible to say why. Now he recognises that the human project does not arise (literally) out of nothing, but is a response to a particular negative fact - need. Along with this goes some sort of recognition that the 'perspective of conflict' in which all relations between people were seen in Being and Nothingness, is not something built into the structure of existence, but is a result of scarcity - a historical reality of which we can project the abolition.

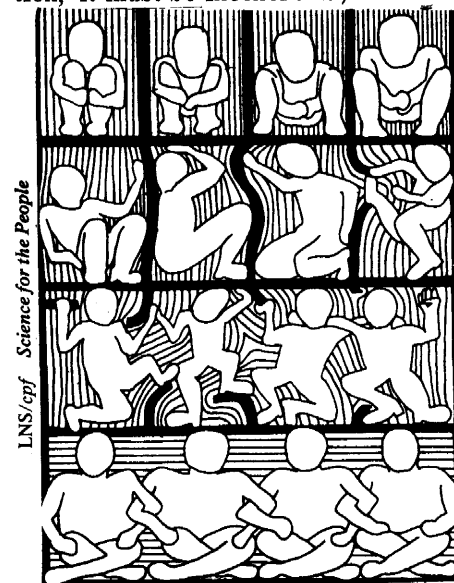
However the perspective of conflict does not disappear quite so easily; that it does not is bound up with the central issue in Chiodi's book - Sartre's conflation of objectification and alienation. It is because of this conflation, Chiodi believes, that Sartre fails to resolve many of the problems of his earlier work, and that his later thought remains pre-Marxist, rather than being the required renovation of Marxism.

Chiodi lays down certain formal requirements for any theory of alienation. These he summarises in a definition: alienation "is the negative process by which a subject makes himself other than himself by virtue of a constraint which is capable of being removed on the initiative of the subject himself" (p80). 'Negative' here seems to mean simply 'undesirable'. Hegel's notion of alienation does not conform to this definition, as the alienation of Spirit in Nature is necessary to its objective expression (and hence not merely negative) and in the end, the whole process is only an apparent alienation anyway. The Absolute remains itself in all its adventures. The Marxist theory of alienation (i.e. that of Marx's early writings) does meet the conditions. Real individuals are subjected to an undesirable constraint by which their powers come to be at the disposal of an antagonistic class; this state of affairs can be remedied by working class political action. In this view, alienation and de-alienation are processes which occur in quite definite historical conditions; they are in no way inherent in the human situation. Objectification on the other hand - the expression of human activity in the objective world, the process by which the being and activity of one person are established in the world of others - this is a necessary feature of any non-solipsistic world, and it would be perverse to see it as negative.

The case of existentialism is differ-

ent again: alienation is seen as an ineliminable feature of the human condition, and this is partly (and especially in Sartre) due to the idea that any objective reality, however much an expression of someone's intentions, is a degradation of their subjectivity, a descent to a subhuman level of being (that of an 'object', which here has both the sense of object as opposed to subject and object as opposed to person. It has both senses just because for the existentialist it is precisely subjecthood which is definitive of persons). So that, as with Hegel, every objectification is an alienation for the existentialist; yet at the same time, alienation has all the negative connotations that it does in Marxism. Existentialism then is a metaphysical rebellion against a metaphysical necessity.

It is when we come to look at the nature of human reciprocity that the consequences of this position are really disastrous. Reciprocity comes to be seen as unavoidably negative: "my relations with the other-as-object are essentially made up of ruses designed to make him remain an object" said Sartre in Being and Nothingness (p297). (In fact some religious existentialists have believed a non-objectifying reciprocity to be possible - Berdyaev's communion of souls, Buber's I-Thou relations - but unless this involves a tacit denial of the existentialist confusion of alienation with objectification, it must be incoherent.)



Chiodi's well-argued contention is that alienation remains ineliminable and reciprocity unavoidably negative. \*for Sartre in the Critique of Dialectical Reason as well as in Being and Nothingness, despite the new stress on need and scarcity, which might have given reason to hope that this sad state of affairs was historically specific and conquerable. This is not without its political implications. The fusion of previously atomised individuals into a group does not overcome negative reciprocity, it merely collectivizes it. The group as a whole remains alienated. It directs the violence of its members

against a common enemy, but its internal life is (a priori) not based on any positive reciprocity, so that as soon as its cohesion is threatened, it can only survive by terror. There seems to be here a sort of a priori argument against the possibility of democratic centralism (I mean democratic centralism as it is supposed to be; what passes as democratic centralism all too often is horribly recognizable in Sartre's phenomenology of the Group). The agents of historical change cannot therefore be classes, organised on democratic lines, as for Marx; they must be groups which are in essence monolithic. As Chiodi puts it:

'De-alienation thus becomes possible only through the suppression of objectification, which in being a feature of the reciprocal relation of multiplicity, can only be suppressed through the suppression of multiplicity itself.' (p93)

There is here a philosophical justification of Stalinism which can never be found in the pages of Marx and Lenin.

I am in complete agreement with Chiodi that the conflation of objectification and alienation is a fatal flaw in existentialism. The question remains: what if anything is the positive contribution of existentialism to the theory of alienation? Chiodi tells us:

'Sartre is right when he rejects the "ease" with which alienation in Marx comes to be suppressed (i. e. the identification of this with the suppression of its capitalist basis), but he is wrong in believing that the way of rendering de-alienation less easy lies via a return to the Hegelian identification between alienation and objectification' (p100)

He also takes the view that Marxism deals with economic alienation, but that it would be dogmatic to deny that there was any other kind, or to assert that all other kinds would disappear with the economic kind. Is there a possibility of a division of labour between Marxism and a demystified existentialism (i. e. one which has learned to make the distinction between objectification and alienation)? I am inclined to think that existentialism is both nearer the truth (phenomenologically) and further from it (in terms of values and practice) than Chiodi thinks. It is worth noting in this connection that, despite Marx's clear insistence in the 1844 Manuscripts that objectification is a necessary and positive phenomenon, probably most readers spontaneously miss this point and identify it with alienation. Also, that in those of his works that he saw fit to publish, Marx replaced the term 'alienation' by others that could not be misread in this sense. On the nature of such things as the

exploitation of labour, the subordination of the worker to the machine, or the subordination of human intentions to the self-expansion of capital, the Marx of Capital leaves no room for misinterpretation.

But Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre are talking about something quite different, something which is precisely what people want to see in the idea of an alienation, and something which really is bound up with objectification; a problem therefore which is insoluble, but which is nonetheless experienced as a problem.

The problem is this: on the one hand we have egocentric illusions - the feeling that one is unique, the desire to be appreciated for one's 'self', seen as quite distinct from all one's 'accidental' characteristics which constitute one's 'objective' being, one's being-for others; the conception of oneself as first a centre of experience and originator of action, and only afterwards entering into relations of interdependence with others. Everyone no doubt, at times at least, lives by these illusions. They show themselves in the dislike of being 'labelled', in resentment at being 'used' (even when this does not imply being harmed), and so on.

On the other hand there are the inescapable facts that we are 'objects' before we are 'subjects', absolutely interdependent and only relatively independent, that the 'self' is defined by 'others', that the being of an individual is composed entirely of perfectly objective qualities, which can be known and labelled by others.

This dilemma is I think the root of the experience of 'alienation', which leads people to recognize their experience in this concept. But this concept of alienation has nothing whatsoever to do with any Marxist one, and the experience is better described in existentialist terms like the loss of the self in the 'they' (Heidegger), or in Sartre's idea that "The Other holds a secret - the secret of what I am", and in his account of personal relations as the inevitable (but necessarily unsuccessful) struggle to wrest the secret from the other by violence.

The great error of the existentialists - and Sartre more than any - is to take this experience as a datum and seek solutions in its own terms.

The 'solution' to this 'alienation' can only lie in the knowledge that the egocentric illusions are illusions, and in a practice based on this knowledge. Such practices do exist, mainly in a mystified form (e. g. the pursuit of loss of self in mysticism).

But the point here is that one should make the sharpest possible distinction between real, politically soluble problems (exploitation, oppression, the irrationality of the market economy) and problems which are the effects of illusion, and are insoluble if taken at face value.

It remains to be asked: Is there any intermediate area of alienation,

not based on illusion and therefore capable of meeting the formal requirements for a case of real alienation, but at the same time not restricted to the economic sphere? There are of course forms of oppression which belong to the ideological-political superstructure, and which can be removed by political action, though their disappearance cannot be expected as an automatic effect of economic changes. But unless one wishes to call every form of oppression 'alienation', I see no reason for applying the term to these. It can hardly be to these that Chiodi is referring when he leaves open the possibility of forms of alienation outside the province of Marxism as such. Sartre characterises alienation in this way:

'The man who looks upon his work, who recognises it as his in every way, and yet at the same time does not recognise it at all; who can say both: "That isn't what I



wanted" and "I understand that it's what I made and that I couldn't have made it any other".' (quoted by Chiodi, p89)

Certainly there are many cases which this passage brings to mind. They range from cases of 'displacement', where the fulfilment of a conscious desire does not bring satisfaction because the desire was only the symbolic expression of an unconscious wish, to cases shading off into simple failure, as when nobody laughs at my jokes. I suspect that these cases have no necessary connection either with the objectification-experienced-as-alienation of the existentialists and of everyday mystified experience, or with the alienated labour of the proletariat, and indeed have little in common with each other. The reasons why the unsatisfactory result occurs are too different to make it useful to subsume them under a single concept. We can understand the diverse phenomena referred to as 'alienation' better if we abandon that word.

In conclusion: Chiodi has provided us with a convincing criticism of existentialism as a theoretical ideology, and a demonstration of the continued presence of that ideology in Sartre's 'Marxist' phase. I would like to see more recognition of the fact that existentialism is not just something cooked up by a few philosophers, but reflects an ideology with deep roots in our everyday experience; the mistakes of existentialism are not rectified until that experience is demystified. Andrew Collier

# Nasty Tales

Michel Foucault (ed.): I, Pierre Rivière, having slaughtered my mother, my sister and my brother ... A case of parricide in the 19th century, trans. Frank Jellinek, Random House (Pantheon Books) New York, 1975, £5.50 (original edition Gallimard/Juillard, Collection Archives, Paris, 1973, pb £2.28)

"Particulars and explanation of the occurrence on June 3 at Aunay at the village of La Faucherie written by the author of this deed. I, Pierre Rivière, having slaughtered my mother, my sister and my brother, and wishing to make known the motives which led me to this deed, have written down the whole of the life which my father and my mother led together since their marriage... I shall then tell how I resolved to commit this crime, what my thoughts were at the time, and what was my intention. I shall also say what went on in my mind after doing this deed, the life I led among people, and the places I was in after the crime up to my arrest and what were the resolutions I took. All this work will be very crudely styled, for I know only how to read and write, but all I ask is that what I mean shall be understood, and I have written it all down as best I can." (p54 - emphasis added)

So opens a narrative of some 25,000 words written in July 1835 by Pierre Rivière, a Breton peasant aged 20, as an adjunct to his interrogation by the examining magistrate at Falaise. These opening lines indicate something of the extraordinary and riveting quality of this document, which forms the central 'exhibit' of the legal and medical dossier of Rivière's trial, assembled here from local archives and contemporary press reports and published together with seven 'Notes' by members of a seminar organised in Paris in 1971-2 by Michel Foucault. (Rivière's memoir was published, in garbled form, by the *Annales d'Hygiène* at the time of his trial; the affair shortly afterwards lapsed into complete oblivion.) The documents begin with the circumstances of the murders, recorded in the eye-witness statements of villagers, doctors and officials, continue with the hue-and-cry, the arrest, interrogation and trial of Rivière, and end with Louis-Philippe's commutation of the sentence of death to one of life imprisonment, and Rivière's suicide in prison in 1840.

The seminar which produced this book formed part of a programme of research, instigated in 1970 by Michel Foucault at the Collège de France with his inaugural lecture 'L'Ordre du Discours', into the relationships between knowledge, desire and power, especially as manifested

in the discourses of 'human' and 'social' sciences. Part of the summary of Foucault's course given in 1971-2 on 'Penal theories and institutions' formulates the approach as follows:

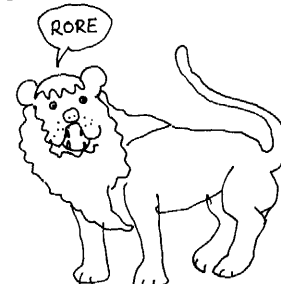
"The working hypothesis will be this: power relationships (with the struggles traversing them, or the institutions that maintain them) do not only play with respect to knowledge the role of a facilitation or of an obstacle; they are not content merely to favour or stimulate it, to falsify or limit it; power and knowledge are not linked to each other solely by the play of interests or ideologies; the problem, therefore, is not just that of determining how power subjugates knowledge and makes it serve its ends, or how it imprints its mark on knowledge, imposes on it ideological contents and limits. No body of knowledge can be formed without a system of communications, records, accumulation and displacement which is in itself a form of power and which is linked, in its existence and functioning, to the other forms of power. Conversely, no power can be exercised without the extraction, appropriation, distribution or retention of knowledge. On this level, there is not knowledge on the one side and society on the other, or science and the State, but only the fundamental forms of 'knowledge/power' ('pouvoir-savoir').... The truth of experimentation (expérience) is the child of inquisition - of the power, political, administrative and judicial, to put questions, extort answers, gather testimonies, test affirmations, establish facts."

The elaboration of this thesis can be found in Foucault's genealogies of the modern asylum, hospital and prison, their corresponding institutional structures and fields of discourse with their complex modes of material and epistemological interdependence.

The dossier on Pierre Rivière offers a fascinating illustration of such a play of forces at work, and, in Foucault's words, "... the documents give us a key to the relations of power, domination and conflict within which discourses emerge and function, and hence provide material for a potential analysis of discourse, even of scientific discourses, which may be both tactical and political, and therefore strategic" (pp. xi-xii). The separate parts form an intricate, conflicting series of 'discourses', each one produced according to the conditions of a particular social place and role, a particular focus of power and set of practices. The 'Notes' contributed by members of the seminar don't pretend to constitute an exhaustive, or unanimous, commentary on this dossier, but provide a wealth of information situating it in its political, social and 'archaeological' context. (We learn, for instance, of the close association between parricide and political assassination in a regime upholding

the family as a symbol of the social order, and the reluctance of juries to convict in parricide cases; of the collective professional interests at stake for the Paris psychiatrists who intervened on Rivière's behalf; of the echoes in Rivière's memoir of the crime stories in popular contemporary broadsheets; of the preceding series of bizarre and widely publicised murders.) Foucault and his colleagues have abstained, however, from any systematic 'reading' (psychoanalytic or otherwise) of Rivière's own text; in keeping with the purpose of the 'Archives' series, they have chosen rather simply to present it and to indicate what was afterwards done with, and to, it. In the end the reader has to decide for himself whether, and how, Rivière's request "that what I mean shall be

## THE LION WHO



## COULDN'T SPELL

understood" can be better satisfied than by his judges' silent incomprehension, without, as Foucault warns, lapsing again into the reductive violence of an institutional 'reading'.

It is, at all events, the haunting personality of Pierre Rivière which emerges most memorably from this book. Many striking episodes in his life are recalled by witnesses. The parish priest noted, and disputed, Rivière's reputation in his village as an 'idiot': "On the contrary. I have always noted in him an aptitude for science and a most remarkable memory, but he seemed to have a skew in his imagination." (p26) Rivière himself tells in his memoir how "I also resolved to distinguish myself by making completely new instruments, I wanted them to be created in my imagination. I resolved first to make a tool to kill birds such as never before had been seen. I named it 'calibene'... I had also resolved to make an instrument to churn butter all by itself and a carriage to go all by itself with springs, which I wanted to produce only in my imagination..." (p103). Rivière's memoir elicited from the examining magistrate the comment: "No doubt many of the thoughts expressed in it denote a deplorable aberration of ideas and judgement, but it is far from being the work of a madman, and its style is not the least surprising thing in its composition." The local paper reported, "It is stated that the memoir of which we are



speaking is wholly rational and written in such a way that it is impossible to say which is the more astonishing, its author's memoir or his crime." (pp50, 52)

The first and longest part of the memoir is a meticulously constructed history of the tribulations experienced over a period of twenty years by his father, a mild and industrious peasant farmer, at the hands of Pierre's mother and elder sister; it represents his mother's character as one of relentless, demented vindictiveness and malice, an opinion which local opinion appears to have endorsed. Rivière chronicles with obsessive precision the course of a marital conflict progressively widened and embittered, under the conditions of a marriage contract which constitutes the partners as antagonistic legal subjects, to entangle every area of their lives - work, business, land, family, property - in endless rounds of domestic warfare and 'conciliation proceedings' before the local judge. The mother generally seems to have had the better of this curious form of litigation. Born into this battlefield, the young Pierre Rivière, in the words of a medical witness, ("just as if he had to represent in himself alone an example of every sort of delusion"), "imagined that a fecundating fluid incessantly flowed from his person and could thus, in his own despite, render him guilty of crimes of incest and of others yet more revolting". Rivière's whole narrative is, as Foucault says, "a marvellous document of peasant ethnology" - the 'Notes' barely discuss this aspect; although J-P. Peter and J. Favret suggest that civil contract law formed the instrument for the political control of the French peasantry after the destruction of the feudal order during the Revolution.

Rivière next presents "as it were a summary of my private life and the thoughts that have busied me to this day", which culminates in his resolution, inspired by his reading of historical and Biblical acts of self-sacrificing heroism, loyalty and vengeance, to rid his father for ever of his wife's and daughter's persecutions, and - what was to be considered the clearest proof of his insanity - to kill along with them his younger brother, beloved by his father and himself, in order that his father should not afterwards have cause to lament Pierre's own death. He planned originally to first write his self-justifying memoir and then to commit the murders, post the memoir to the authorities and commit suicide; but, finding it impossible to write in secrecy, he resolved instead to stand trial and vindicate himself before his judges: "then I would make my declarations that I would die for my father, that no matter how much they were in favour of women they would not triumph ... it is the women who are in command now in this fine age of enlightenment, this nation

which seems to be so avid for liberty and glory obeys women ... I thought it would be a great glory to have thoughts opposed to all my judges, to dispute against the whole world, I conjured up Bonaparte in 1815 ... I thought that an opportunity had come for me to raise myself, that my name would make some noise in the world, that by my death I should cover myself with glory, and that in time to come my ideas would be adopted and I should be vindicated" (my emphases). In the event, having carried out the murders he allowed himself to be captured only after a month of wandering the countryside, and wrote the memoir - at the request of the magistrate - while under arrest, in the space of two weeks.

The courts were thus obliged to try a case which exacted both concern and sharp disagreement within and between levels of opinion, both public and professional, from village to capital. The case happened at a time when the administration of 'public order' under the post-revolutionary regimes, shorn of its feudal props, was going through a stage of danger and uncertainty, and when psychiatry was hesitantly advancing towards installing (or insinuating) itself as a recognised instance of the legal system, and a position of power alongside the prisons as custodian of the social deviant. The Rivière dossier strikingly illustrates how such institutional changes were manifested in a multiplicity of equivocations and oppositions at the level of medical, legal and psychiatric discourses. At the trial the GP who had examined Rivière testified, against the medical pleas for the defence, that, being neither 'monomaniac', 'maniac' nor 'idiot', he was therefore 'not insane' ('pas aliéné'). The jury thereupon convicted Rivière of parricide, yet felt it necessary to concede that he "had never been in full possession of his reason" (p141). The twists and turns of the ensuing controversy indicate, as A. Fontana puts it, the "constitutive limits" of the specialists' "pretensions to the scientificity of medical knowledge", pretensions hardly separable from the claim to institutional power.

But these historical and archaeological considerations are far from exhausting the significance of Rivière's text, no less enigmatic now than in 1835. Its specific contribution to the affair, which would in any case have aroused controversy, appears to have been to render the yes/no questions as to its author's sanity or madness, as determining his culpability, rationality or responsibility, effectively undecidable, perhaps even meaningless. The categories and concepts so volubly deployed here by the forensic experts were confronted in Rivière with a kind of contrary discourse, a heterodox conjunction of language and violence, which rendered them inoperable. To be sure, the memoir was a constant reference

point in the medico-legal arguments, but none of these, as Riot shows, used it in more than a distorted, selective or tangential fashion. Misreading or partial reading was compounded, as Peter and Favret note, by misprinting: "Almost any sort of nonsensical errors could be ascribed to a peasant; hence the copyist or the printer's foreman constantly fabricated more of them than there really were".

One could wish that members of the seminar had elaborated further their thesis on Rivière as having furnished, spontaneously and from below, and in a form doomed to incomprehension, a demonstration of the limits of the psychiatric orthodoxy and/or of the 'official' conception of man. No doubt this would have meant confronting the difficult issue, already touched on above, of what sort of epistemological procedure could yield an adequate understanding of the 'meaning' of Rivière's words and actions. Foucault's way of posing the terms of such a problem would not admit here of merely making an anti-psychiatric hero of Rivière. The elements out of which Rivière constructed and put into execution his design, the edifying histories and legends purveyed in his elementary education, were all parts of an official popular ideology on which Rivière, so to speak, simply performed his own formal operations of displacement; while the form of confessional autobiography of the memoir which Rivière wrote at the court's own request belonged among the customary resources of judicial investigation (Foucault's "child of inquisition") - as well as resembling that of the crime stories popularised in the broadsheets. The Rivière case thus stands in a complex position as an exception, or mutation, within discursive norms, a position which can probably only be adequately elucidated in terms of a general social theory of discourse of the kind Foucault has proposed.

The publication of this dossier is to be warmly welcomed, and should stimulate renewed interest in Foucault's radical initiatives in this field. An accessible British edition should be brought out without delay.

COLIN GORDON

'But most of the undergraduates who come up to Oxford are not going to be professional philosophers. They're going to be civil servants and parsons and politicians and lawyers and businessmen. And I think the most important thing I can do is to teach them to think lucidly - and linguistic analysis is frightfully useful for this. You only have to read the letters to the Times (for example)...'  
Hare

# THE FOX

An art-journal for the vacillating  
petit-bourgeoisie

Contents of FOX 3 Spring, 1976  
include:

*Historical & Dialectical Materialism.*  
*On Hans Haacke.*  
*Artists "organize" in New York.*  
*The Organization of Culture Under*  
*Monopoly Capitalism.*  
*An Art "Enemies List".*  
*Sociological Art as Utopian Strategy.*  
*Comix & Reviews.*

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## Psychic Gumption

Robert M. Pirsig, Zen and the Art of  
Motorcycle Maintenance, Corgi  
pb 95p, 1976

'Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance' is the title of that paperback with the blue cover design of the lotus blossoming from a spanner that everyone seemed to be carrying around with them last summer. The title, the cover design, a modest price, and some rave reviews made sure that a fair number of people bought it and discussed it, though whether many of them read it right through to the end is another matter. After a number of spot checks I found very few who claimed to have finished the whole 400 pages. Still that's never stopped a book becoming something of a cult (remember 'Giles Goat-Boy'? A survey by a journal reported that less than a quarter of the buyers of that book actually got past half-way); in fact it's probably a necessary condition that they don't. Anyway, it's a book that has had a lot of impact - non-academic impact - and is well worth having a look at in the pages of this journal.

First, what happens in the novel? The exterior action of the story is that some time after his mental breakdown a writer of technical maintenance manuals takes his moody son Chris as pillion rider on a motorcycle trip west from Chicago one summer. The journey takes them across the plains and up through high Montana where they rest awhile and climb a mountain, then they head southwest through Oregon for the Pacific and San Francisco. The ride is spectacular but their relationship worsens; the narrator gets more and more self-centred and his son more and more neglected, until just north of the Bay in the fog things hit rock bottom.

Meantime there is an interior journey of the memory. The narrator finds himself retracing his life from confident, precocious beginnings right through to his total mental breakdown. As a fourteen year old undergraduate he found himself increasingly doubting more than he

accepted. He left college, drifted, was drafted to Korea. Later he returned to the midwest and enrolled in a Philosophy course. But after the exquisiteness of Eastern thought he found the Western tradition too harsh and taxonomic. He returned East and stayed for ten years at a Hindu university until he was finally turned off by the indifference and quiescence of Eastern Philosophy. Back in the States he married, had children, graduated in journalism and began hack teaching in Montana. But when life seemed to be neatly predicated, he started to see what was wrong and what must be done. He began to live more authentically. He changed his mode and objectives of teaching. And he engaged on a project that led eventually to his mental breakdown - the search for the nature and source of 'Quality'.

The two journeys are linked by 'Chautauquas' - direct chats to the reader - but actually coalesce in the last pages of the book. His last image of his former self (whom he calls 'Phaedrus') is within the glass doors of a mental hospital. On the outside is his son, uncomprehending; his father it seems does not care about him. Juxtaposed to this image is the reality of the boy, estranged, rocking backwards and forwards in the Californian mist, crying; his father has retreated into his memories again, and again it seems is incommunicado. In this climax to the novel the boy's plight gets through to him and awakens his sense of concern - one aspect of Quality. The boy, responding emotionally, wants reassurance from his father that even in the hospital he had kept his reason, that he had continued to believe what he thought to be right - the other aspect of Quality. Yes, his father replied, he had. But he now saw that in taking a purely intellectual journey in the search for Quality he had ensured that he could never find it. With the end of his son's estrangement from him he found that other dimension of human warmth and contact necessary for the rediscovery of Quality.

The story then is a sort of true romance for intellectuals. All the action is internal. The landscape, like a backdrop, keeps changing, but the two actors scarcely move except to embrace each other in the finale. There is nothing very exciting here, and indeed some may think that any internal action would have to be very strong to carry the interest through until the end, and as I shall later show, what is on offer is tedious in the extreme. Fortunately however the story itself does not really get under way until near the end of section one. It is preceded by some very fine writing and this is where the book is genuinely exciting.

There are thirty-two chapters in the book, divided into four sections. It is the first section, the ride to Montana with two friends, John and Sylvia, that makes the book outstanding. Familiar American themes appear;

the thrill of travelling; the fascination with technological power; the celebration of nature, and the basic dissatisfaction with what people have done with the power and the materials they have. Pirsig digs deeper than most. The journey is solid, substantial experience and you are made aware of the importance of the machine and the concern the riders ought to have for it. Pirsig also stresses how the mode of travel affects perception - no window frames - no spectator role in storms, you're really in there. The treatment makes so many of those other travelling novels seem crude or literary in their approach, picking out only the scenic and squalid; attending more to destinations than to travel, and exemplifying spendthrift attitudes to the horses or cars or planes that are used. And the conversations and incidents appear to develop naturally out of the journeying and resting, really vying with the best of the Western and hobo rail-roading films.

But it is in the analysis of dissatisfaction that Pirsig really scores in comparison with other writers. American heroes have been unsettled by ambition for wealth of power and have travelled to try to get them, or they have been driven by desires to escape from circumstances that had trapped them. But Pirsig coolly analyses dissatisfaction in terms of different alienations. John and Sylvia he sees as lacking a basic harmony, resulting from their failure to make appropriate adjustments to the conditions of their lives, and to take appropriate initiatives to alter those conditions. They seem to exemplify those people who affect to despise technology and blame machines for all sorts of things, but who yet cannot live the life they enjoy best without them. They have, says Pirsig, a sort of blind, scared romanticism. They react to technology as if it was something that sought to control their lives, from which they had to escape now and again. The narrator tries to get them to understand technology. How tools and instruments and machines are constructed by men to use, to make life and work more productive and rich. He wants to show them that they have become estranged from things they should be at home with. But it is no good. They cover their eyes. John kicks his BMW, Sylvia curses a broken faucet.

Even this though is of less pain to the narrator than the behaviour of car mechanics who have become careless butchers, showing no identification with their work. They work hastily yet casually, misdiagnosing faults and ruining machinery. Why, asks Pirsig. They are not romantics like John and Sylvia. They are technologists themselves. Yet they treat their work as means merely to money. They exemplify the spectatorial attitude, that separation of what man is from what man does, characterized by a lack of concern for the quality of what they do.

The section then is extremely interesting, unusual and thoughtful. There is an absence of literary-style writing, and the plot has not got in the way of what Pirsig wants to say. The narrator describes, reminisces, talks directly to the reader and so on. It's easy and relaxed. And the analysis of the rational technology which the narrator embarks upon, heralded by the now well-known passage on p18: 'The Buddha, the Godhead, resides quite as comfortably in the circuits of a digital computer or the gears of a cycle transmission as he does at the top of a mountain or in the petals of a flower' has a lot of promise. But ominously, as early as p36, 'Phaedrus' is introduced, and by the end of the first section the conventional bourgeois novel is under way and Pirsig progressively loses his grip, and each section is worse than the one that preceded it.

So, the title, the cover design, the first section are fine, and account for the enthusiasm about the book. But the book is mainly a story; after all it is four hundred pages long. And the story is basically as I have outlined at the beginning of the review. And no-one who has picked up a copy of the book can fail to have noticed the wildly extravagant claims made for it by a gallery of cosmopolitan literary people. It is almost as if, for some people, a Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit is locked up inside a Kerouac's On the Road, with the chauteauquas like nothing so much as Thoreauvian observations.

True, the book promises in its opening section such a heady chemistry, but it just doesn't deliver the goods, and people have been deluding themselves if they think that it does. What does Pirsig come up with? In place of the original ideas and reasoning qualities of the Hegelian epic we get stitched together precis of Hume, Kant, 'Classic Formalism', 'Scientific Materialism', the 'Tao Te Ching' and Poincaré. In place of Thoreau we get chats that resemble nothing so much as the ten-minute fillers that Religious Trusts buy on commercial radio, and in place of Kerouac's motifs we get ... Kerouac's motifs, though not acknowledged as such.

Let me give some examples.

First the intellectual Chautauqua. These are of two sorts. (i) the potted history of a philosophical or mathematical movement which it would be pointless to reproduce here for it is itself reproduced, and (ii) the authentic Pirsig sort:

Long Chautauqua today ... so I backed up and shifted to the classic-romantic split that I think underlies the whole humanist-technological problem. But that too required a backup into the meaning of Quality. But to understand the meaning of Quality in classic terms required a backup into metaphysics and its relationship to everyday life. To do that required still another backup into the huge area that relates both metaphysics and

everyday life - namely formal reason. So I proceeded with formal reason up into metaphysics and then into Quality and then from Quality back down into metaphysics and science. ... (p269)



And now the homespun, folksy, precepts-for-living sort of Chautauqua, sprinkled by the way with unadulterated Kerouac:

Those crazy Rubaiyat Quatrains keep rumbling through my head. Let's get off Omar and onto the Chautauqua. Omar's solution is just to sit around and guzzle the wine and feel so bad that time is passing and the Chautauqua looks good to me by comparison. Particularly today's Chautauqua, which is about gumption - the psychic gasoline ... what I'm trying to come up with on these gumption traps, I guess, is shortcuts to living right ... (p296)

Is this an 'astonishing literary performance' (Sunday Times)? Toynbee (in the Observer) called it 'a work of great, perhaps urgent, importance'. Is that what you see in those paragraphs, typical of many? Let me quote again:

When you're bored, stop! Go to a show. Turn on the TV. Call it a day. Do anything but work on the machine. If you don't stop, the next things that happens is the Big Mistake, and then all the boredom plus the Big Mistake combine together in one Sunday punch to knock all the gumption out of you and you are really stopped ... (p310)

And this kind of straight-from-the-shoulder Chautauqua has its political side too. Judge for yourself, and listen also to the reviewer of the Village Voice: '... it is a miracle ... sparkles like an electric dream. Freshness, originality ...'

The reality of the American government isn't static, he (Harry Truman) said, it's dynamic. If we don't like it we'll get something better. The American government isn't going to get stuck on any set of fancy doctrinaire ideas ... I keep talking wild theory, but it keeps somehow coming out stuff everybody knows, folklore. This Quality, this feeling for the work, is something known in every shop. Now let's get back to that screw ... (p278) Yes indeed. That really is a puzzle. Who could write like that and come

up with the first few pages? Even the most cursory reading of the book from end to end will throw up the father-son thing, the nostalgia for lost youth thing, the writer's journey into madness type of thing. All of these Pirsig throws himself into with gusto (I nearly said, gumption). His Phaedrus, his early self, is an incredible hero-picture. It is described like this: 'this uncanny solitary intelligence'; 'a mind that recalls the image of a laser beam'; 'animal courage'; 'I.Q. of 170'; 'a timber wolf on the mountain'; 'three days on a mountain thinking about Good'; 'lecturing was electric'; 'creatively on fire with a set of ideas no-one had ever heard of before' (except perhaps Goodman, Holt, Illich, Freire). And then the ultimate in the Charles Atlas thing: (after his new-style lecturing) students astonished, came by his office and said, 'I used to just hate English. Now I spend more time on it than anything else.' Not just one or two. Many. This was the sort of guy he was once.

This is the book the Sydney Sun Herald capitalised like this: 'THIS IS A WORK OF ART'. But it is a thoroughly market-oriented, feeble piece of middle-aged, middle-class, middle-American nonsense that looks as though it could have been glued together one rainy afternoon in an ad-man's office. There is a kid's angle, a mom's angle, a generation gap angle. What fresh-faced American student could resist packing a copy in his worn mock-combat jacket as he sets off for the home-financed European Grand Tour? What fond parents wouldn't nod and smile approvingly. After all it may be a little morbid but there's no sex; there's mention of that queer Buddhist stuff (though confined for the most part to section one) but at least there's no drugs, and thank goodness there's none of that anarchist or revolutionary nonsense, this is solid midwest apolitical.

Yet, it is incredible I know, but it is a big seller amongst medium radical students in this country. It gets quoted in essays and seminar groups. I can only assume that people don't read past section one, or that people are impressed with these glancing blows at Kant, Hume & Co, or maybe reassured that society changes for the better not as a result of hard analysis and concerted action, but as a result of each of us separately coming to terms with his environment, way of life and his technological powers. It is the sort of romance that reinforces that breed of masquerading socialist who wants nothing so much as to take off into some brave new colony, to make a fresh beginning. What they are really choosing is to associate with a fairly select band of similarly youngish, healthy, reasonably intelligent people, and to dissociate themselves from the old, the ill, the broken-down. People through the centuries try to invent high-sounding names for this kind of

practice, but to call it socialist seems particularly ironic. Any socialist rhetoric is a sort of veneer for these people, rub them down with sandpaper and you'll find what they're really like. It's like that with 'Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance'. It seems to me the authentic Pirsig is sections two, three and four. I will float the hypothesis that section one, like the cover-design and the title, is the selling package, the bit that was put together in the publisher's office to capture the buying public's imagination. And the packaging is better than the contents. We buy the contents because of the packaging and when we open them up we realise the packaging is the more valuable.

Of course I may be doing Pirsig an injustice. It may have been that the title, the design, the opening were all his and the rest of the book took it all on from there, and blame should be laid at the door of his advisers and controllers that told him to invent a story and to keep to it, but somehow I doubt it. It's phrases like, 'Now let's get back to that screw' that I think give it away. It's somehow too authentic-sounding. No publisher could make anyone write like that. That really comes from deep inside. That's no veneer. That's authentic. But if that's authentic, then give me the adman.

DAVE JACKSON

#### A NOTE ON PIRSIG'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Pirsig, it is well to remember, is read by an audience hundreds of times greater than Radical Philosophy. No author since Koestler has managed to popularise important philosophical themes more successfully. How has he achieved this? As the above review suggests, the advertising and packaging is superb. But the content itself is not just second-hand dross. Pirsig's use of maintenance handbooks to show the relativity of taxonomy is illuminating and concise. His discussion of the romantic and classical traditions in philosophy is refreshing, and his off-the-cuff remarks about Hume, Kant, Plato & Co, if one-sided, are decidedly appetite-whetting. Those of us who teach and learn within the narrower confines of a formal academic setting have much to learn from Pirsig here.

But the conclusions Pirsig comes to, and indeed the whole drift of his argument, is not just apolitical but distinctly reactionary. It is the more insidious for being couched within the domain of the supposedly progressive ideas of the 'alternative' culture.

At a purely theoretical level, there is an astonishing hiatus between Pirsig's critique of, for instance, the mainstream of Western thought, and his own conclusions. Thus he mounts an attack on Classicism on two grounds - firstly because it suppresses qualitativeness and un-

duly stresses quantitiveness, and secondly because it excludes - and therefore hopelessly distorts - the relationship between subject and object. Yet he does not seem to see that he himself is guilty of just the same 'classicism' when he talks about the relationship between ideas and society. To put it bluntly (but wholly accurately), Pirsig has a 'theory' of society that is both extremely idealist and individualist. The facile nature of his views can be gathered from the following:

The true system, the real system, is our present construction of systematic thought itself, rationality itself, and if a factory is torn down but the rationality which produced it is left standing, then that rationality will simply produce another factory. If a revolution destroys a systematic government, but the systematic patterns of thought that produced that government are left intact, then those patterns will repeat themselves in the succeeding government. There's so much talk about the system. And so little understanding (p94).

Others have many times in the past shown the fallacy of such thinking, so let us put this on one side. The question remains how can Pirsig believe this? Only by dropping his objections to Classicism. Whatever one may say about the idealist thesis that ideas (unilaterally) determine society, and Pirsig's conclusion that therefore changing society will first require a change in each individual's ideas, one thing is clear - that this thesis has nothing to do with Zen but everything to do with western (intellectual) idealism. The fact that the text is littered with the occasional 'Tao', 'godhead', 'karma' and so on, only affects the window-dressing.

Pirsig's views are reactionary at several levels. First there is the level we have already cited. In spite of recognising (some) of the symptoms of alienation, he points to a set of ideas as the means of eliminating these symptoms. He refuses to recognise that the dominant ideas in any society are the product of the real relations between people in that society instead of the other way about. Secondly he sees the rottenness in western society as being more apparent than real. If only (technical) workers could mix a bit of the Romantic mode of thinking into their work, if only anti-technology consumers like John and Sylvia could lace their thinking with a dash of the Classical mode of thinking, then everything could return to the hunky-dory America of the frontier and apple pie. Conclusion - there's no real problem, only problems about the ways we look at and think about the real world. Consequences - don't bother to change the world, just change your ideas until it doesn't bother you any more - the politics of despair.

Thirdly, Pirsig is not just an idealist and a theoretician, but he also espouses an extreme form of individualism. Thus the only workers he talks about are artisans, never proletarians. Their only relationships are with the bits of metal they are fashioning, never with their fellow workers on a production line, and never never against capital. Homo sapiens is a species of pure unadulterated Egos. Here again the real Pirsig is in sharpest contrast with the self-image. One of the first principles of nearly all eastern philosophies and certainly of all Buddhist philosophies is that of ego-transcendence (hence the connection between meditation and these philosophies). Certainly the usual form of ego-transcendence for them is the self/nature interpenetration, and not those associated with the collective action of social classes, but the fact remains that Pirsig's reactionary individualism not only stands in sharp contrast with the traditions of revolutionary socialism, but also in sharp contrast with the eastern mystical trappings which put Pirsig's reactionary message into their trendy package.

Finally Pirsig reinforces at every level the prejudices of his own society. His sexism, for instance, is both extreme and unconscious. In the story it is always Sylvia who does the cooking and the washing. In the Chautauquas it is always the female who is associated with the Romantic mode of thinking and the male with the Classical. Pirsig never raises a finger in protest. Who knows, perhaps it is part of the divinely ordered ying-yangness of the cosmos? Here at least he is completely at harmony with the mainstream of Eastern philosophy.

PETER BINNS

## Trotsky

Geoff Hodgson, Trotsky and Fatalistic Marxism, Spokesman, 1975, 88pp, 95p

This small book contains important contributions to two areas of current debate within Marxism. The first essay, from which the book takes its title, is a hard look at Trotsky's 'conception of the epoch', i.e. his underlying analysis of the twentieth century as being one of capitalist decline and proletarian revolution.

Now, evaluations of Trotsky's contributions to Marxist theory and practice have generally tended to be made, and received, along rigid and factional lines, rather in the manner of armed encampments periodically exchanging salvos of polemic, without inflicting observable damage upon their adversaries. What is different about Hodgson's approach is that it is based on an appraisal of Trotsky's problematic (to use Althusser's term), i.e. his method

of testing out analysis against reality. He argues that Trotsky has a crude and mechanistic conception of the capitalist economy, which was based on the undeniable, but partial truth, that the nation-state had become a fetter on the latter's further development. This led him to envisage capitalism as entering an accelerating process of decline and collapse during the twentieth century. This is instanced by Trotsky's report to the Third Congress of the Third International in 1921, his overall analysis of the 'curve of capitalist development', and frequent references to the imminence of capitalist collapse during the 1930s, culminating in the catastrophist perspectives of the 1938 Transitional Programme.

Trotsky, of course, did not pretend to be an economist; the key point made here is that Trotsky's overly mechanistic view of the capitalist economy led him to make severe errors of political judgement during the period leading up to the formation of the Fourth International. Trotsky's politics were, to a large extent, premised on a faulty and inadequate economic analysis which served to disorient him, as for example in his evaluation of the course of the New Deal in America, and of the prospects for post war economic recovery. An estimation of the 'objective' conditions for proletarian revolution being 'rotten-ripe' had its logical corollary in terms of a 'crisis of leadership', and the weakness of the 'subjective factor' - betrayal by reformist and Stalinist bureaucracies, and a voluntarist emphasis on the need for small Trotskyist groups to lead the masses towards the conquest of state power. Trotsky's idea of the test of the validity of Marxism was, to a large extent, that of economic collapse as the precondition for revolutionary change. To deny the imminence of capitalism's collapse (apparently verified by the world recession of the 1930s) was in effect to deny the whole revolutionary thrust of Marx's work.

The result of this situation was Trotsky's overestimation of the possibilities for economic collapse and socialist revolution in the post-war period, together with the rapid overthrow of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the USSR. As Hodgson documents in the case of the British Trotskyists of the Revolutionary Communist Party, the result was to impart to it a theoretical and methodological legacy which considerably disoriented the infant Trotskyist movement, and which still dogs it today, evident in the fragmentation, weakness and theoretical atavism apparent amongst the competing Trotskyist groupuscules of the present.

The second essay, on 'The Falling Rate of Profit and the Collapse of Capitalism', was written as a rejoinder to Paul Cockshott's critique (published in New Edinburgh Review)



G Grosz Pandemonium, 1914

of Hodgson's earlier article in New Left Review 84. It is complementary to the first essay in the sense that it attempts to refute both Marx's arguments that the rate of profit will tend to fall, as a result of the trend towards a rising organic composition of capital, and the widespread conviction amongst Marxists that the latter must necessarily be an integral part of a revolutionary critique, in theory and practice, of the capitalist mode of production. It aims, and, I think, largely succeeds, to make this debate more accessible than the NLR article, and that by Ian Steedman in NLF 90, to those socialists not fully at home with the fierce polemic between 'Neo-Ricardians' and 'Fundamentalists' currently gracing the pages of Revolutionary Communist and other journals.

Some criticisms: firstly, a valid charge could be that the first essay, on Trotsky, is, to some extent, guilty of a fault which could be described as that of 'epistemological absolutism'. That is, it does not follow logically, with regard to Trotsky, or any other Marxist for that matter, that absolute clarity and correctness of theory is a precondition for effective revolutionary politics; revolutions have been made, and will continue to be made, with inadequate understanding of all sorts of social phenomena, including the workings of the capitalist economy. To use an analogy - a faulty gun may not shoot straight every time, but it can still kill!

To illustrate this point further, there is the example of Trotsky's analysis of the rise of fascism in Germany, which was extremely sharp and prescient; his conjunctural analyses were, to a degree, autonomous, and not necessarily predetermined by a fatalistic underlying conception of the epoch. This point could have been made more fully by the author without undermining the overall thrust of his argument.

The account of the debates within the post-war British Trotskyist

movement, groping for political answers, but constrained by the framework of reference handed down by Trotsky, makes salutary, if poignant, reading. It highlights the lack of an adequate history of British Trotskyism, as one component part of the broader socialist and labour movement in this country. The various Trotskyist groups each tend to claim that such work is, in fact, in progress, but the factional basis of such research must tend to preclude the possibility that such work will appear as other than a factional history.

Perhaps the weakest section of the Trotsky essay concerns its attempt to go on to develop an analysis of the present conjuncture. Hodgson concludes that the main trend is towards growing state control of wages, prices and investment, in the form of a corporatist solution to the chronic problems of the British economy. The evidence for this trend is, as yet, not very convincing, and the citing in support of the New Society article by Pahl and Winkler merely emphasises the hypothetical and tential character of such a perspective at this stage. This could have been better replaced by a more concretely based survey of the present conjuncture, and the present prospects (pace Trotsky's epigones) for a regeneration of British capitalism.

PETER JENKINS

## Rules OK?

Jack Lively, Democracy, Blackwell, 160pp, £3.00

In this lucid and carefully-argued book, Jack Lively seeks to 'define democracy, or at least to trace some of the boundaries of its meanings, and to assess some of the strengths and weaknesses of different modes of theorising about democracy'. He rejects the Pyrrhonist view that democracy is in the eye of the definer and claims, with Tocqueville, that its 'operative principle' is political equality. This, he argues, implies, first, that all should take part in political decision-making unless there is clear evidence of incompetence, and, second, that there should be equality between citizens in their capacity to determine decisions. This latter end, he argues, cannot be fully achieved. The majority principle is the decision-making procedure most conducive to securing prospective political equality (i.e. non-discrimination in advance of a decision's being made) - though it cannot assure it, and in some situations (e.g. where there exists a permanently excluded minority) will militate against it. Lively's argument for the majority principle is weakened by its being an argument by elimination: he argues that it is more conducive to political equality than the other procedures considered, yet he concedes that he examines only a small number



of an 'almost infinite' number of possible procedures.

Also conducive to political equality or 'the rule of the people' are a range of other conditions - 'insufficient requirements': that the rulers should be chosen by the ruled, or by their representatives, and that they should act in the interests of the ruled; and a number of 'necessary conditions': that all constituent groups be incorporated into the decision-making process, that governmental decisions be subject to popular control or that ordinary citizens be involved in public administration. These last two necessary conditions he sees as disjunctive, signifying 'responsible government' and 'direct democracy' respectively. The first requires that governments should be removable and that some alternative can be substituted by electoral decision (hence free elections, freedom of association and of speech and party competition, though different party systems have different disadvantages). Unfortunately, he says nothing about the institutional requirements of direct democracy, claiming them to be 'obvious', and nothing either about how to combine the two - a pressing problem, for instance, for democratic socialists (as opposed to Social Democrats) in present-day Portugal.

The centre of the book consists in a critical examination of theories of democracy - ideal-typical classifications (focusing on Robert Dahl); empirical generalisations concerning the environmental conditions of democracy (socio-economic, cultural, historical and institutional), of whose explanatory value and claims to be value-free he is, rightly, sceptical; deductive models ('economic' theories, deriving from Bentham, such as that of Anthony Downs), of whose limits he is aware, but whose explanatory value he seems to me to overestimate; and so-called 'utopian schemes', which he defines (rather too loosely) as 'seeking to delineate a desirable state of affairs'.

The book's final section seeks to identify the various 'ends' of democracy, which the author sees as distinct and in possible conflict with each other and with other non-democratic ends (such as governmental decisiveness, political stability, industrial progress), these democratic ends being the securing of the general interest, and of the common good, the safeguarding of liberty, and the encouragement of participation, active citizenship and 'an active, co-operative and public spirited civic character'.

Lively's book is a useful sorting out of recent work by social scientists and political philosophers, from a perspective which could be characterised as egalitarian ('the cure for the ills of democracy is more democracy ... greater political equality is very closely bound up with movement towards equality in other areas, economic and educational') and ethic-

ally pluralist (the 'claims of democracy have to be balanced against other ends' - but how?). One might have wished for certain arguments to be pushed deeper. What justifies Lively's claim that he has identified 'the meaning' of democracy? It is unclear whether he offers us a rationally defensible interpretation or conception of an essentially contested concept of democracy, or an account of that contestable concept (of which different conceptions may be offered, depending, for instance, on how 'rule' or 'interests' are conceived), or else an account, that (in some unexplained way) he assumes to be correct, of a non-essentially-contestable concept. And what exactly is his position on the fact-value question: his treatment of the empirical-normative argument in relation to democratic theory leaves this entirely opaque. And what a pity that he fails to expand his extremely interesting suggestion that 'traditionally political theory has talked of what is subject to human will (if only through self-restraint), whilst sociology has traditionally talked of those conditions too deep or too complex to be within the scope of conscious manipulation'. STEVEN LUKES

## Under Weston Eyes

Michael Weston, Morality and the Self, Blackwell, 93pp, £2.25

The author of this short but concentrated book is the philosophy lecturer who was, according to the Industrial Relations Court, unfairly dismissed from University College Swansea for his trade union activities in 1974 (see RP9). But the book operates largely within the framework of orthodox post-war 'moral philosophy' although its aims are critical. Weston criticises Hare and Foot for their shared assumption that moral reasoning is a form of purposive, means-to-ends reasoning. He shows that this assumption does not square with certain moral notions implicit in ordinary English. These notions concern the agent's 'self' or 'idea of himself', and they imply that a person may be 'unworthy' of certain things, irrespective of any purposes or ends. Weston makes effective use of the moral transfiguration of Conrad's Lord Jim (Jim's belief that after having abandoned ship he is no longer morally fit to be a seaman) to illustrate the idea of an "internal" relation to guilt: Jim's reason for refusing to go to sea again is not that this will achieve any desirable end, but simply that he feels unworthy to do so.

The existence of such patterns of reasoning is a significant fact about morality, and Weston's book is a good example of the increasing tendency of philosophical studies of 'ordinary language' to pay attention to detail. But what is it supposed to prove? In assessing its implications,

Weston appears to accept all the undialectical (i.e. unhistorical and uncritical) assumptions of orthodox ordinary language philosophy.

First, he makes no attempt to criticise the notions he discusses; but surely the non-purposive reasoning which leads to Jim's gratuitous self-punishment is objectionable and cruel: wouldn't it have been far better if he had been able to relax and forget all about his lapse? (No doubt Jim's decision tends to escape censure because it involves a sense of guilt and displays the virtue of self-sacrifice: characteristics which it is easy for a third party to applaud; but - though Weston does not mention this point - equivalent reasoning would justify self-righteousness and arrogance in someone who, unlike Jim, was not marked by guiltiness.)

Secondly, while Weston is obviously right in one sense when he says that the connections between morality and self prove that 'purposive' accounts of morality cannot be the whole truth, in another he is wrong. For the discrepancy between purposiveness and worthiness belongs to morality itself - morality, that is, seen not as an unchanging, internally harmonious object of a continuously developing science called moral philosophy, but as a contradictory and shifting configuration of principles of conduct and personal ideals. It is, I suppose, basically a discrepancy between a Christian view of life as the opportunity to prepare one's soul for assessment by the Great External Examiner, and various utilitarian, materialistic views based on the idea of maximising happiness. By a curious philosophical inversion typical of orthodox ordinary language philosophy, Weston presents this conflict as though it existed purely at the level of philosophical theory; and, to paraphrase Hegel's assessment of Kant, why blame the theory (moral philosophy) for the contradictions, rather than the object (morality)? JONATHAN REE

## Mind & Politics

Ellen M. Wood, Mind and Politics, California UP, 1972, £4.00

The fundamental premise of this work is that 'moral and even political implications can be drawn from epistemological theories and their underlying conceptions of mind; that sometimes, in fact, the ultimate meaning of a theory of mind may be seen as a moral or political one, and that sometimes epistemology may be seen to establish the groundwork for moral and political doctrines' (p4). Accordingly, Ellen Wood finds the roots of the British 'liberal tradition' in the British empiricist epistemology which treats the human subject as a mechanically responsive creature for whom both knowledge and actions are wholly reflexive.

Man, as subject, is essentially private, capable only of problematic relations with the object. Though this is the idiom of epistemology, it anticipates, for Ms Wood, a political theory on which the private interests of civil society are pursued independently of the public interests of the state. Representationalism in epistemology, especially Locke's, anticipates representationalism in political theory. In cognition, what is experienced directly is not the object but the sensation, idea, or representation; in politics, participation in social control is not direct but through a representative. Subject and citizen exist at a second remove from the public reality, despite the fact that their range of private experiences and interests is a function of their alienated relations with this public reality. Politically, the ironic symbol of this alienation is the vote 'which has increasingly become not an act of participation in the political realm but an act of withdrawal from it, an abdication of political responsibility to the representative so that the citizens can return to the pursuit of private interests' (p159).

Ms Wood concentrates on Locke, which is understandable, given his status as both epistemologist and political theorist. Hume and Berkeley are largely ignored, which is understandable only in the light of Ms Wood's inadequate concept of empiricism. She defines empiricism in terms of the passive experiences of the material object, which obviously excludes philosophers who question the very concepts of objectivity and materiality. But a more disturbing reason why she is not duly concerned with the extreme subjectivism and individualism of Hume and Berkeley is that, for her, neither of these is necessarily a bad thing. She contrasts metaphysical liberal individualism with dialectical, socialist individualism, and argues that the dialectical concept of social relations treats man as essentially a subject. It is difficult to see what can be gained from interpreting socialism as a form of subjectivism or individualism, given the historical connotations of these terms.

Ms Wood's basic weakness is that her radicalism is too vaguely defined. Her chief influence seems to have been the early Marx, from which she has come away thinking that socialism is purely a theory of dialectical relations between individuals, subjects, and objects. It should be suggested to radical philosophers of such a vague persuasion that there can be no properly radical philosophy without the concepts of class, material product and productive activity. Even in the critique of epistemology, the concepts of sociality and dialectical interaction do not take one far enough.

The importance of Ellen Wood's book, however, lies not in the maturity of her Marxism but in the type of programme which she undertakes.

To the radical philosopher engaged in the re-evaluation of the history of philosophy, she demonstrates how the classical dichotomies of subject/ob-

ject, self/other, man/society, and individual/political may still provide a useful framework within which to state the radical position. Tom Duddy

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'Nevertheless (Austin) did succeed in haunting most of the philosophers in England, and to his colleagues it seemed that his terrifying intelligence was never at rest. Many of them used to wake up in the night with a vision of the stringy wiry Austin standing over their pillow like a bird of prey. Their daylight hours were no better. They would write some philosophical sentences and then read them over as Austin might in an expressionless frigid voice and their blood would run cold. Some of them were so intimidated by the mere fact of his existence that they weren't able to publish a single article during his lifetime.'

Warnock (on Austin)

#### BREEDING GROUND FOR PHILOSOPHERS

'(Austin's) third child of fourteen is very clever and about to go up to my school, Winchester. He talks and looks very much like Austin and we have great hopes for him.'

Warnock

Thus spake Zarathustra

'... Amongst the Englishmen who are staying with me here there is also the very agreeable Professor of Philosophy at University College London, Robertson, editor of the best English philosophical journal, Mind, a quarterly review... All the great men of England are amongst its contributors: Darwin (whose splendid essay 'Biographical Sketch of an Infant' is in No III), Spencer, Tylor etc. You know that we here in Germany have nothing comparable in quality to the English with this journal, or the French with Th. Ribot's Revue Philosophique... I thought again, while he spoke of Darwin, Bagehot etc., how much I would like you to penetrate into this, the only good philosophical milieu that now exists. Will you not contribute something to this journal?...'  
- Nietzsche in a letter to Paul Rée, August 1877

The title of Richard Norman's article in EP14 should have been "Dialectic" and not "On Dialectic" as printed. The title of Sean Sayers' article should have been "On the Marxist Dialectic" and not "The Marxist Dialectic" as printed.

Sean Sayers writes: 'I attach some importance to this, since my paper concerns not the Marxist dialectic in general, but only a specific aspect of it: viz. what Mao calls "the universality of contradiction".'

# News

## ST ANDREWS

In St Andrews, there is virtually no philosophy going on that could be called Radical. The reasons for this seem to me to be essentially political ones.

In the first place, St Andrews is a very conservative university: at a recent referendum an overwhelming majority voted to leave the NUS. The S.R.C. (!) is a Tory stronghold: the I.S. Society consists of less than a dozen people. The general result is rampant apathy.

Secondly, St Andrews is strictly a university town and there is no pressure to make courses relevant to anything.

Thirdly, several other areas of possible radical theory - politics, sociology, anthropology are without foundation because there are no departments covering these disciplines.

Finally, the university and town are dead outside of term time because all students and most lecturers leave - consequently there is no on-going feeling.

Any radical theorist, then, has immediate feelings of isolation arriving here and these feelings are exacerbated because of the distances involved in travelling to conferences, meetings etc which are usually held in South England. Within the university, the organisation of radical activity inevitably falls to the lot of a very small group. We did suggest at the beginning of last year that the philosophy postgraduate students run a radical seminar group, but too many seemed to be intimidated by the old-guard lecturers to risk such a course. The only radical philosophy that has gone on over the past

year was 2 general seminars I gave on Foucault - although I've come to the conclusion that Foucault could hardly be called politically radical.

PETER SMITH

## CAMBRIDGE

We've been trying to get a Cambridge FP group off the ground for over a year. We conceived of it as a general 'countercourse' sort of thing - providing an alternative series of seminars to Cambridge Analytic philosophy for anyone interested, though possibly with some radicalising effect. Within the philosophy faculty such a project would have been disastrous chiefly because of the apathetic conservatism of most students - who'd be interested in a counter course providing scope for investigation of other philosophical traditions but not in anything explicitly 'radical'...

A more successful venture was a small reading group which we set up. At first we told all the radically minded philosophy students (about 8!) but students from other courses like English and social sciences kept turning up. Initially some of us saw it as offering critical rather than just alternative philosophical discussion. For instance two main tasks could have been:

(1) to understand exactly how analytical philosophy in its content can genuinely be seen as part of bourgeois ideology - the conceptions of the subject implicit in Empiricism, its approach to explanation in the non-natural sciences etc. How its various approaches to meaning are ideological, both by the role invoked for the individual in discourse, and demands for meaning invariance and

## Journals received

Science for the People, VIII, 1 (January 1976)  
Camework, 1 (February 1976), 2 (April-May 1976), 3  
Social Work and the Welfare State, a radical pamphlet published by SCANUS, 3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H 0DU  
Socialist Revolution, No. 27  
Radical Science Journal, No. 4  
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Sozialistische Politik 36, August 1976 (Wissenschaft als allgemeine Arbeit)

# HISTORY WORKSHOP

a journal of socialist historians

## Issue 2 - Autumn 1976

Charles van Onselen: Randlords and Rotgut, 1886-1903: the role of alcohol in the development of European imperialism and Southern African capitalism  
Tim Mason: Women in Nazi Germany (conclusion)  
Anne Summers: Militarism in Britain before the Great War  
Gudie Lawaetz: Mai 1968 on film  
Hywel Francis: The South Wales Miners' Library  
Edward Allen Rymer: The Martyrdom of the Mine: autobiography of a 19th century pit agitator (conclusion)

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