

REVIEWS

Post-Industrial Socialism

Rudolf Bahro, Socialism and Survival (trans. David Fernbach), Heretic Books, £3.50 pb
André Gorz, Farewell to the Working Class (trans. Michael Sonenscher), Pluto Press, £3.95 pb

The 'debate on the concept of the proletariat' is, suggests Rudolf Bahro, 'outdated'; it 'tends right from the start to be scholastic'. Farewell to the Working Class opens with a contribution to that debate: André Gorz, in a lengthy settling of accounts with his former political and philosophical consciousness, uncovers what he regards as the Hegelian roots of Marx's 'theological' view of the proletariat as a 'transcendent subject', 'a subject transcending its members'.

This argument, 'scholastic' or not, invites philosophical scrutiny, and Gorz's exegesis of Marx is undoubtedly open to challenge. It's surely not of great importance, however, to know whether, and how far, Marx's concept of the proletariat may have been wishful and idealistic 'from the beginning' (which is what Gorz aims to show). What matters politically is to acknowledge its limitations as a guide to action in the late twentieth century: a matter, not of textual criticism, but of attending to historical evidence. Here, I am in full agreement with Gorz and Bahro when they insist that it has become futile, and worse than futile, to expect revolution to follow in the wake of some future self-realisation of the proletariat as the universal class. Nor is this a matter simply of a (still) insufficiently developed subjective class consciousness, for in the world context, as Bahro emphasises, it is at best controversial to assert that the objective self-interests of European working classes correspond with the universal human interest, (at least in the short or medium term: of course, in the end we live or die together).

It's necessary - especially for intellectuals, who are often quite wealthy and whose work is intrinsically rewarding - to recognise the essential defensive role of workers' organisations (and some of Gorz's silences trouble me, here). But it's equally necessary to recognise that these organisations, in the 'developed' world, are integrated into the structure and reproductive functioning of capitalism. More often than not, the 'marxist science' which refuses this evidence leads solely into a supercilious attitude to non-proletarian movements: feminism, the disarmament campaign, green politics. Militant offers the purest illustration; and I recall, too, the entirely predictable headline on the issue of Socialist Worker on sale at the recent Burghfield/-Greenham/Aldermaston CND action: ONLY WORKERS' POWER CAN STOP THE BOMB. We were to be educated in the harsh realities of a Marxism whose first lesson would instruct us in our own impotence.

Of course, and I don't write this ironically, we may indeed be impotent. The economic power of a united proletariat may constitute the sole force capable of pushing through revolutionary, or any major, change. Unfortunately, capa-

city does not entail desire. And it's not just that European proletariats clearly do not want revolutionary change. The telling question is whether it is not becoming absurd to speak as if 'it', 'the proletariat', can be said to 'want' anything, to have any collective political project as a class.

Perhaps it is necessary to look elsewhere. Perhaps socialists have to ask, in an empirical spirit and with every awareness that our forces may be too weak, what social basis there is for our political programme.

Gorz's answer to the question is cast in a more technical, or (pseudo-) philosophical, vocabulary than Bahro's. He writes of 'the non-class of non-workers', the 'neo-proletariat'. This is variously defined as 'the stratum that experiences its work as an externally imposed obligation' (this definition, however, would surely encompass all 'traditional' proletariat too); as 'those who are resistant to the sacralisation of work'; as 'those who do "any old thing" which "anyone" could do'.

There are some insights, as one would expect from Gorz, into the effects of changing labour processes on the composition and political beliefs of the working class. But Gorz's 'non-class' seems an unhelpful and unreal concept. What, one asks - except, paradoxically, an inveterately Marxist habit of mind - obliges Gorz to identify socialist consciousness with any particular class? If, as he claims, 'the realm of freedom can never arise out of material processes; it can only be established by a constitutive act which ... asserts itself as an absolute end within each individual', then by what logic does it follow that 'only' those who have a particular relation to 'material processes' - the 'non-class' - are 'capable of such an act'?

We are told that this 'non-class' alone embodies what lies beyond productivism: the rejection of the accumulation ethic and the dissolution of all classes'. So: no sooner has the proletariat been stripped of its Hegelian universality as historical subject, then it is assigned the rather less enviable role of 'embodying' the 'productivism' of a particular epoch. Here's a fine inversion: yesterday, the proletariat alone could create the revolution, but today it finds itself debarred, and just because of its class nature, from having anything to do with it.

Bahro - whose book, repetitive though it sometimes is (it's a compilation of speeches, articles, interviews), I find more consistently thoughtful and stimulating than Gorz's more formal essay - seeks to posit no such identities between social class (or non-class) and ideological or psychological disposition. Objective factors, he argues, are promoting the formation of a new political alliance, based on a recognition of the ecological crisis (in all its forms, including the arms race) and on a growing dissatisfaction with the modes of consumption which industrialism enforces. In this alliance (Bahro likens it to the 'historic compromise' advocated by Italian Euro-Communists), proletarians will play a part on the basis, not of their proletarian condition, but of their humanity, their reason, their political education and

convictions; on the same basis, then, as anyone else.

Bahro's political energies have lately been devoted, beyond the urgent campaign for European nuclear disarmament, to the building of such an alliance in West Germany, where the Green Party is of course its focal point. It is at this date an open question how far similar eco-socialist movements may be built, based perhaps on the existing disarmament movements, in some other countries of Western Europe: Holland, Scandinavia, Britain. In any case, and this is a point left all but unexamined, the political and institutional forms of such movements, their relations to the established practices of parliamentary government, require much thought.

Certainly there seems something peculiar, to the left-wing imagination, in the reliance on 'bourgeois democracy', and the frank acceptance of political pluralism, which both these books manifest. Who, on the other hand, wants to invoke notions of 'the workers seizing power', or to speak of 'armed struggle' followed by 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'? It's hardly possible to use without irony that kind of Leninist terminology. But between its mythological emptiness, and the equally vacuous hope in the sufficiency of existing political institutions, there is a large unfilled space. Does the left now have a vocabulary in which to discuss the forms through which socialist power (if 'power' is the term we want) might be gained, and exercised, in a modern state?

If neither Gorz nor Bahro gives proper consideration, here, to the forms of socialism, each has useful remarks on its content. Bahro reminds us again of the objective limits set by ecological crisis - a crisis equally of resources and of the destructive effects of industrialism - to traditional socialist programmes based upon continued, or even accelerated, economic growth. He also places at the centre of debate the gross gap between the wealth of metropolitan populations (including the 'developed' proletariat) and the poverty of the rest of the world.

Gorz, less sensitive to global issues, and concerned less with constraints than with opportunities, sketches in an avowedly utopian spirit some positive features of a new (French) socialism. His central schema involves a distinction

between 'autonomous' and 'heteronomous' work. 'Heteronomous' work is, if you like, 'alienated', but knows itself to be so; it accepts and uses capitalist economies of scale and productive technologies in order to provide, at minimal labour-cost, a range of basic and socially indispensable goods and services ('indispensable' being a term, as Gorz recognises, whose definition requires a political decision about what we need). There is no pretence that 'heteronomous' labour can be entirely agreeable, or that it can be controlled by individual workplaces or communities. But alongside this sphere - which Gorz would expect to see reduced to a politically agreed minimum, and in which everybody would 'take a turn' - a flourishing is envisaged of 'autonomous' work, work not subject to the market dictate of 'efficiency', and situated in the cultural as well as the economic sphere. There should be 'an inversion of the scale of priorities, involving a subordination of socialised work governed by the economy to activities constituting the sphere of individual autonomy' - a process already under way, and which already prefigures 'the transition to post-industrial society'.

This review, like these books, is deliberately suggestive, tentative, provocative. I've not always pursued my own agreements and disagreements with the author's positions, and there are disquieting passages in both books which I haven't touched upon. Nonetheless, the debate in which Gorz and Bahro are engaged is surely of vital importance. Almost everywhere in Europe, socialism as represented (inadequately, of course) by the social democratic parties is ideologically and politically on the defensive. When in 'power', such parties show no intention of fundamentally altering European societies. But the 'true socialism' of intransigent Marxist-Leninist-Trotskyist orthodoxy is as incapable of breaking the ideological hegemony of consumer capitalism as it is irrelevant to many of today's most urgent crises. We have indeed, as Bahro writes, to 're-examine our entire theoretical inheritance'.

Martin H. Ryle

Feeling out of it

R.F. Geyer and D. Schweitzer (eds.), *Alienation*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, £12.50 hc

The discussion about alienation has received new impetus from Braverman's documentation of the changing nature of the labour process and the possibilities this contains for political and affective incorporation of new social layers within the working class. Braverman's work on the deskilling of mental and manual labour with the concomitant loss of control over the labour process provides a welcome infilling of the category of 'capitalist mode of production'.

Alienation evidences that this has kindled an interest in the phenomenon of that name in some followers of Althusser. This leads to some fascinating theoretical contortions when an attempt is made to rehabilitate alienation within the Althusserian schema without at the same time undermining the latter's refutation of the 'problematic of the subject'. Althusserians Horton and Moreno opt for an instrumentalist approach to the problem by arguing that

'alienation' works well enough on the political and ideological levels of analysis even if it cannot be accommodated by theory; it lacks the necessary scientificity, belonging to a 'bourgeois' or 'petty-bourgeois' paradigm. However, this is not argued for and one is left feeling that the real reason for its supposed theoretical inadequacy is its incompatibility with the work of their *maitre de pensée*.

Whilst Horton and Moreno do pinpoint the crucial role of the (alienating) labour process in mediating social reality to the subject in capitalist production in particular, they also recognise sites of alienation beyond those associated with the creation of surplus value: for instance, the functioning of the state, racial and sexual exploitation, also embody forms of alienation. This wider usage of the term seems to denote a recognition of shifts of meaning it undergoes in Marx's writings - for example from 'economic' exploitation through commodity production effecting interpersonal and institutional estrangement and domination, to alienation as an attribute of practice within capitalist

society in general. This latter meaning is located by Archibald et al in a paper linking alienation to differential class experience: the capitalist and the self-employed person also experience alienation. Commodity production seems to take on a life of its own, dictating the behaviour of the owner of the labour process. A further meaning is found by the writers in *Capital* Vol.3 where Marx observes that there is some inevitability about alienation which is due to the division of labour *per se*; for instance, the problems of communication and coordination which arise from any separation of tasks. The writers usefully suggest that alienation above and beyond this level might be referred to as 'surplus alienation'. They also aptly point out that many critiques of Marx's theory of alienation fail because they address themselves to a different set of concepts. Bourgeois critics have taken Marx's conception to be basically *psychological*. They have attempted to relate alienation and the non-possession of property as extraneous variables, whereas in fact it is the alienation of 'property' from its producers in the *act* of production which Marx sees as fundamental to capitalism.

In a paper linking alienation and social integration, Torrance emphasises Marx's (logical?) distinction between alienation as estrangement with its Hegelian connotations, and alienation as 'loss' with its filiation to 'exploitation', 'surplus value', 'labour process' etc. He goes on to argue that 'estrangement' is the best instrument with which to link social structure and subjectivity. In this Torrance commits the error, pinpointed by Horton and Moreno, of taking alienation (*qua* estrangement in this case) as only externally related to labour power; labour is seen only to be estranged from its exploiters and not *lost* to itself. For Marx, the product's otherness stems from its loss to the producer and the latter's loss of control over its production. So if 'loss' is removed from the concept's relevant content, alienation is reduced to a subjectivity without a related objectivity, i.e. 'mere subjectivity'. Hence Torrance attempts to link an unmediated subjectivity directly with 'external' structural factors such as property ownership rather than via a mediating praxis (labour).

Although the writer makes 'loss' disappear as a category of alienated labour, it sneaks back at the level of distribution as 'property ownership/non-ownership', a criterion in the measurement of estrangement. Thus alienation accomplishes its transformation from a concept relating psychological states via 'labour' and '*class*' to a determinate form of *production*, to one relating *individuals'* psychology to property *distribution*. Methodologically, this is

but a stone's throw from the finding of empiricist sociology that class is not determined by position in the productive process so much as by consumption patterns ('purchasing power' figures as an important determinant of social position for non-Weberians such as Rex).

Torrance goes on to indicate the importance of a sense of estrangement for the operability of social control mechanisms (e.g. 'divide and rule' tactics). In this sense alienation is indeed underplayed in modern Marxism. One has to turn to the concepts of Sartre's *Critique* to find an articulation of this aspect - through *alterity* and *seriality* (1). (There is no mention of Sartre either here or elsewhere in this collection.)

Although alienation is explicated from its negative side (as loss and estrangement) as Torrance implies, Ludz attempts to point to its positivity *viz.* for him the way it appears in the Gnostic tradition. In this sense, alienation is 'otherness' *qua* the process of enlightenment/revelation which follows from the subject's confrontation with contingency. Ludz argues that such confrontation provides a therapy against over-discursive theorising (theoreticism). However, its supposed remedial effect seems to be undermined by a purely static (*contemplative*) characterisation. (Compare with Sartre where contingency must be confronted *historically* and overcome by correct *practice* if it is to be constituted (totalised) as an object of practice and hence cognitively assimilated.)

Sartrean alterity/seriality again seems relevant for a paper by Thibault which highlights the alienation (estrangement) of sociologists from the socially subordinate groups they study. Sociologists, he argues, have a responsibility due to their special knowledge of social mechanisms to assist in projects of dis-alienation (*qua* self-emancipation) and they can only overcome their own alienation (serial relationship with those they study?) by participating in collective projects of dis-alienation (producing the group-in-fusion?). There is a need, it is argued, for self-reflexivity on the part of social theorists re their situatedness within the social totality, both as theorists and activities, (in the latter case lest they enter into a manipulative relationship with those they seek to 'direct').

Alienation provides a good read for those interested in the development of the term's usages, and the papers mentioned reflect the strengths and weaknesses of the collection, but anyone hoping to find a debate based on recognisably common terrain will be disappointed.

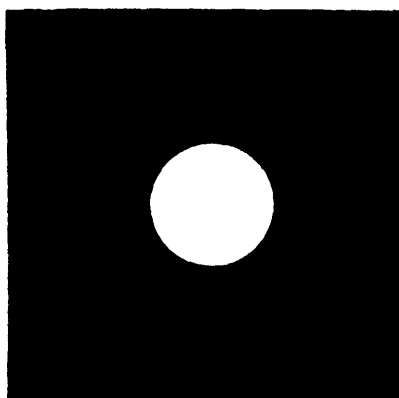
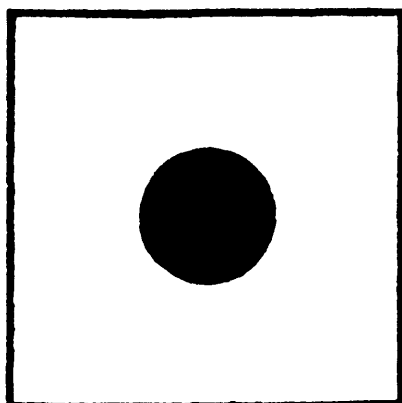
Howard Feather

Footnote

- 1 This sense of estrangement can be exemplified by the case of racialism, where 'the black', 'the Jew' etc. is represented as otherness or *alterity*. The Other has a kind of unifying effect upon those who perceive ethnic minorities in this way; the relationship between those 'brought together' in this way is one of *seriality*. Such agents have nothing intrinsically in common (given by this relationship) and the unity of the series consequently lies outside it. The potential for 'divide and rule'

within the series is signified by a double movement: the creation of collectivities with an absence of reciprocity is conditioned by the prevention of reciprocity with those outside the series, *viz.* the Other.

The opposite of the serial relationship is the *group-in-fusion*, produced in the case of the proletariat, for example, by the re-interiorization of a lost reciprocity which dissolves its seriality. However, the fused group is an ideal type, and Sartre notes that even group members will display seriality in aspects of their behaviour and attitudes.



Taking in the Surroundings

Necdet Teymur, *Environmental Discourse*, Question Press, P O Box 162, London N2 9LZ, £11.95 hc, £4.95 pb

Everybody loves the environment. We are all - well most of us - in favour of trees, greenery, whales and clean air. We would like to inhabit a more pleasant rather than a less pleasant environment. That much is clear. And a series of professions and interest groups exists to confirm and reinforce our general sympathies. But if we were asked to define just what we meant by the environment that might be a bit more difficult. Where does it begin and end? What would be excluded?

This book approaches the environmental question from an unusual and stimulating direction. No attempt is made to define the environment and discuss the scope for and constraints on human intervention into it. Teymur argues that such attempts, however well meaning, have in the past become trapped in an 'environmental discourse' whose assumptions actually make it more difficult to solve most of the practical problems it takes as its own. A first step in breaking the hold of this discourse is to explore its nature and outline its implications. Teymur suggests that its very claims to universality - which make it so superficially appealing - are a source of basic weakness since they reduce complex sets of relations to a simple dichotomy. This man/environment dichotomy, he says, is at the heart of most writing on planning, architectural and 'environmental' issues.

Teymur succeeds admirably in his sharp critique of approaches which operate as if the world could be neatly divided into compartments labelled man and the environment in which 'he' operates. Such a division implies that the 'environment' is a thing which can be effectively planned or defended or which technically proficient or inspired designers can improve. Even the most radical of 'green' politicians are likely to be hampered by a perspective which fails to see how those objects generally jumbled together arbitrarily under the heading 'environment' are actual products of social processes. As Teymur puts it: 'What the designers design and the planners plan is not "environment" but complex sets of objects and relations whose physical existence as well as theoretical conception are socially determined' (p.191).

Yet, finally the book delivers less than it seems to promise. Teymur makes rather grand claims to develop a method of discourse analysis appropriate to the topic. He repeatedly emphasises the need for theoretical clarity, justifying the opacity of his prose and what appears to be frequent repetition on the basis that he is breaking new theoretical ground. But at times the statement of a critical theorist's (or researcher's) ABC is presented with apparently portentous significance: 'Even most commonly recognised statements and terms,' we are told, 'may be highly questionable' (p.11).

Teymur does not carry his theoretical baggage lightly, yet seems more committed to stating it than to using it effectively. Thus, despite his frequent statements that environmental discourse is a social practice, it is generally discussed without reference to society or social practice. Teymur does not, for example, explore the significance of the use of the same word in advertisements for a VW Golf,

an architect's discussion of public housing and even the insistence of the Swedish delegation at one international conference on the environment that the dropping of bombs on Vietnam by the US Air Force was an appropriate topic for discussion. His examples simply seem intended to show the astonishing range of issues and relationships which are considered environmental. But that does not take us very far. Yes, 'environment' is clearly a prime candidate for inclusion in Marx's list of 'chaotic conceptions', but if there is to be a serious debate about some more or less coherent discourse, we need rather more convincing evidence for its existence. Repeated assertion is not enough.

Some familiar problems of 'theory' surface again in this book. It is as if by claiming a theoretical project, a discussion of social practices is unnecessary. Unfortunately in this case the two have to be woven tightly together, since only an understanding of the latter makes the former a possibility. In the book, one aspect of this comes out particularly clearly: despite criticisms of environmental discourse for being ahistorical, the discussion is curiously lacking in history. We get no idea of where 'environmentalism' came from, nor by which social practices it may be defined, so there is a real danger of retreat into a rather timeless linguistic analysis and a generalised - if unexceptionable - critique of dualistic approaches.

Both the weakness of the analysis and its potential strength come out in some passing references which need to be developed if we are to gain a proper understanding of the inadequacies of 'environmental discourse'. These references take the form of bald statements requiring further explication and explanation. It is suggested, for example, that 'environmental discourse' reflects the ideology of liberal capitalism in its emphasis on the rational (free) individual making choices about 'his' environment (p.163). But there is little discussion of why (or how) this might be the case, nor of the reasons for the growth of such an ideology in the post-war period. Links are frequently (and sometimes helpfully) made to past traditions of thought, but there is insufficient discussion to indicate why this particular version - or 'discourse' - is so important today.

Similarly, there is little reference (a footnote on p.80) to, or interrogation of, the strange dominance of Man (with a capital M) as the protagonist of the environmental discourse. One assumes that within the discourse women are held to be part of the 'environment' or are subsumed into the generality of manhood, while in practice male architects and planners define just what that general abstract manhood amounts to and is interested in. Some hints in the text suggest that even where advertisers note greater 'environmental' awareness among women, it is a male profession which defines what that is, in a demand for pleasant smells, pastel colours and small cars.

Had there been a greater focus on the environmental discourse as a social practice, explorations of the mechanisms at work here would have been possible or, allowing the book its theoretical pretensions, the need for them would have been made explicit. As it stands, one is left instead with a set of worrying absences and questions about the book's theoretical substance.

Allan Cochrane

Understanding Benjamin

Richard Wolin, Walter Benjamin - An Aesthetic of Redemption, Columbia University Press, £16.75 hc
Julian Roberts, Walter Benjamin, Macmillan Press, £5.95 pb

Anyone attempting a critical and coherent study of Walter Benjamin is immediately faced with difficulties. Firstly, the work, being fragmentary and essayistic in character and sententious in style, does not easily lend itself to a reductive interpretation. Secondly, there is the problem of doing justice to the plurality of theoretical standpoints Benjamin upheld during his lifetime. The work is usually divided into an early 'theological' phase and a mature 'materialist' phase. Benjamin was one of those who are born posthumously, and since interest in his work began in the late 1950s controversy has raged over which of the two sides of this self-professed Janus face represents the authentic Benjamin.

These two books, the first full-length studies of Benjamin to be written in English, compound rather than clarify the problem of evaluating Benjamin's work. Wolin is sensitive to the myriad problems which Benjamin's work presents, and sets out to modify the commonplace, un-dialectical opposition between the two Benjamins. In an effort to treat the work systematically he seeks a leitmotiv which will serve to unite the various strands of Benjamin's thought into a coherent whole.

Taking his cue from Habermas, he finds this leitmotiv in 'a relentless desire for redemption which represents the inner drive behind the entirety of Benjamin's theoretical oeuvre' (p.31). But this is only achieved at the cost of significantly distorting Benjamin's work by constantly undermining the sincerity of his commitment - political and intellectual - to Marxism. We are told, for example, 'in many ways, he always considered his flirtation with Marxist principles over the last fifteen years of his life as a kind of experiment' (p.108). While the validity of Benjamin's 'dialectical materialism' is perpetually held in doubt, his theological pretensions are never critically examined. If Marxism is to feel compelled to enlist the services of theology to be victorious, then Wolin needs to produce a more convincing argument, instead of unsubstantiated judgements on 'the degenerate nature of orthodox Marxism in the present historical epoch' (p.249). Implicit in his argument is that, like Benjamin, we should all be thinking on the forty nine levels of the Torah!

The book does offer a comprehensive and well-organised account of Benjamin's life and thought. Yet despite the informative chapters on the early epistemological and aesthetic concerns (the years 1916 to 1925) and the munificence of the systematic presentation, some severe criticisms can be made of his portrait of Benjamin. In Chapter 7, entitled 'Benjamin's Materialist Theory of Experience', and the concluding chapter, an attempt is made to assimilate Benjamin to traditions of cultural pessimism, enlisting him in the services of an aesthetic of despair. This is done in two ways.

Firstly, he describes Benjamin's theory of culture in terms of a Marx-Weber synthesis, claiming that for the later Benjamin the paramount concern became the problem of the 'rationalisation' of contemporary life (p.217).

Rather, the problem for the later Benjamin was how to bring about an effective political mobilisation of intellectuals against Fascism and challenge capitalism's cultural hegemony. Instead of recognising the vitality and relevance of this challenge for present concerns, Wolin prefers to incarcerate Benjamin in the Weberian iron cage. Secondly, in order to support his claim that the concern for redemption represents the inner drive of Benjamin's work, he imposes - without acknowledgement - Marcuse's aesthetics onto Benjamin. Art, according to Marcuse's thesis in The Aesthetic Dimension, contains a promesse de bonheur whose redemption and preservation for future generations is the task of the critic.

Thus, argues Wolin, the basis of a materialist cultural criticism for Benjamin becomes the redemption of the hidden utopian elements contained within lost traditions and great works of art, not the politicisation of aesthetics and the 'culture industry' as he had argued in his so-called Brechtian essays (pp.262-4). This seems to me a highly reactionary programme for a so-called Marxist aesthetics, reinforcing the elitist practices of bourgeois cultural criticism. It is also the very opposite of how Benjamin saw his task. His task was to disrupt, not increase, the pile of cultural treasures heaped on humanity's back. For Benjamin the work of art is only the beginning of a complex play of forces and relations, not a thing or end in itself: 'the rigid, isolated object (work, novel, etc.) is of no use whatsoever but must be inserted into the context of living social relations' (Understanding Brecht, p.87).

Benjamin's relevance for historical materialism, we are told, lies 'in the reverential attitude he assumes toward tradition, a position which to be sure stands in sharp contrast to most Marxist accounts' (p.264). By the time Wolin has finished his evaluation, Benjamin is barely distinguishable from conservative cultural critics like George Steiner. To go beyond what he sees as the decrepit nature of current Marxism, Wolin endorses the call made by the American social theorist Paul Piccone for a return to 'a broad existentialist critique of the Enlightenment and of bourgeois civilisation' (p.16). This absurd regression receives further endorsement when Wolin urges contemporary social theory to resurrect the bourgeois autonomous individual of the nineteenth century (p.160). But, as defined by Wolin, all a materialist cultural criticism can offer this individual are empty promises of happiness. In the hands of Wolin Critical Theory reaches hitherto unknown levels of despair and impotence.

Julian Roberts, like Wolin, offers a study of Benjamin that is both an exercise in intellectual history and a critical evaluation. Roberts is of the conviction that we can only fully understand Benjamin's contemporary relevance by firmly situating him in his proper historical and intellectual context, rather than throwing him in the current philosophical ring, battling it out with Derrida and deconstruction in a raging sea of floating signifiers (the mistake of Terry Eagleton's lucubrations on Benjamin). But this approach also makes for the major weakness of the book, that is, in its organisation. A biographical understanding of Benjamin is necessary, but almost half the book (nigh on 100 pages) is devoted to establishing the intellectual background of his

thought, without, one feels, any real connections being made. We have sections apportioned to Dilthey and Geisteswissenschaften, Heidegger and new ontology, etc. but where Benjamin fits into all this is not exactly clear. This makes for unrewarding reading. The book also borders on the superficial at times - for example, the inclusion of Hegel on Stoicism in a discussion of Benjamin's Trauerspiel book. It is a book that frequently appears as a piece of intellectual tourism which takes the reader nowhere.

Despite these organisational problems Roberts does have some original points to offer on Benjamin's work. While Wolin pays too much lip-service to the views of others (especially those of Adorno and Habermas), Roberts assumes an irreverential attitude towards the problem of Benjamin's legacy. The centrepiece of the book is a section entitled 'From Ethics to politics' (p.103), where he attempts to revise the idea of a 'radical break' between the early and later Benjamin. His evaluation takes the exact opposite course to Wolin's. Through a fastidious political reading of the abstruse arguments of the 1925 pre-Marxist Trauerspiel book, Roberts aims to show that there is a remarkable continuity in purpose between Benjamin's early theological standpoint and his overtly communist standpoint of the 1930s.

In contrast to Wolin, who holds that the authentic Benjamin is to be found in his last reflections, the famous Theses on the Philosophy of History, where, it is asserted, the theological Benjamin once again gains the upper hand, Roberts provocatively suggests that the Theses are 'no more than a bizarre recapitulation of the views of

Heidegger and Klages skimpily dressed in the language of revolution' (p.6).

The book suffers from a real lack of any sustained discussion of Benjamin's texts and the problems they raise. Although Roberts makes the admirable point that Benjamin's ideas are not just another model for the analysis of texts but 'an immensely sophisticated set of propositions about the function and impact of ideological labour', the book insufficiently applies itself to probing Benjamin's unique intellectual output in any great depth. Too much emphasis on Benjamin as 'a strategist in the literary struggle' results in a portrait of Benjamin as a jack of all trades, and the challenge of the actual content of the work is not articulated. For while Roberts correctly stresses the pedagogic aspects of Benjamin's work, the precise nature of his contribution to Marxist theory is not sufficiently examined. A greater discussion of the work would have enabled Roberts to define more clearly and in much greater depth the aims and aporias of a materialist cultural theory and practice. Still, Roberts' book does more than any presentation so far to challenge the evisceration of Benjamin's thought by an academic oligarchy, and to dismantle the misleading image of him as a kind of wayward 'man of letters'.

Both books offer a useful introduction to Benjamin's work and its complex nature, but with their different interpretations and emphases they testify to the fact that Walter Benjamin is a difficult phenomenon to evaluate.

Keith Pearson

Changing the Subject

Richard Rorty, Consequences of Pragmatism, Harvester, 1983

In Radical Philosophy 32, there was an interview with Richard Rorty, followed by a critique of his Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature by Joe McCarney. This is certainly an acknowledgement of the visibility of Rorty on the contemporary philosophical scene. Yet my feeling was that some RP readers may not have got a sense of the real worth of Rorty's contribution. The interview was fairly snappy and inconsequential, for one thing. And whilst I would not disagree with some of the things Joe McCarney says about the 'incoherences' in Rorty's positions, the heavyweight tactic of going straight to the fatal weaknesses had the effect of playing down his considerable strengths.

Some of my reasons for liking Rorty's work are in a way autobiographical. He powerfully expresses many of the raw grievances we put before mainstream philosophy as disgruntled students in the formative year of the radical philosophy movement. These were that academic philosophy was narrow, arrogant, empiricist, ahistorical, detached from real-life issues, and all that. Moreover, philosophers seemed unable or unwilling to sketch out the broad connections between the different 'technical' branches of the subject, between past and present debates, and between philosophers and those dealing in ideas who happened to belong to other university departments. Rorty, by contrast, has an enviably lucid and stylish manner of cutting out the arc of significant debate. And he speaks up for those thinkers whose moral and political focus has earned them dismissal as not being 'real' philosophers at all in the eyes of the

professionals. Finally, being myself someone who has experienced the drift from 'specialist' philosophy to the more dubiously amorphous 'cultural studies', it is good to be able to enlist the support of a writer who theoretically endorses that broadening out, yet who cannot be put down as lacking analytical precision or philosophical scholarship. The following definition of the philosopher's role usefully encapsulates this stimulating part of Rorty's project:

Philosophers could be seen as people who work with the history of philosophy and the contemporary effects of those ideas called 'philosophic' upon the rest of the culture. (p.87)

Consequences of Pragmatism is a collection of essays written between 1972 and 1980, and it covers the same ground as the more systematic Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature. In fact, I prefer it to the latter, since the collection format serves to emphasise the strengths of Rorty's 'negative' criticisms rather than the more questionable 'positive' side of his pragmatist standpoint. His main target is the obsessive and (in his view) unsupportable idea that Philosophy (capital 'p'), and the science it idolises, can reflect, represent, or capture the essence of the world 'as it really is'. And he tracks down this 'illusion' of epistemology and ontology into philosophical areas which are not in other respects very similar: the Greeks, British empiricists, Kant, Marxism, ordinary language philosophy, Husserl, semantics, and so on. The absurd hope of discovering 'nature's own language', Rorty argues, has led philosophers to ignore the fact that the uptake of beliefs and theories occur because of fundamentally non-epistemological considerations, such as where you study, what you read, who you talk to, what the pressing cultural problems are, etc. To

condemn or diminish all these 'schools' because of their common 'illusory' objectivism seems on the face of it a rather crude point to stand on. But Rorty's arguments are crude in the sense of being fundamental rather than being unsophisticated. His writings exemplify the fact that, however necessary the attention to fine detail in philosophy and outside it, large scale assumptions, intentions, and goals are seldom obliterated. It is this, after all, which makes philosophy the magnet for the naive and concerned as well as the smart and cynical.

As a 'realist' myself, I think much of Rorty's critique can be accepted as reminding us of the inescapable 'transitive' dimension of metaphysical commitment. I would certainly be prepared to concede to Rortyish critics that attempts to show the superiority of realism over pragmatism, rationalism over 'discourse theory', inevitably involve elements of cultural prejudice, logical circularity, and base-line intuition. And the perennial itch to resolve the 'problem' of justification, or to refute the sceptic, does indeed border on the neurotic (Rorty has some interesting speculative passages on the relation of philosophy to sexuality too).

These concessions do not, it seems to me, make Rorty's conception of philosophy wholly acceptable, or his critique of realism definitive. He sees philosophy becoming more culturally useful and intellectually therapeutic by dropping questions of truth and rationality altogether. This is not to advocate instead irrationalism or subjectivism; it is simply 'to change the subject' (p.xiv). But what would the subject be in post-philosophic culture? Rorty is not only against truth-seekers and world-representers, he seems suspicious of problem-solvers and argument-makers (at least he praises Heidegger and Derrida for their refusal to solve and argue). This picture makes the image of philosophy quoted earlier on look redundant, since assumptions about truth and reason are spread throughout the history of phil-

osophy and in the wider culture. They are part of the coinage of those realms. For philosophers to have any effect, they must at least be prepared to claim something about life! In this context, there is something parasitic and decadent about Rorty's further characterisation of the philosopher's function as 'an all-purpose' intellectual who advertises 'commentaries about commentaries' on 'how things hang together with everything else' (p.xxxiv, 93).

Moreover, his arguments about the illusions of objectivism are not aimed strictly to refute realism. He freely admits that the pragmatic or deconstructivist option can only thrive in the very atmosphere of its opponent. He rejects the posturing of Foucault's and Derrida's epigoni, who seem to assume that textuality or disconnection are the newly privileged metaphysical modes. And it is clear that Rorty finds no contradiction in combining historicism about the criticism of knowledge with naturalism in the explanation of knowledge-acquisition (e.g. p.82). It seems that as long as we recognise naturalism to be one vocabulary amongst any number of others, then we can carry on using it. If it helps us to cope, then realism is instrumentally justified.

So there is a basic conciliatory impulse to Rorty's deconstruction of Philosophy, and it tempers his iconoclasm. Towards the end of the collection, he declares that all he really wants is to ensure that life in the faculty can go on harmoniously in the face of fundamental theoretical disagreement. Politics is inescapable in philosophy, he says, but let it be fought out within philosophy. Neither the political tolerance nor the theoretical instrumentalism strike me as sufficiently persuasive or desirable to stand as clear alternatives to 'objectivism' in either science or politics. But then I have these illusions about the real world....

Gregor McLennan

Frye: Sexual Politics

Marilyn Frye, The politics of reality, Crossing Press feminist series, Trumansburg, New York, 1983, \$7.85

This book is a collection of essays on aspects of feminist theory, in which Frye explores concepts such as that of 'sexism', and links this conceptual exploration to observation and analysis of women's lives and experiences. There is a great deal in the book which is very sensitively and acutely observed and written.

In the essay on 'Sexism', for example, she puts up for discussion her own earlier definition of sexism, which goes as follows:

The term 'sexist', in its core and perhaps most fundamental meaning, is a term which characterises anything whatever which creates, constitutes, promotes or exploits any irrelevant or impertinent marking of the distinction between the sexes. (p.18)

The trouble with this definition, she argues, is that in a sexist cultural or economic system, sex in a sense always is relevant. Relevance is an intra-systematic thing, and there is no 'pure' definition of it which we can appeal to which is untainted by the very sorts of distinctions between the sexes that we might want to question. Thus, she says:

What is wrong in cases of sexism is, in the first place, that sex is relevant; and then that the making of distinctions on the basis of sex

reinforces the patterns which make it relevant.

She discusses very interestingly the all-pervasiveness of 'sex-marking' behaviour, the extreme importance we attach to being able to identify someone's sex, and the degree of anger and discomfiture which often results when we are unable to do so, or find ourselves mistaken.

I think that the main strength of the essays really lies in her discussion of issues like this; and of the ways in which male perceptions of women, male behaviour towards women, and male attitudes towards one another, subtly mesh and reinforce each other such that, whilst isolated instances may appear trivial or harmless, their cumulative effect is a system of immense power in which women are systematically disadvantaged. Whatever other advantages or privileges a person may have, or whatever forms of oppression they may suffer from, simply being male, Frye argues, rarely works to someone's social or economic disadvantage, whereas simply being female usually does.

There are questions, however, that I want to raise about some of the essays, in particular that entitled 'In and out of harm's way'. In this essay Frye discusses, among other things, the way in which women can be psychically dominated or shaped by their oppressors, can collude with them, and can come to define themselves in the oppressors' terms. She compares the situation of women with that of slaves; she discusses the way in which in extreme circumstances such as the abduction of a girl and her forced

introduction into a life of prostitution, the will and autonomy of the victim may be totally bent to that of her captor, and she will be effectively annihilated as an agent. She mentions The Story of 'O', the sado-masochistic pornographic work in which the whole physical and psychic being of 'O' is subjugated to the will of her male masters.

Now there is an interesting analogy between her discussion, and the view of black slavery in the ante-bellum southern states of America put forward by Stanley Elkins in 1959, in his book Slavery. Elkins argued that the conditions of black slavery, which he compared to those of a concentration camp, produced, or tended to produce, a certain sort of personality-type among slaves which in some cases did correspond to the 'Sambo' stereotype. During the Sixties and Seventies, a number of critics attacked the Elkins thesis about slave personality violently, arguing that any view that blacks were psychically 'damaged' was racist, failed to recognise the immense contribution of blacks to American culture, and did historical violence to the existence of a culture with its own lively traditions, including that of resistance, on the southern plantations.

In a reply to his critics, written in 1975, Elkins argued that in some of the discussions of slave culture and plantation life that had been critical of his work, the brutality and oppression of slave life seemed almost to have disappeared. It is inconceivable, he argued, that a regime such as that of slavery, which dominated the lives of its subjects to such an extent, could have had no damaging psychic effects at all. The problem was how to admit the possibility and the existence of 'damage' while at the same

time recognising the vitality and resistance of slave culture.

I think that feminist theory often finds itself in a similar dilemma. How do we steer a course between on the one hand stressing women's psychic subjugation or presenting models with which to try and understand it (such as that of abduction or the story of 'O') which tend to make it difficult to see how women could resist at all, or depict them as mere creatures and objects created by men; and on the other hand, depicting women's resistances, their (often hidden) achievements, their undermining of the structures which try to dominate them, and their construction of alternative views of human life and relationships, in a way which makes them appear psychically immune or untouched, merely constrained and coerced?

I do not think we have yet solved this problem, and my worry about Frye's essay is that I wonder if she lays so much stress on women's psychic subjugations that it is difficult to reconcile this with a recognition of women's strengths and achievements. And, just as I think Elkins' comparison of slavery to life in a concentration camp can be questioned, so I am doubtful about the extent to which situations of abduction etc. can really be used to show something about the conditions under which all women live.

I think there is a great deal of interest and value in Frye's book, and the problems it raises seem to me to be central ones that all feminist thinking needs to come to terms with.

Jean Grimshaw

It's Only Natural

Norman Geras, Marx and Human Nature: Refutation of a Legend, Verso, 1983, £12.50 hc, £2.95 pb

Norman Geras has written a short but very powerful assault on a ghost that won't exorcise: the myth that the 'mature' Marx did not hold to any theory of human nature. It is an openly polemical book, trying only to establish a minimum position - that Marx did continue to hold to some theory of human nature, and that he was right to do so. The exact nature of the theory is not Geras' concern.

It is of the nature of polemics that they are hard to summarise. Put baldly, Geras goes through three stages. First, there is an extended analysis of the Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach, perhaps the most cited of all Marx quotations supposed to show a rejection of 'human nature'. It is where Marx calls the 'essence of man' the 'ensemble of social relations'. With infinite care and patience, Geras unwraps the many possible meanings this Thesis could have. It is a very elegant and thorough logician's job, and it leaves him in the end with three possible meanings.

(1) The 'nature of man' (this not necessarily implying a conception of a fixed, limiting nature) is conditioned, but not wholly determined, by the ensemble of social relations; (2) 'Human nature' or the 'nature of man' (i.e. either fixed or unfixed) is manifested in the ensemble of social relations; or (3) human nature is wholly determined by, or dissolved in, the ensemble of social relations. This last is the view he is out to refute for ever.

The next part of the book is a historiographical demolition of the third position. He simply shows that Marx just repeatedly says the opposite. This is well done. I could not

but delight in his quotations which show Marx saying his apparently most anti-essentialist things in his Early Writings, the ones which reputedly he later overcame because of their essentialism. And then showing Marx, in his 'mature' writings, saying things every bit as essentialist as the Early Writings!

Finally after the historiographical demolition comes a briefer critique of a whole series of arguments which have been put forward to show that, whether or not he did reject 'human nature', Marx ought to have done so. There is excellent meat for discussion in Geras' arguments here, and he has done a most useful job in bringing them all to the surface together, as well as in criticising them.

This is all very good polemic, and I wholly agree with its minimal conclusion. I do sincerely wish it would have the desired effect of ending the hagiographical arguments once and for all. For I think that Geras is right in seeing the view he is criticising as actually extremely silly. If only we could get that agreed, we could get on with discussing the substantive questions which instantly arise the moment Geras moves beyond his minimal position - as inevitably he does.

In the course of his argument, he quite properly distinguishes views of human nature as a fixed quantity (and usually conservative) from what he calls views of the 'nature of man': ideas about general human needs and capacities which exist as general conditions and potentials, rather than as immediate determinants or absolute limits. He also introduces many of Marx's specific statements on particular needs and capacities.

The trouble is that these are of very different kinds,

and we can know about them in very different ways. Needs for food, shelter, rest, company, sex - though these are all different enough, for goodness' sake - are given fairly immediately, whereas Marx's 'need for breadth and variety of activity' is a far more abstracted claim. Then there are Marx's suggestions about mechanisms by which needs and capacities are produced, as in the famous: 'Men can be distinguished from animals by language, religion, anything you like. They begin to distinguish themselves from animals when they begin to produce their means of existence.' These are not all claims on the same level of analysis.

The question, what kind of a theory of human nature Marxism needs, is a big one. I suspect - though the evidence is only partial - that Geras is after one which is

pretty immediately checkable by evidence. He says for example that Marx's claim that we have needs for breadth and variety of activities should be empirically testable. I am not so sure. I fear that virtually any direct empirical test would be equivalent to the experiments American sociologists were fond of, that tried to measure 'degrees of alienation'. That way did not lie revolutionary socialism.

These are the big questions and, to be fair, Geras is not really tackling them. He is polemicising, to good effect, that to say Marx had no theory of human nature is just silly. And I agree.

Martin Barker

Imagined Communities

Michael Taylor, Community, Anarchy and Liberty, Cambridge University Press, 1982, £14 hc, £4.95 pb

For some years Michael Taylor has been worried about the logical coherence of anarchy, and has had a nagging doubt that Hobbes just might have been right. In his Anarchy and Cooperation (London, John Wiley, 1976) he tried to find the answer in what he modestly called 'some elementary mathematics' (dauntingly complex though this was to non-mathematicians), and concluded that cooperation was sometimes possible without a state, though usually only in very small groups. In his latest attempt to put the Hobbesian state behind him, Taylor has abandoned mathematics and embraced anthropology.

The starting point of the book is that all societies need to create social order of some sort, and cannot rely on individuals voluntarily refraining from doing those things that threaten social order. Taylor thus parts company with many anarchists in dismissing the possibility that we will all become faultless altruists as soon as the state is removed from our backs and our psyches. Such easy solutions are indeed unconvincing, though there could have been more consideration of such evidence as there is on whether altruism will increase significantly in the absence of a coercive state. Nevertheless, Taylor cannot be accused of making things easy for himself when he chooses to work with such unpromising human material.

If social order has to be created, and if you don't like it created for you by the Hobbesian state, you'll look around fairly carefully for something else. Michael Taylor's eyes have alighted on 'community', and most of the book is an examination of how it works: this is where the anthropology comes in. Many 'primitive' societies have been characterised as stateless yet succeeded in securing social order for thousands of years: how did they do it? By, it seems, a mixture of structural characteristics that eased tension (e.g. the exchange of women in marriage - something for anarchist feminists to ponder), and various forms of threats (ranging from blood-feuds to social disapproval, through witchcraft and withdrawing assistance). (For reasons not entirely clear to me, Taylor wishes to play down socialisation and education.) And these threats only worked because the societies were communities: that is to say, smallish groups of persons with some shared beliefs and values, who interacted frequently with each other in various different ways, some of which combined short-term

altruism with long-term self-interest. Community so defined, then, is an alternative to a state. Anarchic co-operation has thus been shown to be feasible in small and stable societies, which is a considerable advance over his earlier proof of its possibility only in very small groups.

It must be said that this is interesting and persuasive as far as it goes, but some important questions remain unasked. It's far from clear exactly what the conditions are that allow communities to function adequately: it seems rather odd, for instance, not to ask whether the Nuer or Hopi solutions are not closed to us today. (Alternatively, perhaps we can construct stateless societies in ways that they didn't.) Surprisingly, whilst Taylor acknowledges that the state destroys community, he doesn't ask whether this destruction is permanent or not - which is surely crucial to the prospects for anarchy now. Little cheer is provided by his exploration of the reasons why communities everywhere gave way to the state: his favoured theory is that communities need to split from time to time in order to survive - either when they grow too big, or when irreconcilable internal divisions occur. Such splittings can only occur if there is somewhere for the new community to go to; when there is no longer room, communities grow too large and become states. This 'inspires little optimism about the viability of anarchy in a crowded world' (p.139), which somewhat understates the case.

But Taylor is not really interested in such mundane problems - he wants to show that anarchy is coherent, however impossible of attainment. So he devotes considerable space to a criticism that anarchy is self-defeating since it would require a state to support it; this since, on Taylor's account, a rough economic equality is a necessary condition for community and hence for anarchy, and yet (the criticism goes) economic equality can only be sustained by state intervention. Again the anthropologists are wheeled on (together with evidence from peasant societies) to show that equality not only can but has been sustained without a state - by the threats and social pressures of various kinds that occur within communities. So egalitarian communities are shown to be possible, and anarchy is thus rescued.

The 'liberty' of the title is dealt with in a chapter that examines the claim that community and individual liberty are incompatible. The anthropologists get left out of this one, which is mainly a summary of different analyses of 'liberty', reaching the rather weak conclusion that there

is no reason to believe liberty is impossible in communities. The arguments here are unconvincing, and since Taylor stresses that he's not committed to individual liberty as a central value anyway, one wonders why he bothered.

So this short book is about anarchy, but not anarchism or anarchists. It deals in an interesting way with a rather abstract intellectual conundrum; but even if successful, this book only succeeds in meeting an objection to anarchy, it does not say much about what a contemporary anarchist

theory would look like. Occasional flashes of this appear in the discussion of 'intentional communities' (particularly contemporary communes) in which we see tantalising glimpses of what anarchism is all about, but these ideas are not developed.

If you lie awake at night wondering how the Nuer avoided Leviathan, this may be the book for you. If you want to avoid Leviathan yourself, I'd take out a subscription to Freedom.

Pete Morriss

In Defense of Utopia

Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor, The Politics of Utopia: A Study in theory and practice, Hutchinson, 1982, £5.95 pb

This book sets out to describe the utopian tradition as a key aspect of both the history of political thought and modern politics, and hence to legitimise utopian modes of thinking about societies, as well as the study of such modes, vis-à-vis existing academic classifications and the theoretical biases of dogmatic Marxists and liberals alike. For many on the left, the idea of utopia has been a problematic one since Engels' famous distinction between 'utopian' and 'scientific' socialism, with the latter representing the theoretical superiority of the materialist conception of history and its various adjuncts. For hard-core liberals, and most notably the school of Popper, Hayek and Talmon, all forms of utopian thinking have involved an exclusivist and authoritarian political outlook in which an a priori model of rational human society is to be forced upon an otherwise diverse, individualistic reality capable only of piecemeal alteration.

During the last 20 years a renewed enthusiasm for the history of utopianism (as well as its actual practice) has combined with a relative decay of both orthodox Marxist and Popperian liberal views to facilitate the reclaiming of the utopian act and heritage. Marx's scientific emphasis has been revealed to have concealed a positivistic tendency, and while no revival of pre-Marxian socialism has taken place, a less sharp distinction between Marx and his predecessors is now often pointed to, and the value of the speculative bent of the latter in such areas as sexual relations and varieties of property ownership has been more greatly appreciated. Liberalism, meanwhile, has shirked some of its anti-socialist phobias in maturing beyond the Cold War rhetoric of the 1950s (though the same cannot be said of modern conservatism).

These are necessary but not sufficient conditions for the sort of rescue bid Goodwin and Taylor have in mind. Their treatment of the subject is divided into two main sections, the first dealing with the relation of utopia to political theory, and the second to political practice, with a concluding section being entitled 'In defence of utopia'. The first of these parts (by Goodwin) concentrates on justifying why, since so few utopian works concentrate upon politics per se, we should take the genre as a serious element in the history of political thought, and offers in addition a brief survey of utopian literature oriented

towards exploring how the 'constant' of politics, the problem of order, has been treated. Further sections here discuss in detail the relation of utopia to ideology and science, as well as the basis of modern liberal and conservative attacks on utopian models of thinking.

The second section (by Taylor) dwells primarily upon 'utopian socialism' and communitarianism, hence overlapping to some extent (about 20 pages verbatim) with Taylor's recent Political Ideas of the Utopian Socialists. Here Taylor generally presents a very useful account of the relationship between the origins of socialism and the utopian urge to completely transcend existing society, as well as a very insightful analysis of Marx's rejection as well as incorporation of his 'utopian' predecessors.

Little of the material on 19th-century American communitarianism (the principal modern tradition of small-scale utopian practice) is new, with Taylor deferring instead to R.M. Kantner's Commitment and Utopia: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective. Goodwin and Taylor then contribute a chapter each to the concluding section, with the former defending utopianism as the necessary presentation of counterfactual 'possible worlds' which allow us to reintegrate elements of human experience too often otherwise ignored. Taylor briefly reviews a number of modern utopian writers (Bahro, etc.) and emphasises the valuable and necessarily utopian elements in the modern ecological movement.

On the whole, both authors do succeed in showing that utopianism is 'a key ingredient of the whole process of modern politics' (p.9) quite convincingly, while offering us the best modern introduction to the general topic. Much more might have been said about Marxism, and those interested in the key question of the disappearance of 'politics' into 'administration' will find this given very short shrift (pp.34-7) considering its importance. There are a few dubious points of interpretation, especially in cases where secondary literature is relied upon (e.g. that an important part of Owenite education was the inculcation of bourgeois morality and discipline). On the whole, however, this is a well-written, well-integrated and important contribution to the literature on utopias which students of political theory will also find superior to existing accounts, of which there are very few of this precise type.

Gregory Claeys

Does the Emperor have any Clothes?

Wayne Hudson, The Marxist Philosophy of Ernst Bloch, MacMillan, 1982, £20 hc

Bloch's philosophy is not yet well known in the English-speaking world, and yet it forms a remarkable contribution to the Marxist tradition. Bloch (1885-1977) was born and educated in Germany. During the Nazi period he was forced to emigrate to the US, but in 1949 he returned to East Germany as Professor of Philosophy at Leipzig. However, he exiled himself to West Germany in 1961 and spent the remainder of his life there.

His philosophy is an extraordinary amalgam of utopian, metaphysical, speculative and religious themes, drawn, as Dr Hudson shows, from a great range and variety of scholarly sources, and all combined within the framework of a quite orthodox Marxism - adherence to which enabled him to live and work in East Germany for over a decade without problems. This book is the first full-length treat-

ment of his work in English and, as such, it is welcome. However, beyond summarising some of the larger themes in Bloch's work, the book is not useful either in helping one to understand Bloch's philosophy or to appreciate its significance.

The approach is diligent and scholarly, but unenlivened and unilluminating. One is given a good sense of the amazing scholarly range of Bloch's work, and of his openness (so unusual in a Marxist writer) to themes of a utopian, speculative and even mystical character. But whether it all adds up to a coherent system of thought, or whether it is just an unrigorous and specious eclecticism, is never made clear. Does the emperor have any clothes? This is the doubt that has been raised by other commentators on Bloch's work. Unfortunately, this book does not really help one to settle it.

Sean Sayers

NEWS

Realism and the Philosophy of Science

Critical Review of the conference of the Northern Association for Philosophy at Manchester Polytechnic, 25-26 February 1983.

This conference was timely in capturing the trend towards 'realism' apparent in seemingly diverse areas of philosophical thinking: the growing interest in De Re modality (for example in Kripke's a posteriori necessities) in analytical philosophy, the 'Formal Ontology' movement in phenomenology and the concern with realist theories of science in the work of Bhaskar and Hillel Ruben.

Six papers were read and discussed by contributors from Britain and Germany. Two symposiasts: B. Smith and J. Shearmur (both of the University of Manchester) engaged in what they called Dialogues Concerning Naturalistic Realism. Both are phenomenologists and formal ontologists. Formal ontology is the description of, for example, part-whole relations where, say, 'if a is a part of b and b is a part of c then a is a part of c' is held to be necessary and

where this necessity is held to obtain actually in the objects and not, say, in some convention of language or constraint on the human imagination or in some logical rule such as 'p is necessary if not p is self contradictory'. Most of the examples of De Re necessities (or as they preferred to call them 'existential necessities') were drawn from the study of colours. For instance on this view it is de re necessary that no phenomenal colour can be unextended, no two colours can simultaneously and exhaustively occupy numerically the same extension etc. The symposiasts conceded that there are logical and a priori necessities but allowed a further class discoverable a posteriori.

One possible drawback of this approach is that the concept of necessity has to be taken as 'primitive'; not capable of further analysis. Theorists agree that 'nothing is red and green all over' expresses a necessary truth or that in some very strong sense the purported state of affairs the sentence describes cannot obtain. Precisely what we are interested in though is the nature of this necessity. A regress is generated by saying the necessity is itself necessary. To say it is just a fact that nothing can be red and green all over is to restate the problem and not to solve it. If we say in some respects the world cannot be other than