

REVIEWS



DANGEROUS KNOWLEDGE

Bernard Harrison, *Inconvenient Fictions: Literature and the Limits of Theory*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1991. 293pp., £25.00 hb, 0 300 05057 7.

Plato, with an apparent inconsistency which has puzzled some of his modern commentators, condemned literature both for its triviality and for the danger it posed to the life of virtue. It was dangerous, he thought, in that it offered a delusive simulacrum of theoretical knowledge, failing to engage with reality while giving the appearance of doing so. Philosophy, in contrast, he regarded as dangerous in a positive way, integral to the life of virtue. As genuine theoretical knowledge, it had the power to subvert entrenched illusions about self and world.

In *Inconvenient Fictions*, Bernard Harrison argues that literature does indeed threaten ideals of theoretical knowledge inherited from Plato. But what it offers, for Harrison, is 'dangerous' knowledge, in the sense Plato reserved for philosophy. Plato, he thinks, was right to see literature as threatening ideals of theoretical knowledge, but wrong to deny it the status of knowledge in its own right. Literature unsettles, in a morally enlightening way, confidence in our established ways of making sense of ourselves and the world, forcing us to engage with the intractable reality of perspectives other than our own, and making us aware of the tenuousness of our ways of constructing the world. 'Dangerous knowledge' is the price exacted by intelligent reading – the risk of being shaken from our preconceptions, of being radically changed in our moral outlook. Whereas our received ideals of theoretical knowledge lead us to expect an epistemological stability that transcends the limitations of particular points of view, literature constantly disrupts and unsettles our moral certainties. Indeed its peculiar ethical value, Harrison argues, resides in its power to act as 'a standing rebuke and irritant to the dominant paradigms of knowledge'.

In the context of 'post modern' literary theory, to present literature as a source of serious moral enlightenment is bound to sound like old-fashioned 'humanism'. One of the novelties of this rich and fascinating book is that its vision of the ethical importance of good fictional narrative is articulated by drawing out the philosophical import of ideas underlying Derridean reading strategies. Harrison enlivens the truism that good literature enables us to engage with alternative points of view by expressing it through Derridean themes of 'différance' and 'dissemination'. Deconstruction, on Harrison's presentation of it, means not that texts can mean anything you like, but rather that they can

always turn out to mean more than you might prefer them to mean. The 'disseminative potency' which Derrida attributes to language does not result simply in an idle play of signs, but constitutes the agency by which we are enabled to transcend perceptual limitations. To grasp another point of view – to engage with another consciousness – is to see how signs can combine in configurations other than those I take for granted. Derrida's rejection of a fixed meaning 'outside the text', by reference to which its interpretation might be fixed, allows us to articulate how literature can reveal to us possibilities of how the world might be. It is this which gives it its 'dangerous' power to move and change us. Derridean 'dissemination' becomes the vehicle of an ethically significant self-transcendence. Derrida's approach to texts – his insistence on the possibility of renewal and movement in a text, opened up through a liberating attention to what it suppresses and marginalises – here lends itself, Harrison suggests, to an articulation of one of the central functions of the literary text itself.

To use Derrida in this way to reaffirm old 'humanist' ideals of literature as a source of morally significant self-transcendence may at first sight seem perverse. But the idea is persuasively elaborated through a series of imaginative and philosophically informed readings of literary texts, interspersed with more directly theoretical discussion of the philosophical implications of Derridean reading strategies. The result is a first-class collection of interconnected essays, which succeed both in giving philosophical substance to deconstructive reading strategies and in enriching the traditional concerns of analytical philosophy of language. This book is not a direct commentary on deconstruction or Derrida, but rather a much-needed working through of the philosophical implications of his severing of meaning from psychic presence, in relation to more traditional themes from the history of philosophy and contemporary analytical philosophy of language. It will repay careful reading not only by those interested in philosophical aspects of literature, but for the freshness it brings to well-worn issues of meaning, truth, reference, selfhood and self-knowledge.

This book, as well as illuminating issues of literary interpretation, also shows how fruitful it can be to bring together the history of philosophy, contemporary literary theory and the methods and concerns of analytical philosophy. We see in the treatment of *Tristram Shandy*, for example, something more than the familiar 'influence' of Locke on Sterne. Harrison finds in the novel a 'deconstructive' response to the sterility of

Locke's opposition of fanciful, idiosyncratic 'wit' to 'judgment', with its emphasis on the plain facts of 'natural correspondence and connexion'. The philosophy of G. E. Moore, rather than being seen as just intellectual background to the novels of Forster, is shown as being put to the test in Forster's fictional working through of the upshot of a moral outlook grounded in individual access to the intuition of what is 'right'. And the philosophically puzzling question of how a mere fiction can challenge a moral perspective is explored through the contrasts between Jane Austen's creation of a unified moral landscape and the shifts between different universes of value that characterise the literary style of Muriel Spark.

True to the spirit of Derridean deconstruction, the methodology of this book proceeds by unexpected juxtapositions and disconcerting alignments. The theme of 'the death of the author' is discussed in relation to Descartes's metaphysics of selfhood and its rejection by Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty. And the 'private language' issue, in turn, takes on new dimensions in relation to post-modern approaches to textuality. Self-knowledge, Harrison suggests, can be fruitfully understood in terms of the unfolding in time of the 'text' of our acts, responses and utterances, always amenable to new interpretation by ourselves no less than others.

Issues of the truth of literature form the connecting thread in Harrison's theoretical discussions and textual readings. The book critically engages with various aspects of the doctrine Derrida labels 'logocentrism', given content by Harrison in relation to the role of reference and truth conditions in meaning. Harrison argues that literature's engagement with reality is mediated not through concern with reference and truth – the mark of 'theoretical' knowledge, but rather through possibilities of relating with the world through action. Literature yields a 'cognitive gain' different from that involved in theoretical understanding – an opening up of possibilities which cannot be encapsulated in a set of propositions about Life. The concluding chapter of the book relates these questions of truth and meaning directly to the theory of metaphor, interestingly discussed with reference to Frege's theory of meaning. The understanding it conveys of

possibilities, unmediated through reference and truth conditions, makes literary language, Harrison argues, 'constitutive' in character. And it is this power to evoke an understanding of possibilities that makes literature a source of 'dangerous knowledge'.

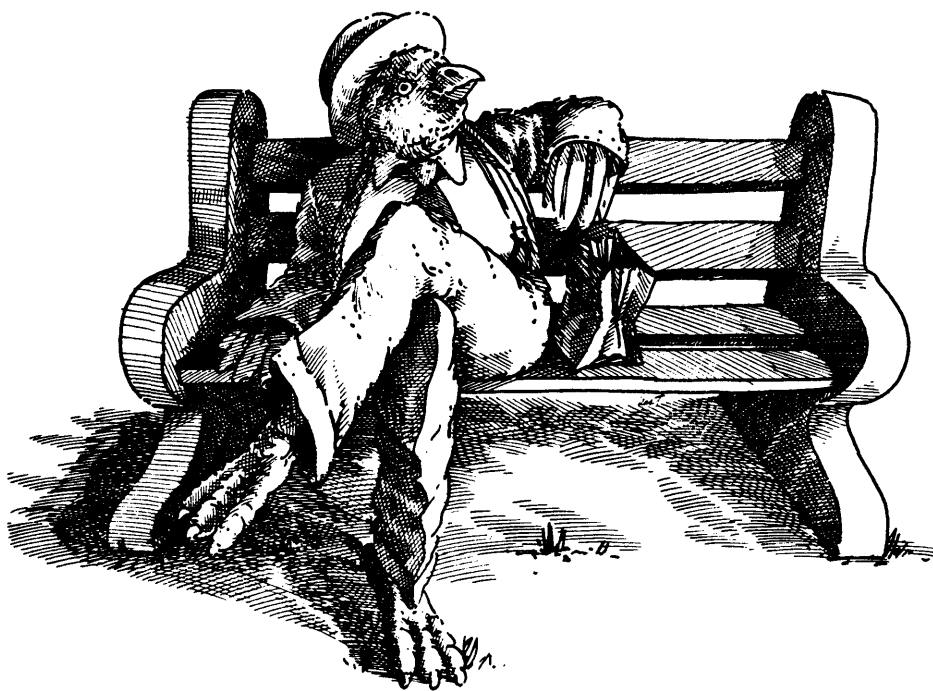
There could perhaps have been more discussion of just how this 'constitutive' aspect of literary language differs from the referential use of language, and of why exactly its mediation through possibility cannot be understood through the idea of truth. It would be interesting, for example, to compare Harrison's concept of 'constitutive' language with Ricoeur's development, in *Time and Narrative*, of the Aristotelian concept of *mimesis*. Ricoeur's distinction between 'configurative' and 'refigurative' aspects of *mimesis* is supposed to reconcile the truth of literature with the idea that it engages with the real through the idea of the possible. It would also be interesting to see more discussion of the ways in which 'theoretical' language can itself be seen as 'constitutive'. But perhaps, as with many 'binary oppositions', to deconstruct here demands that we first have a clear idea of how the terms are opposed. Harrison has done a great deal to prise literary meaning apart from reference and truth, to allow us to see better how it operates and what is important about it. To then see elements of 'constitutive' meaning in theoretical writing would involve insight difficult to gain without first clearly separating them.

Where, one may ask, in all this might we locate the language of philosophy and its mode of engaging with the real? Plato of course set us on the path of seeing philosophy as theoretical knowledge, as against trivial, delusive literature – the language of mere appearance. In showing how fruitfully philosophical and literary insights can work together, this book opens up the possibility of some constructive reconsideration of the self-perception of philosophy in relation to the theoretical and the literary.

Some readers may be disappointed to find a lingering Leavisite high-minded seriousness in Harrison's reconstruction of some of the theses of old-style humanism through insights drawn from Derridean deconstruction. What is most important about literature, it seems, is its power to first humble us as a step

towards morally worthy self-transcendence. What, we may ask, becomes of post-modern 'pleasure in the text' – of the delight in the sheer play of meanings that exceeds any moral importance reading may have? We read for the pleasure of recognition and of reinforcing our nascent perceptions, as well as for the edifying disillusionment of our certainties. But, although the pleasure of the text may not figure explicitly in Harrison's analysis of the workings of literature, it is certainly implicit in the verve of the writing – in the manifest enjoyment it conveys in reading and reflecting on what it involves. Dangerous knowledge can be pleasurable, and play can be ethically important. Much contemporary philosophical writing is neither pleasurable nor, in Harrison's sense, 'dangerous'. This book sets an example of how good philosophical writing can be both 'dangerous' in its power to shake entrenched perspectives and oppositions, and pleasurable, in its capacity to glimpse new possibilities.

Genevieve Lloyd



NEED FOR THEORY

Len Doyal and Ian Gough, *A Theory of Human Need*, London, Macmillan, 1991. 365pp., £35.00 hb, 0 333 38324 9, £10.99 pb, 0 333 38325 7.

I cannot over-emphasise the importance of a book like this for the Left today. In any historical context, it would only be in relation to a theory of human need that a standard of injustice could be struck, and a sense of proportion brought to a left political programme. Present circumstances redouble the urgency that the practical agenda of the Left be rigorously reconstructed on such foundations.

Those for whom the overthrow of existing class relations is the centre-piece of that agenda may call this 'reformism'. But the time is long past when opposing the central iniquity of capitalism – the appropriation of surplus value – can absolve the Left from further concern with the concrete details of justice. Today's injustices may all owe their origin to capitalist social relations of production. The overthrow of those relations, however, would not, in itself, put right the consequences of two centuries of capital and empire.

One of those consequences has been the ideological levelling of every value to the subjectivist currency of desire and exchange. Famine and epidemic threaten humanity on an unprecedented scale; debt repayments represent a larger net flow of resources from poor to wealthy nations than at any time in the previous history of imperialism. Yet a chorus of ideologues from all points on the political spectrum agree that human needs are relative, values subjective, and that concern for the welfare of others is the first patronising step in their oppression. Under this new egalitarianism of values, each moral claim merits its collecting tin, or its two minute TV charity appeal. Indeed, nothing could show the power of ideology and malleability of consciousness better than the prevalence of those beliefs Doyal and Gough rebut so as to rehabilitate the notion of human need.

As Doyal and Gough point out, this pervasive ideological malaise was fomented no less by the self-styled Left than by the right. Now the Left's most urgent priority must be to bring some order to the cacophony of causes competing in the post-modern free market of compassion. This encompasses starving people of the third world, laboratory animals, rain forests, torture victims, people forced to be passive smokers, historic buildings, the homeless, persons passed over for promotion to top jobs, the terminally ill, silkworm pupae and, of course, the only too recent beneficiaries of 'actually existing socialism' as was.

A Theory of Human Need begins by identifying a diversity of sources from which modern relativism and subjectivism spring – from the orthodox neo-classical economic view that preferences, summed as 'demand', best represent human needs, through New Right sanctification of individual choice. They go on to identify a number of purportedly 'left' contributions to this ideological drift. There is historico-developmental relativism, which differentiates the needs of people according to their level of economic development: the poor on the streets of Calcutta supposedly have the same needs as Oliver Twist, rather than those of the workless in Britain today. There is multiculturalism, which gives an overriding value to the moral claims expressed by oppressed groups, notwithstanding inconsistencies. Both religious fundamentalists and radical feminists claim to speak for the oppressed, for example, but try organising a 'seminar of the oppressed' on arranged marriages! There is the view that needs can only be identified by

the unconstrained discourse of democracy, and finally the over-tender phenomenological outlook, which condemns any attempt to articulate another's need as morally inauthentic. In a vigorous counter-attack Doyal and Gough argue that, whatever its intellectual roots, relativistic subjectivism concerning rational values and human needs functions as an ideology which denies a rational basis to claims for justice.

Their positive response is to return to first principles in a philosophical account of human needs. This is founded on the necessary conditions for the possibility of *being fully human*. This focus lifts their analysis of needs beyond the biological, but without leaving biology behind, since both *physical health* and *rational autonomy* are necessary for the exercise of *rational agency*. They argue that no moral theory can avoid placing a value on the possession of this capacity, for its exercise is necessary for persons to follow the precepts of *any* moral outlook. From this perspective they are able critically to accommodate leading modern positions on justice (Rawls and critics) and rights (Gewirth) so as to construct a powerful and sophisticated political theory.

In fact, they rather underplay just how powerful it is. Their introduction builds on the Aristotelian notion of 'human flourishing' to define 'harm' as what stands in the way of its achievement. But they do not stress how far this strengthens the way they are able critically to accommodate political/moral theories with a neo-Kantian foundation. Consider how arguments from normative '*presupposition*' have been employed in recent moral and political theory: 'fairness' is 'presupposed' in devising any rational rules for distribution of goods (Rawls); rights are 'presupposed' in attributing duties to people, if 'ought' implies 'can', and people cannot do what they ought without help you can supply (Gewirth); the aim of arriving at the truth is 'presupposed' in the practice of argument (Habermas).

Withholding any *necessary* condition for the exercise of human rational agency *causes harm*, and normative presuppositions for its exercise, exemplified above, are no less necessary conditions than physical health. Flouting such normative conditions harms those thereby prevented from exercising their rational agency, even if you impose just what they would choose for themselves, given the chance. This is because the exercise of rational agency is inextricably bound up with the pursuit of the good, and so with human beings flourishing *as such*, rather than as unreflective animals. Thus, we do not have to settle the *sufficient* conditions for human flourishing (a notoriously difficult task) to know that the human *telos* is advanced if we identify and supply those *necessary* conditions for its achievement lacking from the lives of so many people. There may well be the basis here for a critical accommodation between deontological and consequentialist approaches to social ethics, but this is not explored by Doyal and Gough, who turn instead to more practical matters.

At all events, their arguments powerfully support the claim for a universal human right to optimal satisfaction of basic needs in the spheres of health and liberation. These are grounds, in turn, for the identification of a range of '*intermediate needs*' which are empirically necessary for the satisfaction of basic needs. These are (for physical health): adequate food, water, housing, safety at work and of domestic environment and health care; and (for personal autonomy): a secure childhood with significant primary relationships, physical and economic secu-

city, control over child-bearing, and basic education.

Indeed, the basis for a social policy research programme emerges directly from the normative relations which must hold here – namely that each person has a right to the minimum level of intermediate need satisfaction required to produce the optimum level of basic need satisfaction. That is, only empirical research will reveal the point at which, in relation to some overall envelope of resources, rapidly diminishing returns commence on further increments of expenditure in one area if we steal, say, from housing to pay for health care, and so on.

So Doyal and Gough proceed from their philosophical theory to give a concrete account of human needs as a yardstick to measure the adequacy with which different socio-economic systems provide for their members, given their means. Their perspective generates principles which bring order to the plethora of data available from statistics of economic, health, educational and welfare performance world-wide. More than that, it articulates the justified demands of the oppressed and spells out the inescapable duties of the powerful, on the basis not of sentiment, but of what it must mean to share a common humanity.

The authors' two-fold characterisation of human need, as comprising physical well-being and autonomy, also commits them to a specific politics of need satisfaction. This requires a two-track political strategy with the aim of striking an appropriate balance between 'top down' state action and 'bottom up' self-activity in the pursuit of need satisfaction. This is the least developed section of their argument, mainly because the authors are not in a position to make the same kinds of detailed study of

the comparative efficacy of political movements that they earlier make of world-wide trends of need satisfaction.

Nonetheless, their conclusions point both towards principles for ordering a field of descriptive political studies, and towards a politics acknowledging that not all the classical principles of liberalism are contradicted by those of socialism. The empty formal rights of liberal capitalism really are a mockery for all those who lack the material means to enjoy them. But collectivism is no remedy if it neglects individual freedom, rights, privacy and self-expression on the principle that workers won't miss what they never had in the first place.

This book should help give 'applied philosophy' a good name. It is no set piece where intellectual howitzers, wheeled on to obliterate some barely defended folly, demonstrate the irresistible superiority of academic firepower. Instead, a well grounded and powerful philosophical view is developed. This is applied to the solution of momentous practical problems. It is needed because these problems are currently obscured by thickets of ideology.

There will be those (for whom 'outflanking on the Left' is a reflex) who will find this book insufficiently radical. It is quite comprehensible on first reading, it confirms a fair amount of common sense, and, of course, it is only a book – 'Philosophers have only *interpreted* the world...' and all that. On the Left, however, too many have retreated even from this, and now only interpret texts. This book, by contrast, is about what has to be done, and what we will need to know in order to do it.

Roger Harris

WHITHER MARXISM?

Gregor McLennan, *Marxism, Pluralism and Beyond*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1989. xi + 304 pp., 0 7456 0350 5 hb., 0 7456 0351 3 pb.

Anyone considering what future there is for Marxism should find this a useful book. Even if you were to take issue with everything McLennan has to say, his thorough detailing of the many theoretical stumbling blocks and disputes which have engaged Marxists since the '60s will provide much grist for your intellectual mill. The problem of class identity, the relationship between forces and relations of production, the state, revolution, socialism and more besides are each given a thoughtful reprise. McLennan's purpose in examining these conundrums is not to resolve them, but rather to set out the state of contemporary Marxism as a *body of social theory*, and its relationship to its chief adversary in the field: pluralism.

He charts the emergence of pluralism historically to its high point in the '50s and early '60s, through to its own reassessment and transformation into critical pluralism. Critical pluralists having eschewed the ideological complacency of classical pluralism have given belated recognition to the importance of class in politics, together with the considerable limitations of Western democracy. This shift towards a radical democratic perspective mirrors a reassessment among Marxists of the importance of democracy and political pluralism. Are we witnessing a convergence of former adversaries? McLennan argues that we are not. The heterogeneous and problem-ridden state in which the two traditions now find themselves, together with a number of shared concerns, has certainly rendered the relationship less antagonis-

tic, but philosophical commitments will continue to maintain an 'essential tension' between them.

Thus, while the R. A. Dahl of critical pluralism might concede the importance of classes in political arrangements, he explicitly repudiates any attempt to give them ontological primacy over other social groups. By contrast 'even weak historical materialism entails an objectivist and developmental conception of the social totality; while class analysis, no matter how hypothetical its propositions are claimed to be, registers definite analytic priorities' (p. 166). McLennan argues that philosophical considerations, although often unacknowledged, are crucial to discussions about the adequacy of theory in capturing the diversity and richness of social life. This can be seen in the various declarations of intent by post-modernists, post-Marxists and so forth, to move beyond 'the played-out orthodoxies of Marxism and pluralism'. The ontological commitments of the two traditions are held to be no more than elements of modernist narratives whose hold on thought must be broken by recognising the diversity and instability of discourse and language games.

There are limits, however, to this sort of radical philosophical pluralism. In the first place 'some degree of analytic of substantive "closure" is necessitated in retaining any sense of dynamic structural tendencies within society, or any firm moral statement of the general benefits for humankind which socialism might offer' (*Ibid.*). Furthermore, the would-be transcendence of Marxism and pluralism in many cases merely reinvent its terms and preoccupations. Lyotard's emphasis on 'functional complexity, mobility, differentiation, and the absence of permanent allegiances' (p. 178) is far from alien to the concerns of conventional

pluralism. Deconstructionists, furthermore, have been guilty of such old-hatisms as *reductionism* (in selecting 'a plurality of texts in a given field only to condense them into a format in which none other than the "metaphysics of presence is discovered"' (p. 173)), and (worse still) *idealism* (in holding that 'all sorts of apparent entities and relations are essentially textual, constellations of signification-potentials' (p. 174)).

While McLennan's examination of ontological tensions is both useful and suggestive, his philosophical interests sometimes run away with him, to the detriment of cohesiveness and direction. A discussion of issues in the philosophy of science in chapter 6, for instance, tends to misrepresent or inadequately explain the issues and thinkers mentioned (e.g. on p. 183, the account of Kuhn), as well as taking Bhaskar and his followers to be representative of modern scientific realism. Nor is the relationship between philosophical pluralism and pluralism in political theory properly theorised, given McLennan's awareness of the empiricism of the latter.

Of those theorists whom McLennan regards as having made important advances in attempting to synthesise the two traditions or providing a 'third way', he finds that their contributions have in fact served to restructure and advance the opposition in various respects, rather than transcending it. Giddens, for instance, while seeking to give proper weighting to both agency and structure, weighs heavily towards voluntarism, while his critique of historical materialism 'shades off into caricature' (p. 214). By contrast, 'the broad lines of the historical materialist notion of the transition from feudalism to capitalism are still visible' in Skocpol's account of the French Revolution (p. 236).

The opposition between the two traditions will, McLennan believes, continue to be important for some time to come; and no bad thing at that: the tension is a productive one. Given

McLennan's conclusion and commitment to 'pluralist Marxism', I take it that he would concur with Giddens's view, which he quotes, that 'there are no easy dividing-lines to be drawn between Marxism and "bourgeois social theory"' (pp. 204-5). Is McLennan's message, then, that there is or should be something like a historic compromise in the field of theory? Not a convergence of course, but a friendly engagement? One might ask 'why this now?' (In fact the book is a product of the late '80s rather than the early '90s.)

The answer, perhaps, has something to do with an old problem on which McLennan spends comparatively little time: the unity of theory and practice. He is critical of the notion of theoretical class struggle in so far as that is taken to mean anything more than 'serious and self-critical intellectual exchanges with alternative perspectives' (p. 131). In the discussion leading to the 1990 Congress of the CPGB he argued that 'Above all the emphasis on the link between theory and practice throughout the tradition must, paradoxically perhaps, be severely weakened if dogmatism is to be avoided' (*Congress Views*, Issue 1, CPGB).

Marxism as practice looks just now to be in a much sorer state than Marxism in theory, and perhaps this is the motivation for wishing to sever the link. It is a long time, of course, since a commitment to Marxist theory implied a commitment to revolutionary politics, and it is doubtful whether any but a very loose entailment could be demonstrated. Nevertheless a divorce does raise real problems about the identity of what remains. Marxism without the revolutionary commitment and attachment to working class organisation, as Lenin might have said, looks sadly like a lifeless copy of the real thing.

Kevin Magill

ANOTHER COUNTRY

Krishnan Kumar, *Utopianism*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1991. viii + 136pp., £20.00 hb, 0335 15362 3, £7.99 pb, 0 335 15361 5.

Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, Hemel Hempstead, Philip Allan, 1990. x + 224pp., £10.95 pb, 0 86003 700 2.

Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Neville and Stephen Plaice, Oxford, Polity Press, 1991. xiv + 377pp., £39.50 hb, 0 7456 0553 2.

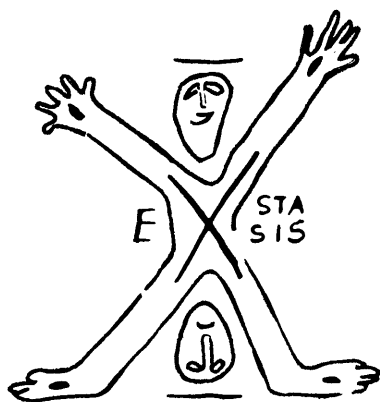
Utopianism has become more acceptable in recent years. As a specialist academic field 'Utopian Studies' has burgeoned in Europe and, especially, the US. Large, multi-national, and interdisciplinary conferences abound, journals appear. Sections of the Left have also partly overcome their old prejudices against utopian socialism; feminism has become the site of some impressive syntheses. The first phase of the rehabilitation of utopianism has therefore made impressive gains. It has also brought problems, most notably a conceptual woolliness. In this respect utopianism has been a victim of its own success. So badly was a positive usage of the concept missed that it has been hungrily fallen upon. The term 'utopian' has been applied to an enormous range of fact and fiction, from Alexander the Great to D. H. Lawrence, from interplanetary travel to a comfortable pair of socks. Academics have found that they can add the words 'and utopianism' to their regular papers, add a few new paragraphs, and metamorphose themselves into practitioners of a new discipline. If the revival of utopianism is to move to a second phase it

urgently requires the introduction of substantial conceptual rigour.

Kumar's book is introductory. It is a clear, accessible and well-written work, which briskly conducts the reader around the principal features of the subject. But Kumar has an exclusive, even restrictive, definition of a utopia, as a literary form invented by Thomas More in 1516. Furthermore, he argues, this could not have sprung out of non-Western conditions. This approach certainly reduces the field of study, eliminating classical and medieval claimants, as well as those of Asia, Africa etc. It also eliminates non-literary forms such as social theory. It could, however, be argued that Kumar has merely universalised one form of utopianism, the modern Western literary form. Certainly the claim that there are no pre-modern and non-Western utopias has been contested on both theoretical and empirical grounds, and does, in the case of the non-Western claim, leave Kumar in the position of having to argue that the utopianism of which he is a defender is an essentially alien device in non-Western countries. Utopianism could be construed as a form of cultural imperialism from this perspective. Whether or not one agrees with Kumar's categories, his recognition of the problems, and willingness to intervene in the debate, is to be welcomed.

Levitas's book is primarily about conceptual clarification. Although discussing a wide range of thinkers (e.g. Marx, Sorel, Mannheim, Bloch, Morris, Marcuse) and topics (contemporary utopian studies, feminism and utopia, historic commentaries and anthologies), her principal aim is conceptual clarification. To this task she brings impressive analytical skills and a sharp, occasionally fierce, critical intelligence. She examines utopias,

and approaches to utopia, in terms of content, form and function. Thus one can look at the good society portrayed, the mode in which it is revealed, and the purposes it serves. Armed with this threefold distinction Levitas begins to re-map utopia. Like Kumar she finds the field resistant to classification. Thus in an examination of earlier commentaries she has to admit that 'on the whole' these are liberal humanist, and this tradition 'tends to focus' on definitions in terms of form. Her main focus is on functional definitions, with most emphasis on the Marxist tradition, and a series of incisive chapters on specific thinkers or groups of thinkers. Her overall conclusion is that the essence of utopia is desire – 'the desire for a different, better way of being'. She accepts that this leaves the boundaries of utopia vague, but that definitions such as the one proposed by Kumar are simply too restrictive. She polemicises against notions such as 'a utopian impulse' or 'a utopian mentality' with one bad argument, that they point 'towards the existence ... of some ultimate, universal utopia' and one much better, that they theoretically foreclose on the social and historical variability of desire. The whole work is a fine contribution to the task of conceptual clarification.



Levitas says that Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* 'cannot properly be ignored in any discussion of utopia'. With the publication of a translation of *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (*Heritage of Our Times*), the English-speaking world has a further instalment of Bloch's utopian Marxism. The first edition of the original text dates from 1935, and therefore predates *The Principle of Hope*, but this translation is of an updated and expanded edition of the work published in 1962. Some of the essays on Expressionism are available elsewhere in English, as is part of the section on 'Non-Contemporaneity and Obligation to Its Dialectic'. Anyone who has struggled through Bloch's other works will know what to expect from this text: page after long page of opaque metaphor, untranslatable German puns, obscure neologisms, and windy rhetoric. On occasions the desire to fling the book out of the window was very strong. What stayed my hand was a genuine gold-bearing seam (to use one of Bloch's happier metaphors) of intellect and insight. Bloch provides one of the most profound analyses of utopianism to be found in any language.

Heritage of Our Times is essentially an explanation of the rise of fascism in Germany. It does this by showing how fascism was able to mobilise the hopes and aspirations of diverse classes. The book therefore contains an anatomy of the dream world of, particularly, the peasantry and the petite bourgeoisie. These (the best) sections are to be found in Parts I ('Employees and Diversion') and II ('Non-Contemporaneity and Intoxication'); Part III ('Upper Middle Classes, Objectivity and Montage') contains an analysis of various cultural forms (music, philosophy, literature, drama, etc.).

Although adopting a scathing, even snooty, tone towards what he calls 'the little man', Bloch does not adopt the Marxist commonplace of denouncing this mentality in its entirety as 'false consciousness'. Instead he sees such consciousness as a mixture of dross and treasure, and as a product of 'non-contemporaneity'. 'Non-contemporaneity' is Bloch's belief that many individuals, whole classes in fact, are not entirely contemporary since they contain within themselves residues from earlier eras:

Not all people exist in the same Now. They do so only externally, through the fact that they can be seen today. But they are thereby not yet living at the same time with the others.

They rather carry an earlier element with them; this interferes. Depending on where someone stands physically, and above all in terms of class, he has his times. Older times than the modern ones continue to have an effect in older strata...

Amongst these residues are genuinely utopian and subversive elements which have never been adequately satisfied, 'the repressed matter of this not yet Past'. He criticises hyper-rationalist Marxists who have been blind to the potential of such elements, thereby leaving the field to anti-rationalist fascist co-option: 'vulgar Marxism had forgotten the inheritance of the German Peasant Wars and of German philosophy, the Nazis streamed into the vacated, originally Münzerian regions...'. Within this basic insight Bloch develops a plethora of conceptual distinctions in an attempt to provide an adequate language of analysis: internal and external contradiction, subjectively and objectively non-contemporaneous, unrefurbished past, prevented future, abstract and concrete utopia.

Clearly the Left has to become sensitive to such residues and integrate them into the struggle for socialism. However, when it comes to questions of revolutionary transformation, Bloch's work is blighted by the Marxist-Leninist vanguardism to be found in much of his work. In one section, originally appearing in a Moscow journal in 1937, he writes: 'The wish for a Führer must be the oldest of all. It exists in the relationship between child and father... . Group animals have the strongest male at their head, hunting peoples who as yet know no division of labour whatsoever choose a chief.' A little later the article continues:

The Communist Manifesto still contains no mention of leaders, or only between the lines, in the given existence of its authors as it were, of those who issued it. But as soon as the Manifesto began to be realized, the name of Lenin flashed up alongside the founding fathers of Marxism, and the appearance of Dimitrov in Leipzig was of greater help to the revolution than a thousand blatherers or speakers at meetings.

But such a strategy is not a necessary outcome of Bloch's analysis, in fact it seems at odds with the spirit of most of his other assumptions.

To conclude. It does seem to be the case that a more sophisticated approach to utopianism is emerging. The new works of Kumar and Levitas are moving beyond the mere unfocused assertion that utopianism is good for you, and attempt to probe the various complexities of the subject. The translation of earlier classics, as in the case of Bloch, is adding to this richer critical framework. The future, as utopians say, is looking bright.

Vincent Geoghegan

IN THE NAME OF REPETITION

Lacan and the Subject of Language, edited by Ellie Ragland-Sullivan and Mark Bracher, London and New York, Routledge, 1991. 226pp., \$30.00 hb, 0 415 90307 6, \$8.99 pb, 0 415 903084.

Lacan and the Human Sciences, edited by Alexandre Leupin, Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press, 1991. 191pp., \$19.95 hb, 0 8032 2894 5.

The theoretical work of Jacques Lacan and his infamous 'discovery of Freud' (a masterpiece, this, of pseudo-theoretical innovation) has had ambiguous effects upon the world of institutional psychoanalysis. On the one hand, Lacan's interpretation of Freud's texts has deeply disturbed the complacent circles of mainstream Anglo-American psychoanalysis. Through a cross-fertilization of several intellectual disciplines, Lacan powerfully argued that the 'autonomous ego' – that so-called adaptive entity posted by American ego-psychology – was by and large simply a mirage of contemporary ideology. On the other hand, the hermeticism of Lacan's writings, and particularly his late attempts to designate the 'truth' of the unconscious through the masquerade of algebra and mathematical formulas, were clear indications of the impasses and mistakes inherent in this reconceptualisation of Freud.

In social and political theory, the adoption of Lacanian thought has produced similar ambiguities. On one level it is undeniably the case that Lacan's work has been a valuable theoretical resource for analysing contemporary forms of domination. It has been employed to challenge the humanistic model of ideology as 'distorted consciousness', to question the view that subjects might ever perceive the social field in an undistorted way, and to highlight that our current notions of truth and knowledge are inadequate. Yet, on a deeper level, the recurring problem for social theory when set within Lacanian parameters is that all dimensions of human subjectivity, including the capacity for critical reflection and political resistance, become inscribed within the signifier and trapped by the Law. One major consequence of this ambiguity in Lacanian-based theoretical work has been the failure to develop plausible accounts of alternative social relations.

These ambiguities, it might be thought, indicate the need to critically rethink the whole Lacanian framework. Sadly, this has rarely been the case. Today, and at a rate faster than ever, Lacanians churn out Lacanian 'theory'. Two recent edited books of Lacanian theory amply illustrate this tendency. *Lacan and the Subject of Language*, edited by Ellie Ragland-Sullivan and Mark Bracher, and *Lacan and the Human Sciences*, edited by Alexandre Leupin, are both products of recent Lacanian conferences in the US. As is common to the extreme idealisation of the Master by Lacanian disciples, the reader is informed early on of the 'groundbreaking work' developed at these conferences, of the 'large and captivated audiences', and of the 'immense complexity' of Lacanian formulations (a political warning, if ever there was one, to potential questioners of Lacanian doctrine).

To be sure, among the contributors are many highly established names in Lacanian circles. They include Jacques-Alain Miller, Stuart Schneiderman, Jane Gallop, and Slavoj Žižek, just to mention a few. Despite this eminence, however, the Lacanian formulas that pass for theory are trotted out just the same. Randomly selected, here are just a few: 'the signifier is that which represents the subject for another signifier'; 'the analyst is a master signifier supposed to know'; 'the subject of the signifier

is lived as the *objet à* at the level of jouissance'; and 'lack is the human cause which generates efforts to suture lack'.

What is ultimately most depressing about the repetition of these Lacanian 'formulas' is that they attribute a full-blooded repetition to the nature of the psyche itself. It is as if having linked repetition to the 'death of the subject', the Lacanians are unable to understand that we could not even see repetition as a psychical state if it were not for our capability of non-repetition – the capacity of the psyche for new thoughts, representations, images. Lacanian theory, however, blankly refuses to acknowledge these creative dimensions of human subjectivity. Instead, it simply condemns the subject to an eternal repetition, misrecognition, dis-being.

One of the most striking features of these two collections is the persistent failure of the respective authors to engage in any way with the substantive and logical difficulties of Lacan's thought. A useful example in this respect is Lacan's early account of 'specular identity'. Almost all the contributors emphasise the centrality of the 'mirror stage' to the constitution, and consequent misrecognition, of the self. Situating the 'I' in a line of fiction, the Lacanian argument is that the imaginary order is brought into existence only after the self is *reflected* as an object. On this view, the perception of the 'self' reflected in the surface of an other is inseparable from a misrecognition of our true subjecthood. In short, the small infant in the 'mirror' jubilantly imagines itself to possess a unity and completeness that it actually lacks – the 'truth' of the subject being the disunity of its bodily drives.

While it is undeniable that Freud viewed misrecognition as internally tied to ego-formation, the Lacanian reformulation of this process encounters a number of logical problems. For example, how does the individual subject recognise or identify itself from its mirror-image? How, exactly, does it cash in on this conferring of 'selfhood'? The problem here is that surely for an individual to begin to recognise itself in the 'mirror' it must *already* possess the imaginary capacities for identification and representation; what Freud named psychical reality.

These objections to Lacan's theory of an inescapable misrecognition of selfhood are hardly new. When Cornelius Castoriadis first pointed to the antinomies of Lacan's specular logic some twenty years ago, his was then a lone voice in poststructuralist Paris. But, since that time, extensive critiques of Lacan's theory have been developed by, among others, Jean Laplanche in psychoanalysis, Manfred Frank in philosophy, and, via a complex reworking of Lacanian themes, Julia Kristeva in literary theory. For these reasons, it is surely incomprehensible that the Lacanians should keep blindly repeating that the self is always subjected to misrecognition – unless we understand this as some form of negation, as a last ditch effort to hold firm to their faltering 'logic'.

Many Lacanians, of course, would claim to have a kind of solution to these problems. It was precisely in order to understand what motivates the subject to search for *particular* mirrored-images, the Lacanians would no doubt point out, that Lacan introduced the concept of the *objet a*. Indeed, in Ellie Ragland-Sullivan's essay 'Stealing Material' (which appears in the volume edited by Leupin) this notion of unconscious objects is understood as causative of both imaginary referents and identifications. According to Ragland-Sullivan, the *objets a* may

comprise any part of the subject (breast, gaze, lips, phallus, voice) that *fail* to be mirrored. The important point about such objects, she argues, is that they are allied to the function of lack and serve to provide a representational lining of subjectivity. The *objet a*, in short, *causes* certain imaginary fantasies that 'cover over' that gap which is at the heart of human subjectivity.

Yet it is not hard to see, in my view, that formulations such as these are still unsatisfactory. Lacan's account of the *objet a* renders the unconscious imaginary merely a derivative realm. To parody this case somewhat: how can a lacking object cause the imaginary to form certain images and representations? Where does the unconscious imaginary get this representational capacity from? Surely it cannot be from the lacking object itself, either specularised or repressed, since this would do away with the notion of psychical reality entirely. The problem here is that the Lacanians have simply got things the wrong way round. The lacking object itself can only come to exist *as* lacking to the extent that it is invested with unconscious desire. The first part-object which is privileged in psychoanalytic theory, the breast, is at once present *and* absent (or at least always potentially absent). This first object, and all subsequent object-loss, can only be constituted for the individual through an original relation to the unconscious. But having bracketed the unconscious to those secondary formations of language and symbolic residues, the Lacanians have no coherent way of conceptualising this. Instead, they reduce the imaginary to little more than a 'sideshow' – always and everywhere suturing that lack in the subject's being.

Lacan's contribution to psychoanalytic theory in the English-speaking world, it is often argued, has been under-appreciated because of the concern over the nature of Lacanian clinical practice. (Lacan was expelled from the International Psycho-Analytical Association for introducing 'short analytic sessions'; which often consisted of no more than a few minutes.)

The reasons for questioning the benefits of Lacanian clinical practice, I think, are certainly valid if the contributions in the volume edited by Ragland-Sullivan and Bracher are any indica-

tion of the current state of things. In his essay 'Language: Much Ado About What?', Jacques-Alain Miller argues that it is because of our concern and preoccupation with signifiers – our 'ado' about language – that some people go to see psychoanalysts in the first place. But what are exactly the patient's reasons, one might be left wondering, for ever seeing a Lacanian analyst about this 'ado'? For, according to Miller, 'to speak is always to speak about nothing'. Having revealed that nothingness structures our language, and hence our reality, the only thing that becomes clear in Miller's article is why Lacanians actually run 'short sessions'. If the subject is in any event condemned to dis-being and lack, why bother to drag it out for the 50-minute psychoanalytic hour?

In Russell Grigg's essay 'Signifier, Object, and the Transference', which is by far the most impressive contribution to the collection, a sustained argument is developed about the possibilities of reconciling the subject to its own misrecognition. Grigg contends that psychoanalysis is not about 'moral re-education' – as it has so become in the hands of certain analysts – but is about 'the absence of control and direction'; it should encourage the patient to reject the analyst as a 'Master signifier' and to confront the painful 'lack' of desire itself.

Despite the cogency of these remarks within Lacanian terms, however, Grigg's paper reveals, almost in spite of itself, that Lacanianism is a static doctrine. It has nothing to say about the relation between the unconscious and conscious self-identity, since the latter is ruled out as mere imaginary fantasy. It has nothing to say about the project of critically reflecting upon unconscious representations and affects, and of seeking to *alter* their relation to consciousness. In one sense, of course, evaluating Lacanian theory in such terms is to invite disappointment. How could it make a contribution to these matters – indeed, how could the Lacanian analyst ever make an active and creative *interpretation* – when its own theoretical base rules this out *a priori*. Lacanian theory and practice, as these volumes testify, has succumbed to the very destructive psychic processes which it should be concerned to comprehend.

Anthony Elliott

REIFICATION

Arpad Kadarkay, *Georg Lukács: Life, Thought, and Politics*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1991. xv + 538pp., £25.00 hb, 1 55786 1145.

Georg Lukács (1885–1971) had an extraordinary life as a philosopher, literary critic, and (between 1919 and 1929) one of the leaders of the Hungarian Communist movement. There is still no adequate biography; although the main facts of his life are known; and there are excellent studies of particular aspects of his thought, e.g. by Michael Löwy, and by István Mészáros (whose *Lukács' Concept of Dialectic* contains fifty pages of biographical data). His adherence to Marxism came relatively late and relatively suddenly. In December 1918 he joined the Communist Party, and during the months of the Hungarian Commune of 1919 he served as Commissar of Education and Culture. At the same time he was a political commissar at the war front. A frail bespectacled figure in plus fours and green stockings, he stunned the soldiers by strolling along the top of the trench ignoring the hail of bullets from the Czech side; he also had deserters shot.

His most famous work, *History and Class Consciousness*, appeared in 1923. In spite of being condemned at the time by the

President of the Comintern, it had an enormous influence on 'Western Marxism', and European thought generally. It is particularly impressive in foregrounding the theme of reification in Marxist thought, at a time when Marx's 1844 Manuscripts were not known. In it Lukács argues that dialectical method embraces the historicity of human practice, the self-reflective nature of dialectic, the category of social totality, and the critique of all forms of reified consciousness.

As punishment for advocating 'popular front' politics before Stalin was ready for it, Lukács was 'cominterned' in Moscow, and began a complicated career of intellectual production and obligatory self-criticism. The 1844 Manuscripts were discovered in time to inform the last part of his homage to Hegel: *The Young Hegel*. Although Löwy thinks this work is a symptom of Lukács's 'reconciliation' with Stalinist reality, it cannot be denied that it enormously enriches our understanding of Hegel and Marx.

Lukács returned to Hungary after the war; but he held high office only briefly, as Minister of Culture in Nagy's ill-fated government of 1956. After its overthrow he refused to make any

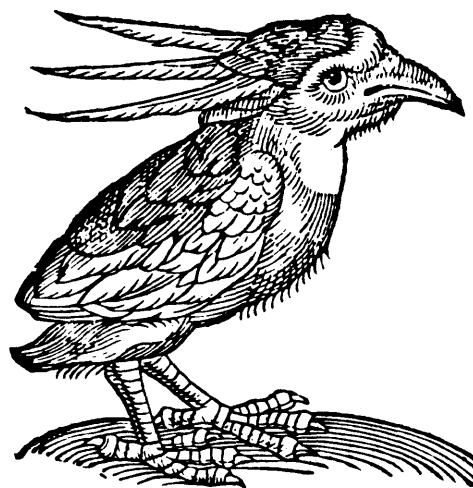
more 'self-criticisms'. Thus it is important to understand that the 1967 Preface is perfectly sincere in its adumbration of defects in *History and Class Consciousness*.

Unfortunately for us, of his last major work, *Towards an Ontology of Social Being*, only three chapters have appeared in English; some obscure dispute over rights seems to have permanently stalled the process.

The dust jacket of Kadarkay's book carries puffs from a trio of luminaries: Eagleton ('magisterial study'); McLellan ('a splendid achievement'); and Kolakowski ('the best'). I can see why Kolakowski liked it, because it fits in with his anti-communist prejudices. But I am a bit surprised at Eagleton's endorsement; for the book is 'magisterial' only in that it is very big. The author has certainly spent the midnight hour in the Lukács archive transcribing letters (sometimes without getting explicit permission from writers to reproduce extracts, I happen to know). But, in spite of the author's detailed factual research, I found the result rather disappointing. In fact, the subtitle (Life, Thought, Politics) is misleading. There is a lot on the 'Life'; something on politics, something on literary criticism; and virtually nothing on philosophy. Thus you will learn little of Georg Lukács's thought here (it is symptomatic that the *Ontology* gets only half a page, and that on his students' dissatisfaction with it). On the other hand, you will become very well informed about the love affairs of a generation of Hungarian intellectuals.

In approaching Lukács's works, Kadarkay employs that most irritating method of intellectual biography: psychologising reductionism. All Lukács's work, it seems, expresses his 'inner drama'. So how come those having good relations with fathers and straightforward love-lives find it so valuable and challenging? The framework of analysis is primarily ethical. Thus Lukács's political commitment is interpreted in Dostoevskyan terms as a decision to embrace 'the dialectic of evil'. Ludicrously, we are told that the key to *History and Class Consciousness* is that St. Augustine 'exerted a powerful influence on Lukács'. Given this, it is no surprise to learn that the proletariat is cognitively privileged because of its 'suffering'.

Many people are said here to have 'profoundly influenced' Lukács: but not, bizarrely enough, Marx! 'Reading Marx one gains insight into Shaw. But reading Marx offers little insight into Lukács.' (Modelling myself on my author now) I speculate that this verdict is not unconnected with the fact that Kadarkay is himself entirely innocent of any knowledge of Marx. This makes



him peculiarly unsuited to explaining Lukács's contribution to Marxism, of course. Wisely, he does not try, restricting himself to the usual platitudes about the rediscovery of Hegel in Marx.

The narrative grip of the book is a bit uncertain; and important events (e.g. the outbreak of World War II) are elided. But something worse happens with the book's treatment of the Lukács-Sartre debates after the War. No punches were pulled on either side – as may be seen in Lukács's 'Existentialism or Marxism' (available in G. Novack, ed., *Existentialism versus Marxism*, 1966). Even when, in 1957, Sartre attempted a juncture with Marx (in *The Problem of Method*, Methuen, 1963), modern Marxism in general, and Lukács in particular, got a lot of stick. Although in 1956 Lukács had made sharp criticisms of Stalinism's 'sectarian subjectivism', Sartre recognised this only in a grudging way by writing: 'It is not by chance that Lukács ... has found in 1956 the best definition of this frozen Marxism. Twenty years of practice give him all the authority necessary to call this pseudo-philosophy a voluntarist idealism' (p. 28).

However, Lukács was targeted for somewhat accidental reasons. According to Mészáros, in February 1956 Sartre had contrasted the deplorable state of Marxism in the French CP with Lukács's achievement: 'the only one in Europe to explain from their causes the movements of contemporary thought'. But Sartre's attitude changed sharply in 1957 after Lukács's release from the Rumanian castle where the former Nagy government was held. Sartre mistakenly believed that Lukács had gone to join the Kadar régime! Hence in the draft of *Method* that appeared in *Les Temps Modernes* Lukács as a person, and as an intellectual, is traduced. In late 1957 Mészáros reported to Lukács that Sartre 'expressed regret for it, saying that he was misled and would correct the offensive remarks'. He expressed willingness to resume dialogue: and Lukács replied to Mészáros that such an intellectual rapprochement 'should be taken seriously'. But nothing came of it. Indeed, while the mistakes were eliminated from the 1960 publication of *Method*, it is disappointing that Sartre did not bother to find a more deserving target: the passage quoted above remained. Kadarkay's treatment of all this is muddled; and into the bargain he *misquotes* the passage as 'his frozen Marxism' (p. 446).

To conclude, this is the 'life' without the 'thought'. What is needed now is a full intellectual biography, showing just why Georg Lukács was – and here I agree with the book – 'the greatest Marxist intellectual of the twentieth century'.

Chris Arthur



LANGUAGE? WHAT LANGUAGE?

David Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* (paperback edition), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991. 472pp., £14.95, 0 521 42443 7

David Holdcroft, *Saussure: Signs, System and Arbitrariness*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991. 180pp., £25.00 hb, 0 521 32618, £8.95 pb, 0 521 33918.

The great leap forward in twentieth-century philosophy, they often tell us, was – in Gustav Bergmann's lucky phrase – the 'linguistic turn'. Instead of minds and ideas and world-views, philosophers started talking about sentences and words and texts. The linguistic turn has, however, meant a great variety of things. Some have listened out for the nuances of Greek or English or German (Austin, Heidegger); others have taken translatability into some favourite language – predicate calculus, for example, or 'ordinary' English – as a touchstone of intellectual propriety (Quine, Strawson); others have taken language in general as the fundamental institution of human society, and therefore the source (for better or worse) of moral and political norms (Lacan, Habermas). And so on, and on, and on: the only thing the linguistic turn lacks is a clear and unified concept of language.

There could hardly be a better means of confronting the question of the identity of language than David Crystal's *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*. It is not an encyclopedia in the usual sense, but a single-author systematic survey, presenting a treasure-house of information about, amongst other things, the languages of the world; language structure in all its aspects; speech, writing and signing; language and the brain; language-learning; and the politics of language. It is not till the end of this magnificent survey that Crystal gets round to the question of the definition of language; and his starting point, which philosophers might do well to take as theirs, is that it is simply 'what this encyclopedia is about'.

Of course, the philosophers may say that they are not interested in particular historical manifestations of language, but in language as such. The distinction they rely on here is the one which was worked on by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, and made into the cornerstone of his doctrines: the *langage*, or the 'faculty of speech' in general, and *langue*, the 'social product' which constitutes such institutions as English or Sanskrit or Tagalog.

Saussure is therefore an essential figure for philosophy's problems about its relation to language. But which Saussure? After his death in 1913, his attempt to give a scientific basis to linguistics was continued by Trubetzkoy, Jakobson and the rest of the 'Prague circle'. But apart from that, he was largely ignored. He was never a canonical figure in American linguistics, and Chomsky sees him as representing the 'naive view' that a language is 'a sequence of expressions corresponding to an amorphous sequence of concepts' – precisely the view, in other words, that Chomskyan transformational grammar was to overthrow.

In France, however, Saussure was belatedly adopted as a master, not only in linguistics but in philosophy, psychoanalysis, and the social sciences as well. It seems to have begun in the 1940s, when Merleau-Ponty would give general summaries of 'what we have learned from Saussure', without referring specifically to any of his formulations. 'What we have learned from Saussure,' he said, 'is that, taken singly, signs do not signify anything, and that each one of them does not so much express a

meaning as mark a divergence of meaning between itself and other signs.' Furthermore, 'Saussure has the great merit of having taken the step which liberates history from historicism'; and above all, he had adopted 'the perspective of the speaking subject which lives in its language'. Merleau-Ponty's Saussure, in other words, was enunciating from beyond the grave the positions which Merleau-Ponty was actually struggling to formulate for himself.

But then there was structuralism. The structuralists' analyses of social, psychic and artistic formations as uncentred and transient articulations of permanent elements, though devised partly in opposition to Merleau-Ponty, also presented themselves as posthumous doctrines of Saussure. The structuralists took over the distinctions between *langue* and *parole*, and synchrony and diachrony, and fastened on a passage where Saussure had ruminated about a future science which might explain 'the life of signs within social life'. He did not predict what this science would say, but it had 'a right to exist', and Saussure devised a name – *semiology* – to be ready for it when it arrived. Lévi-Strauss and other structuralists regarded themselves as fulfilments of this prophecy; and its apostles treated Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* as proof of the legitimacy of their own claims. In particular, they liked to refer to Saussure's statement that 'in language there are only differences without positive terms', and to brandish the last sentence of the *Course*: 'the only true object of linguistics is language (*la langue*) in itself and for itself.' Armed with Saussure's idea of structure, so they thought, they would expel the humanistic idea of the subject from social theory.

The Saussure of the structuralist anti-humanists was a fantastic fabrication, however. For one thing, Saussure never talked about 'structure'; and for another he actually referred rather frequently to the point of view of the 'speaking subject'. Moreover, his famous concluding sentence was written by the editors who compiled the text of the *Course* shortly after Saussure's death, and has no basis in the notes from which they were working.

In fact the text of the *Course* is itself something of an imposture. The editors compiled it on the basis of the course of lectures that Saussure gave in 1910–11; but in the process of editing they changed both the proportions between the parts and the order of exposition. Saussure's intended conclusion on 'linguistic value' was secreted in the middle of the book, and the extensive discussions of the variousness of natural languages, which had occupied the whole of the first half of the course, were removed to a relatively brief section – Part Four – on 'geographical linguistics'. The result was to make Saussure seem a far less eclectic and pluralistic thinker than he really was.

It was not as though people read the *Course* very much, though. It is not a particularly long book, or difficult to read; but for some reason it has exerted its influence almost entirely through confident but frequently inaccurate or even disingenuous paraphrases. It would be a good idea, therefore, to turn back from the summaries to the book itself. And anyone who does so will find in David Holdcroft a very valuable guide. His central chapters deal with the main theses of the *Course*, giving full references to the text and clear explanations of the strange complexities of its history. Then, in the best traditions of analytic philosophy, Holdcroft subjects the doctrines he has identified to punishing tests for consistency, ambiguity, and general empirical plausibility. Such venerable principles as the arbitrariness of

the sign, the linearity of the signifier, and the distinctions between *langue* and *parole*, come out of it all looking extremely forlorn. And the doctrine that a linguistic system contains differences without 'positive terms' may have had its day altogether.

Saussure, rather like Freud, was amongst other things a great inventor of metaphors. Holdcroft takes these seriously, and gives clear diagnoses of their limitations and incompatibilities. Is a language (*langue*) supposed to be like Morse code, or like a symphony? Saussure offers both analogies, but their implications are radically different, as Holdcroft shows; and the same applies to Saussure's attempts to explain 'linguistic value' by reference both to money and to the waves produced by fluctuating air-pressure on the sea. And then, if a language is (as Saussure often claims) like a game of chess, how are we supposed to account for its changes over time? (Saussure is perhaps a little less confused than Holdcroft alleges, for his discussion covers two themes in a way that may get lost in translation: the game of chess in general – *le jeu* – whose rules have altered over the centuries; and a particular game – *une partie* – which, however long it may drag on, will presumably be governed by the same rules from beginning to end.)

Holdcroft succeeds in making Saussure's prophecy about a coming science of semiology look pretentious and absurd. But he does not conclude that 'Saussure's overall project ship-

wrecks'; on the contrary. He sheds no tears at all for the 'structuralist and post-structuralist philosophers' who have, as he sees it, built upon the opaque and unnecessary idea of 'differences without positive terms'. But he raises a cheer for Saussure's sustained campaign for the view that it is pointless to engage in historical and comparative studies of language without grounding them in studies of individual languages as systems. It takes an effort of historical imagination, as he points out, to see that this argument inaugurated 'a radically new perspective in the study of language, a veritable Copernican revolution', and that without it the science of 'structural linguistics' would have been inconceivable. Holdcroft's work might equally, however, lead to a different conclusion: namely that Saussure's dichotomies, even as they break down, and his marvellous analogies, when they careen out of control, provide some insight into precisely those aspects of language – the poetic, for example, or the whole range of issues garnered in Crystal's *Encyclopedia* – from which structural linguistics abstracts. What Holdcroft regards quite negatively, as the unfortunate theoretical excesses of the *Course*, can also be taken as an eloquent if unwilling witness to the fact that what languages have in common with other sign-systems, and indeed what they have in common with each other, may not be their most interesting part.

Jonathan Rée

POLITICS AFTER METAPHYSICS

Michael Kelly, ed., *Hermeneutics and Critical Theory in Ethics and Politics*, Cambridge (Mass.) and London, The MIT Press, 1990. xi + 285pp., £24.75 hb, 0 262 11154 3, £12.50 pb, 0 262 61066 3.

The extended confrontation between Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jürgen Habermas over the nature and limits of hermeneutical understanding and the character of social criticism may have begun in the 1960s, but its reverberations continue today. This is strongly evinced by the twelve essays contained in this volume, which focus on the meaning of 'critique' and its relationship to ethical and political practice. If little overall unanimity emerges on this question, the exercise remains valuable because it clarifies what is at stake and contributes to the 'self-understanding of the principles, methodology, and goals of contemporary ethical and political debate', as Michael Kelly explains in his useful introduction. The ultimate success of such a project is imperative, given the continuing fragmentation of contemporary society into seemingly incommensurable world-views and the virtual abandonment of politically-engaged critique on the part of broad sectors of the intelligentsia. As such, the commitment on the part of the contributors to this volume both to diagnose the ills of modern society and to develop the methodological groundwork for the articulation of a coherent vision of the 'good society' is very welcome indeed.

The central focus of this collection concerns the recent controversy about 'communicative' or 'discourse' ethics, particularly the issue of its 'universalisability'. In her stimulating contribution, Seyla Benhabib dismisses the argument voiced by Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor and others that a formalist ethics cannot possibly account for the contextual character of moral action within everyday social life. She suggests that these objections can be avoided, but only if the conversational model

developed by Jürgen Habermas is reconstructed along somewhat different lines. Benhabib asserts that universalism must be subjected to certain constraints – specifically, by the interlocking principles of 'universal respect' and 'egalitarian reciprocity' – if the formal process of the adjudication of validity-claims is to be conjoined with particularistic considerations of moral value. The adoption of these (non-transcendental or 'situated') principles encourages the 'continuation of ordinary moral conversation, in which we seek to come to terms with and appreciate the other's point of view'. Michael Walzer disputes this, asserting that any ethical position which relies on a 'constructed philosophical conversation' (including Habermas but also such American neo-liberals as Rawls and Bruce Ackerman) hypostatizes idealised speech at the expense of 'real talk'. It is only through the medium of such real talk, he argues, that substantive debate can be engaged in. Such a dialogue can only be constrained by conventional factors operating within particular forms of life, and therefore a genuinely free dialogue can never be subject to the arbitrary dictates of an *a priori* conversational design, whatever the emancipatory intent: 'Real talk is unstable and restless, hence it is ultimately more radical than ideal speech.' In her brief reply to Walzer's article, Georgia Warnke makes the valuable point that the later Habermas abandons the hyper-rationalist model of the 'ideal speech situation' and instead adheres to the notion that the procedural assessment of validity-claims is 'built into' the very structure of pragmatic communicative action itself. Although Warnke suggests that this invalidates the central thrust of Walzer's argument, she does concur that some conception of 'real talk' must be retained in a discourse-based ethics if we want to ensure 'the rationality of our political discourse without eliminating the diverse perspectives that make it possible'. (In a separate piece, interestingly enough, Warnke defends Walzer's pluralist theory of justice against the criticisms of

Rorty and others.) In his contribution, Habermas criticises the psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg for utilizing the concept of 'ideal role taking' or empathic reversal as the main basis for developing a moral point of view. Such a position fails to acknowledge that individual well-being ultimately depends upon the integrity of the 'shared life context': 'the perspective complementing that of equal treatment of individuals is not benevolence but *solidarity*.' Reiterating Warnke's argument, Habermas asserts that the barriers to the realisation of such solidarity (and the universal morality it implies) can only be dissolved by recourse to 'the conditions of symmetry and the expectations of reciprocity characteristic of every ordinary communicative practice'.

Another debate centres on the question of universalisability in terms of political 'will formation' rather than communicative ethics as such. Carol C. Gould argues that universalisability (or some analogous conception of a 'common interest') is possible, but that Habermas's restriction of universality to the dialogical model is untenable. What is needed, in her opinion, is a conception of shared interest which is grounded in the forms of practical, shared activity that occur in all domains of social life. The critical theorist Albrecht Wellmer also defends a modified version of universalism with respect to the ideal of communal freedom. His position is that the 'positive' communal freedoms espoused by radical critics of capitalism must be premised upon 'negative' individual freedoms enshrined in liberty rights. The latter must be continually 'translated' into the former in order to realise a genuine ethical life, but there will always be some tension between them. To believe in some ultimate reconciliation between communal and individual freedoms is for Wellmer 'utopian' in the pejorative sense: 'The end of utopia ... should be understood as modernity entering its postmetaphysical stage.' Agnes Heller argues against rooting an ethical theory in some abstract conception of universality or shared membership, asserting that all we can have in common in the modern world is a situation of radical contingency. The desire to live an ethical life cannot be based upon *a priori* principles; goodness can only be realised through difficult existential choices on a daily basis whereby we translate contingency into 'destiny'.

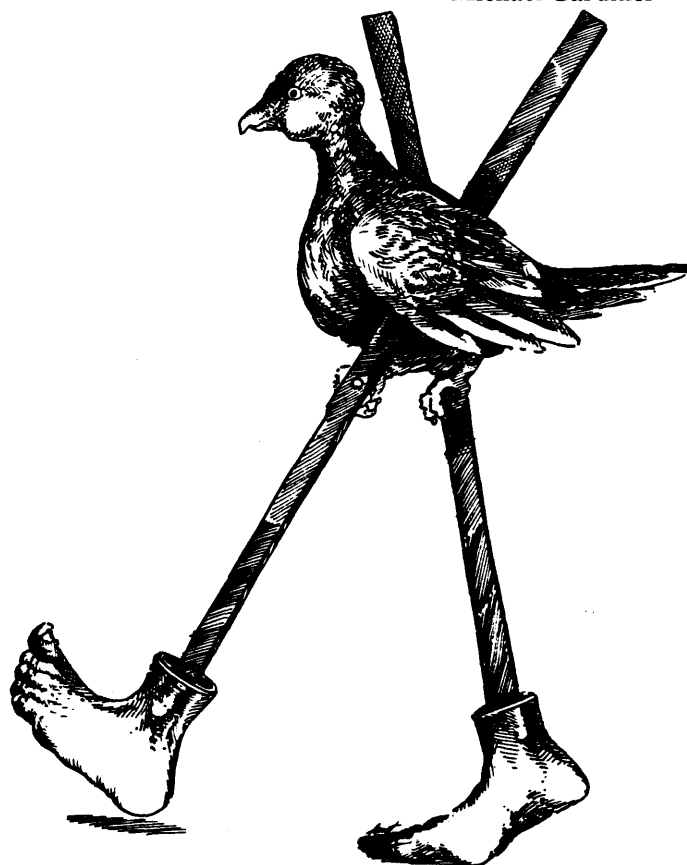
Two essays focus on the differences between Habermas and Alasdair MacIntyre on the issue of 'tradition' and its relation to critique. Both figures see philosophical ethics as both historically-situated and critical. However, for Habermas this is rooted in the universalised 'normativity' of modernity, while for MacIntyre it is 'internal' to the norms and practices of a particular tradition (which doesn't preclude the possibility of intercultural dialogue). This internal rationality, according to MacIntyre, emerges in the wake of moral crises that tend to develop within any given tradition, combined with the enhanced reflexivity this situation encourages. Michael Kelly envisages a significant *rapprochement* between their respective approaches, but only if Habermas abandons the desire to 'discover the tradition-transparent ground of moral principles'. MacIntyre, for his part, is admonished to accept that rationality within a tradition is never 'guaranteed' but is only possible if such a tradition actively strives to *resolve* rather than simply tolerate moral dilemmas and social conflict. By contrast, Kenneth Baynes rejects MacIntyre's account of the rationality of tradition and defends Habermas's attempt to combine interpretive hermeneutics and causal analysis in a higher synthesis. This is a goal that Habermas has pursued for most of his career, but Baynes's essay is useful because it charts some of Habermas's more recent reformulations of this strategy and places it in the context of a wider debate about the means and ends of rationality.

The remaining contributions fall outside the rubric of these

central debates, but remain of considerable interest nonetheless. In a highly provocative essay, Adi Ophir challenges the standard view that a hermeneutic ethics should be based on the principle of the just distribution of goods, arguing instead that social criticism must aim to decipher and analyse the distribution of *evil*. Some evils cannot be avoided, and some can be converted into a socially-defined good (by voluntary suffering, etc.), but in a just society 'all socially preventable suffering is prevented'. The converse is a situation of 'radical evil' (e.g. Nazi Germany), in which the principle of 'convertibility' is not the outcome of discursive negotiation but is eliminated altogether. Thomas McCarthy's 'Politics of the Ineffable' launches a devastating attack on the currently-fashionable 'politics of deconstruction'. Astutely characterising the essentials of deconstructionism's philosophico-political programme, he convincingly argues that by abandoning any notion of 'positive critique' (which, as he is keen to stress, does not necessarily entail foundationalism), Derrida and his followers have embraced a version of 'politics' that is incoherent at best and downright pernicious at worst. Finally, Rudolf Makkreel attempts to derive a theory of critical interpretation from Kant's third Critique with the goal of reflexively mediating between the three spheres of the aesthetic, the teleological and the moral.

Generally written with verve and precision, the essays that comprise *Hermeneutics and Critical Theory* represent a highly successful attempt to bring together three distinct intellectual traditions – contemporary hermeneutics, post-Frankfurt School critical theory, and Anglo-American political theory – in order to rethink the character of ethico-political critique and its relation to existing debates over rationality, modernity, and philosophical reflection. Given the sophistication of these contributions and the urgency of the task of developing a genuinely democratic and participatory politics in these 'postmetaphysical' times, this volume deserves widespread attention and careful scrutiny by philosophers, social and political theorists alike.

Michael Gardiner



FRICION

Sarah Kofman, *Freud and Fiction*, translated by Sarah Wykes, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1991. ix + 196pp., £29.50 hb, 0 7456 0627 x.

Freud and Fiction brings together four essays originally published between 1969 and 1974 and revised for publication in book form in 1974. Kofman reads Freud reading Empedocles, Jensen's *Gradiva*, Hebbel's *Judith and Holofernes* and Hoffman's *The Sandman*. Her preface 'On the Analytical Novel', added in 1974, reads Aristotle's reading of the pre-Socratics in order to emphasise the philosophy–psychoanalysis crossover by examining a text 'paradigmatic of all philosophical interpretation'. The outcome is as predictable as that of most paradigms: 'Aristotle's metaphors constitute a secondary text within the text which undermines its authority and its seriousness by introducing an element of play into it.' In short, Kofman's readings are largely restatements of a deconstructionist vulgate which repetition is beginning to render wearisome. She reads with subtlety and erudition, carefully tracing the possible parallels between Empedocles's dualism and Freud's later theory of the drives and examining in exhausting detail fictional texts which clearly mean a great deal to Freud. Ultimately, however, the sophistication palls and one is left with a dismal feeling of *déjà-lu*. The detailed readings begin to look like theoretical myopia rather than insight. References to the privileging of writing over speech, to the endless supplementarity of writing and to letters which are meant to be read even if they do not reach their destinies, begin to look like the tropes of a rather tired rhetoric. The one thing that cannot be deconstructed, it would appear, is the foundational authority of Derrida, whose name is confined to footnotes but whose presence is palpable throughout.

Freud and Fiction belongs with the 'theory as fiction' discourse which has established enclaves within literary and philosophical studies. Psychoanalysis is the privileged locus for this discourse. Perhaps it is also the privileged victim. This is a psychoanalysis which has become disembodied, in which the only affect is the satisfaction of completing a particularly complex word game. Freud was naive enough to believe that psychoanalysis had at least something to do with transforming neurotic misery into ordinary human unhappiness. He was clearly wrong; its true destiny was to become part of an aesthetic-philosophical discourse which is at home in the seminar room but not the consulting room. Kofman alleges, inevitably, that Freud's texts lead to the deconstruction of metaphysics. In this and similar readings they lead, rather, to the reconstruction of a precious mannerism.

Yet some traditional vices survive: characters 'experience' and authors 'intend' meanings. No doubt such notations can be read as a subversive blurring of the real–fictional divide, but they can also be seen as stubborn survivals of a form of literary criticism which was commonly supposed to have died out with formalism. On the basis of the arguments put forward here, one reading is as valid as the other.

The translator copes well, if at times rather literally, with a difficult text. The only real problem is one of a slight misrecognition. Freud wrote, or Kofman has him write, *le roman analytique*. If this ambiguous term is translated as 'novel' rather than 'romance', the important allusion to Freud's paper on 'Family Romances' is unfortunately obscured.

David Macey

STRUCTURATIONS

Christopher G. A. Bryant and David Jary (eds), *Giddens' Theory of Structuration: A Critical Appreciation*, London and New York, Routledge, 1991. 252pp., £12.99 pb, 0 415 00797 6.

Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity, 1990. xi + 186pp., £9.95, 0 745 60923 6.

Barbara Adam, *Time and Social Theory*, Cambridge, Polity, 1990. 192pp., £29.95 hb, 0 745 60740 3.

Anthony Giddens is a phenomenon. His published writings have grown over a decade and a half into an 'oeuvre' – voluminous, all-embracing, erudite, suggestive, pregnant with possibilities. He stands at the confluence of some major streams of modern social thought: Marxism, Critical Theory, Structural-Functionalism, Symbolic-interactionism, trying to identify some place for free human agency in social change. Marxist sociologists look on sceptically as, volume by volume, his *Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* rolls out. Others wonder how to apply his social theorising to empirical or historical material, and why he hasn't done so himself. Expressions like 'Giddensiana' and 'the Giddens industry' have surfaced to try to make out the terrain he is traversing.

It is natural to look to Bryant and Jary's collection for help and guidance. On an exegetic level, they provide it. Much useful work has gone into the book, which takes as the core of Giddens's thought his ontology of 'structuration': the process whereby human action at specific points of the social structure amends that structure while reproducing it. There are thorough, if rather stodgy, analyses of the theory and of its roots in both Europe and North America, with numerous summaries of the comments of others to help the reader into the luxuriant corpus of Giddens's own work. There is a comprehensive bibliography of that work and of writings about it. There is critical commentary from a group of theoretically inclined British academic sociologists: Ron Boyne, Richard Kilminster, John Urry and the editors themselves. To end, Giddens contributes a prospective on his own work.

Most of the writers are admirers rather than critics of Giddens. (The exception is Ron Boyne, who accuses Giddens of 'blatant Cartesianism' – 'strong language', he claims – for retaining the notion of a 'knowledgeable social actor'). Yet, it is striking that the writers' overall tone is one of disappointment. Giddens advanced an optimistic view of the emancipatory affinity between social theory and lay social actors: 'There is no mechanism of social organisation or social reproduction identified by social analysts,' he wrote in *The Constitution of Society* (1984), 'which lay actors cannot also get to know about and actively incorporate into what they do.' Yet, these writers find little confirmation of the optimism. As Bryant points out, even social-policy analysts greeted Giddens's overtures (in his 'dialogical model' of sociology) with suspicion. Far from realising the early hopes, Urry argues that Giddens's accounts of human structuring activity have cashed out in a concentration of agency in the state. According to Jary, when Giddens substituted the 'time-space distanciation' of historically given societies for all teleological, evolutionary models of historical development, he may have excluded numerous illuminating, untried historical possibilities. Finally, for Kilminster, the structuring agent remains suspiciously close to the rational one who is traditional in sociological theory, eliding the complex of lived bonds by which human beings inhabit their understanding of the social world.

In his compact survey of the 'past, present and future' of structuration theory, Giddens himself rises breezily above the criticisms. What is fundamental in structuration, he insists, is not society and the individual (agent or otherwise), but recurrent social practices. The Enlightenment itself grasped the reflexive historicity of modern social existence. So, the self had become 'a reflexive project' long before post-modernism prematurely proclaimed the abolition of the determinate subject and the arrival of a new age. Giddens's project is precisely to show (despite Habermas's fears of colonisation by expert systems) the 'many opportunities for individual and collective organisation' which reflexivity offers. For this he promises us the 'utopian realism' of the forthcoming volume of the *Contemporary Critique*.

Post-modernism is a primary intellectual target of Giddens's thoughtful and readable essay on *The Consequences of Modernity*. It defends a 'radicalised modernity', in which the fragmentation of subjectivity and historical truth are countered by new possibilities for reflexive identity and empowerment. In setting this out, Giddens rehearses, in uncomplicated language, the features of modernity expounded in his other works: the 'disembedding' (and 're-embedding') of social practices; the high levels of risk and trust which that generates; the self as a reflexive project.

In a section resembling a trailer for future work, Giddens also explores his conception of utopian realism. Even though it dispenses with teleological guarantees about the future, it retains, he argues, the Marxian principle of pursuing only those avenues for change that are connected to 'institutionally immanent possibilities'. The very abstractness of modern systems dissolves the old dichotomy between real and utopian goals. For, we now live with the risks of vast, perpetually open systems, where utopian ideals may be advocated, provided they are tempered by realism. In this way, Giddens believes that we can attempt to steer the 'juggernaut' of modernity, even if we cannot seize hold of any unitary, teleological history.

The doubters in the Bryant and Jary collection repeat criticisms which have been often levelled against Giddens's theorising on the human agent. Some favour a deconstructive dissolution of the human subject altogether, or a switch from logical to 'sociogenetic' procedures to define the human subject afresh. But the theoretical alternatives advanced by Giddens and his critics leave considerable philosophical doubts. The basic problem seems to lie in what Giddens calls 'ontology'. By this he means the 'investigation of the nature of human action, social institutions and the interrelations between action and institutions'. According to Giddens, human action – and hence, its 'ontology', in his sociological sense – has undergone a crucial historical transformation. As modernity increased interaction between humans who were physically separated from each other, social practices were, in Giddens's term, increasingly 'disembedded' from the everyday experience of the agent. Structuration could then take place on a new plane of reality, where there was wider scope for social practices to be modified in their repetition. Agents became more free in that sense; but their freedom appears to be profoundly ambiguous. It also became *harder* to own one's social practices and *easier* to impose them from above. Giddens's account of human action still has to illuminate the ontological grounds which could make this kind of historical transformation of human agency an emancipatory one.

Giddens closes his prospective with a summary of some current research using structuration theory. Had it appeared at the time, he could well have included Adam's short, lively book. It is dedicated to Giddens for 'making time a legitimate topic of investigation for social theory'. This is a reference to Giddens's

concept of 'space-time distanciation', the process by which social practices construct and maintain zones that share the same time and space. According to Adam, one of the virtues of space-time distanciation is that – unusually amongst social theories – it has assimilated Einstein's fusion of space and time.

However, Adam wants to go much further. She directs her argument against the tendency amongst social theorists to regard all time as social time. This, she claims, rests on an out-dated Newtonian–Cartesian conception that takes natural time (and the causality associated with it) to be sequential and absolute. More advanced concepts of rhythm and entropy so qualify the contrast between natural and social time that a new synthesis has now become possible. Events that are repeated, or are acausally contemporaneous, can be shown to be compatible with the unidirectionality of natural time. Adam proposes that the experience of time is a special case of universal principles of time found throughout nature. Since both are embraced in the same orders of time, a link can be made between human experience and the material artefacts that are its indispensable real referent. Yet, Adam admits to struggling for an adequate conceptual apparatus to embrace this way of thinking. She settles provisionally upon holography, with its distinctive conceptions of the relationship of whole to parts. The central difficulty appears to be the representational dimension of human insertion into time: the seeming inability to shape and re-shape past and future in imagination. The hardest terrain to map remains the modern sense of the possibility of transformation within historical time.

Noel Parker

IMAGINATIONALITY

E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990. viii + 191pp., £5.95 pb, 0 521 40678 1.

Hobsbawm opens his enquiry into the question of nationalism by postulating the bemusement of an imaginary post-Apocalypse intergalactic historian trying to reach an understanding of nationalism in human history. But such a scenario seems rather superfluous, given the work-a-day confusion about the nature of nationalism which the contemporary observer of world events could readily be forgiven. Neil Ascherson, writing in *The Observer*, expresses the current confusion in terms of nationalism's Janus face; one side being the old-style nationalism, right-wing, brother of patriotism and protector of long-held interests, the other the expression of peoples' power, encapsulating liberationist aspirations for self-determination.

Hobsbawm's book goes some way to clearing up this confusion, providing a history of the concepts of nations and nationalism from their beginnings to the present. In so doing, he uncovers two distinct phases of nationalism, that of the liberal era, approximately 1830–1880, and a second, transformed form, under whose banner any group of people considering themselves to be a nation claim the right to self-determination. Hobsbawm brings out the distinctiveness of these two different creatures posing under the same name, showing how, in the heyday of bourgeois liberalism, the building of nations was seen as a process of expansion, the idea of 'nation as progress' being regarded as part of mankind's natural evolution. From the practice of these beliefs, he elicits three criteria for nationhood: the historic association with a current or recent state, the existence of

a long-established cultural elite, and the proven capacity for conquest. Nationalism at this time, then, considered as a unifying force, accepted and even embraced the idea that smaller nationalities and their languages were ultimately doomed to extinction.

To late twentieth-century ears, these ideas seem a long way from the later cries for self-determination in the name of ethnicity, language, religion and culture with which we are now so familiar. Hobsbawm traces the shift to the second, more recognisable form of nationalism, locating its principal characteristic as being national sentiment ground in popular roots. In the course of this, he highlights rather than fudges difficult issues such as our inevitable ignorance of the contents of the ordinary political soul, and the precise factor constituting proto-nationalism, and this honesty allows him to make revelatory comments which run counter to the now conventional wisdom about national aspirations. Notable are the observations on the relative unimportance of language and ethnicity to the question of nationhood in its infancy and the lasting centrality of an 'imagined community' in popular consciousness.

On this level, perhaps the book's main virtue lies in its charting of the changing notions of nation and nationalism according to their social and political context, thus historicising the notion itself. In this way, it provides an accessible history of a very potent idea, illuminating the relation between both of nationalism's faces. But, at the same time, it makes something of a frustrating read, as some of the more interesting comments are not as fully developed as they might be and would merit a deeper discussion. The most prominent of these is Hobsbawm's conclusion about nationalism's place at the end of the twentieth century, into which his interpretation of liberationist nationalism in the third world must be read. While his attribution of their existence to decolonization, revolution and the intervention of outside powers may in some measure be correct, and his pointing up of their aims as fundamentally internationalist trenchant, the dismissiveness of his analysis gives rather short shrift to the genuine aspirations of those movements. This is perhaps explicable in terms of his opening declaration that a writer who documents nationalism cannot be true to his subject while nurturing a belief in it. But his suspiciousness leads to a conclusion ringing with ultimacy: 'Nationalism, however powerful the emotion of being in an "imagined community", is nothing without the creation of nation-states, and a world of such states, fitting the present ethnic-linguistic criteria of nationality, is not a feasible prospect today.' At a time when struggles for independence in the name of nationalism, for whatever motive, are not only proliferating but also winning out, such an appraisal seems somewhat precipitate; perhaps this phenomenon indicates rather a third face of nationalism.

Alex Klaushofer



ETHICAL KNOWLEDGE?

Tom Sorell, *Scientism: Philosophy and the Infatuation with Science*, London, Routledge, 1991. 206pp., £35.00 hb, 0 415 03399 3.

Tom Sorell is concerned to reassess philosophy's view of the relationship between the arts and sciences in such a way as to rectify the undervaluation of the former without seeking to disparage the latter. He identifies two forms of 'scientism' – the belief that science and its methods are more valuable than those of the arts and humanities – in the history of philosophy: the relatively old form, whose antecedents are the writings of Bacon, Galileo and Descartes, and whose twentieth-century adherents are typified by the Vienna Circle; and a more recent form, which seeks to 'naturalise' philosophical problems – for example, by relocating ethics in biology, epistemology in empirical psychology, and the philosophy of mind in neuroscience. Sorell suggests that a more balanced approach occurs in the philosophy of Kant, in which the arts and sciences are both valued insofar as they contribute to human moral improvement. He thus updates Snow's disquisition on the competing 'two cultures' and asserts that a rapprochement between the two is possible in Kantian terms.

Sorell introduces the concept of scientism by explicating the programme conceived by the Vienna Circle and like-minded theorists for the 'unity of science'. By this, they meant the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the social sciences, humanities and arts in order to place them on a supposedly more scientific footing. He traces these excesses to the views of Bacon and Descartes. In his central chapter on Kant, Sorell gives an exemplarily lucid account of that philosopher's views. However, he does not make clear whether he shares Kant's theory of ethics, nor whether he subscribes to Kant's 'moral law' (the idea that individuals can rationally expect to be rewarded for their virtue) and its metaphysical corollaries (the existence of God and the immortality of the soul). For if he does not, and if it is not possible to arrive at ethical truths, then how can one evaluate the respective contributions of the arts and sciences to human moral improvement in the way that Sorell hopes Kant's theory will? If Kant's project is misguided, then perhaps there can be no 'correct' view of the relationship between the arts and sciences.

This seems to me to present an irremediable difficulty for Sorell's theory. In the following chapter, he considers heterogeneous moral criticisms of the arts and sciences which might demonstrate that they are somehow built on morally bad foundations and so cannot contribute to human improvement – for example, the view that science might make us indolent by improving the efficiency of our work, or that it puts life into a 'distressing perspective' by discrediting religious teleologies. He surmises that 'if there is a body of knowledge that tells people the difference between right and wrong and that strengthens their resolve to do only the right, it is the sort of knowledge that is required if science is not to be misused'. But what is this knowledge? Who has it and how did they come by it? If we take Sorell's 'moral objections' to science as examples of the genre, it is easy to show their relativity: indolence is a moral defect only insofar as one subscribes to some form of work-ethic; the discrediting of teleology only matters if one accepts a religious world-view. He considers Nietzsche's critique of the moral evaluation of culture and makes a peculiar remark to the effect

that anthropological study might reveal 'substantial agreement' between differing moralities. It is hard to see how there might be 'substantial agreement' between monogamy and polygamy, for instance, or between our own values and the Aztec practice of human sacrifice – hard, too, to understand why the history of humanity is marked by continuous conflict between nations, classes, races and religious groupings if there is in fact some underlying moral consensus.

Sorrell argues that the adversarial view of the relation between science and art can be overcome when human improvement is the criterion of evaluation. He sees philosophy as a mediating influence which may help to diminish the perceived

disjunction between them. He is critical of what he thinks is a more recent form of scientism in philosophy, which seeks to absorb philosophy into science, and makes a cogent critique of this tendency. In the final chapter of his well-written and extraordinarily catholic analysis, Sorrell protests against the attempt to assimilate ethics and the social sciences to natural science by 'naturalising' value – he suggests that 'it is an unpromising approach to social science as it is to morals'. All this is extremely interesting. But if the attempt to reduce the normative to the natural fails, this does not necessarily increase the likelihood of ethical knowledge which is non-naturalistic.

Gary Kitchen

IN THE SHADOWS

Peter Hulme and Ludmilla Jordanova (eds), *The Enlightenment and its Shadows*, London and New York, Routledge, 1990. viii + 232pp., £35.00 hb, 0 415 04231 3.

The editors of *The Enlightenment and its Shadows* claim that its essays present original research from an interdisciplinary perspective, concentrating 'on the written texts of the Enlightenment rather than retelling a more general history of ideas'. (Although several of the essays make good this claim, sharing the sense of 'discovery' which can arise from textual archaeology and analysis, too many of them seek their material in the penumbra cast by the textual research of other scholars.) The essays cover a diverse range of issues: Voltaire, Rousseau, Ferguson, Burke, Kant, Mercier's utopian novel *L'An 2440*, music, sexual politics in France, human rights since 1789, the authoritarian response to the Enlightenment in the nineteenth century. The shared basic premise is that, although twentieth-century readers can no longer bask in the optimism of the Enlightenment, its 'shadows have played a complex role in nineteenth- and twentieth-century society'. These 'shadows' are generated by the way Enlightenment thought was formed and informed by historical interests even as it presented its basic assumptions as transcending history.

Hulme's 'The Spontaneous Hand of Nature: Savagery, Colonialism, and the Enlightenment' demonstrates the link between colonial exploration and Enlightenment philosophy by tracing the way metaphors of discovery shaped the attitude of early Enlightenment texts towards traditional authority. Hulme sets the tone for all the essays in this collection by attempting to 'reinstall the Enlightenment discussion of "savagery" into a colonial history, ... trying to see just how [it] formed part of an extended ideological justification for colonial appropriation of non-European territories, particularly in the Americas'. The Powhatan attempt to extirpate the English colony at Jamestown in March 1622 provided an opportunity to refigure the native Americans as more like animals than noble savages. Hulme speculates that English perceptions of this event influenced a range of seventeenth-century texts, including Hobbes's account of the state of nature in *Leviathan* (1651). The intriguing, and for his contemporary readers disturbing, aspect of Hobbes's text, however, is that the distinction between European 'civilization' and native American 'savagery' is complicated by his suggestion that the European would not differ much from 'the wildest of Indians' if all the benefits of civilization were removed. In other words, 'the "savage" Americans become for the first time identical in their deepest nature with their European antagonists.

In this way savagery is lodged disconcertingly close to the crust of civilization'.

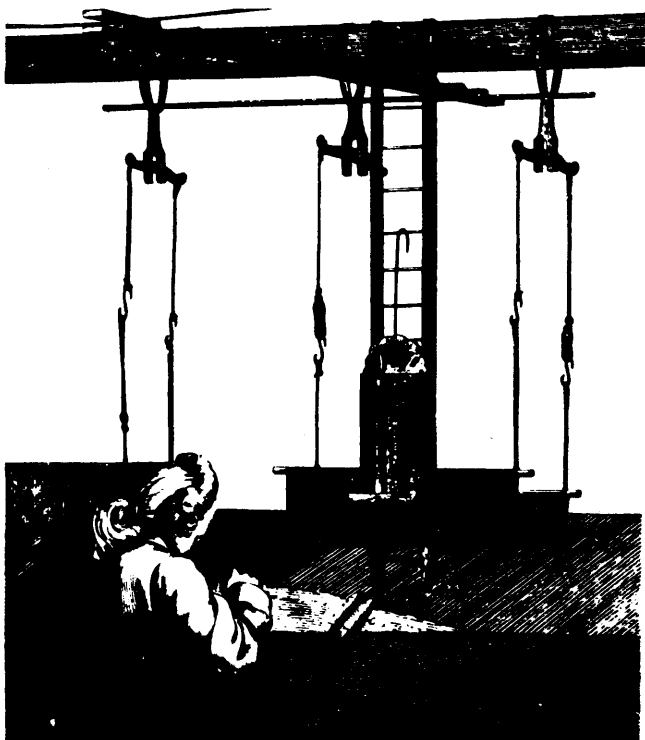
At least two of the essays in *The Shadows of the Enlightenment* explicitly foreground their own historical moment and political sympathies (and thereby become 'historical' in the sense of already seeming dated). Ted Benton's 'Adam Ferguson and the Enterprise Culture' sets out to refute Thatcherism's misappropriation of Adam Smith as a philosophical forerunner (surely one of the Enlightenment's most umbrageous shadows), and uses Ferguson's critique of Britain's developing commercial society in the eighteenth century as the basis of a critique of Thatcherism. Ferguson's rejection of 'luxury' in favour of 'the active exercise of our faculties' is characteristic of the eighteenth-century concern that 'a high development of the mechanical and commercial arts' carries with it 'attendant dangers of corruption, national ruin, and despotism, or political slavery'. For critics such as Smith and Ferguson, these dangers arise partly because the nature of the occupations which fall to the majority of the labouring classes in the division of labour tends to render them unfit to take an active part in social and political life. Ferguson's concern – and Benton makes it seem our own – is that 'a self-interested and preoccupied citizenry' will be 'incapable and unwilling to make sacrifices in defence of their liberties', and so be 'liable to lose them'. At the level of state policy, the value system of commercial society tends to concern itself 'only with preserving the security and property ... of the citizenry, without regard to the promotion of their higher faculties and virtues'. Ferguson's description of the strategy of the person who controls the executive power in such a society is implicitly offered as a salutary warning to Britain in 1990:

When he has fixed a resolution, whoever reasons or demonstrates against it is an enemy; when his mind is elated, whoever pretends to eminence, and is disposed to act for himself, is a rival. He would leave no dignity in the state, but what is dependent upon himself; no active power, but what carries the expression of his momentary pleasure. ... The tendency of his administration is to quiet every restless spirit, and to assume every function of government to himself.

Benton argues that Ferguson's critique can be reinterpreted as suggesting that 'a healthy and vital labour movement is a necessary condition for substantive democracy in the advanced commercial states'. He is disturbed, however, by the 'masculine – even militarist – cast to Ferguson's concept of the virtuous life. ... He frequently uses the word "effeminate" to characterise a

life-style corrupted by luxury and withdrawal from the exertion of public life'. Yet I would suggest that Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* needs to be read not only for its contemporary 'relevance', but in terms of its place in the discursive formations of mid eighteenth-century Britain. In this context, the figuration of luxury and virtue as feminine and masculine respectively is not an unfortunate aberration but a shaping assumption, with a complex history of meanings, in the discourse of politics and economics. Although these eighteenth-century discourses can be said to construct versions of our contemporary understandings of gender distinctions, the historical specificity of Ferguson's project, and its *differences* from our own concerns, also needs to be recognised. As well as encouraging us to find continuities between the present and the past – as Thatcherism itself sought to – we need to remain alert to the way historical differences challenge as well as confirm our understandings of the present.

David Musselwhite's 'Reflections on Burke's *Reflections*, 1790-1990' is a provocative re-reading of Burke's texts which seeks to 'present a Burke who speaks to us now in 1990 – that is, to an audience, to a public even, bemused and disturbed by the political phenomenon of "Thatcherism"'. The editors' preface to Musselwhite's essay seeks to dramatise its historical moment: 'Given Margaret Thatcher's less than glowing assessment of the French Revolution, delivered with matchless insensitivity during her visit to Paris in July 1989, it would no doubt come as an unwelcome shock to her to read how Burke – father of conservatism – had castigated the Revolutionary Assembly precisely for its Thatcherite economic policies'. In a curious way, then, Mrs Thatcher becomes the implied or intended reader of this essay (of this book?) and Burke's attack on the age of 'sophists, oeconomists, and calculators' is offered as a salutary lesson for a British prime minister (and/or the British public) two hundred years on. Indeed, Thatcher becomes the Enlightenment's most terrifying shadow as Musselwhite identifies the 'unformed spectre' which Burke claimed to dimly apprehend in the French Revolution not with communism (as Conor Cruise O'Brien does) but with the unbridled capitalism which eventually achieved its historical embodiment in Thatcherism. This is Burke in the first of the *Letters on a Regicidal Peace* (1796):



out of the tomb of the murdered monarchy in France has arisen a vast, tremendous, unformed spectre, in a far more terrifying guise than any which ever yet have overpowered the imagination and subdued the fortitude of man. Going straight forward to its end, unappalled by peril, unchecked by remorse, despising all common maxims and all common means, that hideous phantom overpowered those who could not believe it was possible she could at all exist. ... The poison of other states is the food of the new Republic. That bankruptcy, the very apprehension of which is one of the causes assigned for the fall of the monarchy, was the capital on which she opened her traffic with the world.

This is Musselwhite:

this monstrous female personification of the Revolution must remind us of none other than Mrs Thatcher herself: the remorseless determination, the pitilessness ..., the unnaturalness. That sentence, 'The poison of other states is the food of the new Republic' – which for Burke was metaphorical, has become astonishingly literal in the context of a country offering itself as an unregulated dump for toxic waste, while his perception that bankruptcy has become the very principle of international finance is all too accurate an account of the current hysterical ebb and flow of hot capital through the City driven by a monstrous balance of payment deficit. Burke's nightmare is upon us.

It seems difficult to differentiate the hysteria from the history here. This passage seems to encapsulate the way Thatcher's spectre 'overpowered the imagination and subdued the fortitude' of a large sector of the intellectual Left in Britain in the 1980s. Why, though, the emphasis on hysteria in the first place, and why link Burke's spectre with Thatcher on the basis that both are female?

Although these questions cannot be adequately discussed without a thorough analysis of the gendering of politics, economics, and aesthetics in the eighteenth century (Benton's essay on Ferguson takes a hesitant step in that direction), Margaret Iversen's 'Imagining the Republic: the Sign and Sexual politics in France' reminds us that the protagonists of the Revolution represented their own projects and principles in gendered terms. In place of the *ancien régime's* implicitly 'feminine' public spectacles such as the masquerade, Iversen reminds us that Rousseau imagined, and the revolutionaries sought to institute, 'a completely different kind of festival that would unite citizens without making them spectators'. Yet this is complicated by the revolutionary government's need to exploit the power of images in order to influence 'the people'. Iversen draws on Mona Ozouf's suggestion that the revolutionaries opted for 'allegory ... as a solution to the problem, for allegory is allusion rather than illusion', and avoids 'the slipperiness of the simulacrum by heightening the conventionality of the image'. The choice of an allegorical female figure as an image for the new seal of the Republic by the National Convention of 1792 not only alluded to the Catholic tradition of female saints, but found its theoretical underpinning in Rousseau's notion of sexual difference – in which the ideal of transparency was reserved for men, while 'women in the Republic should wear a veil of *pudeur* or modesty in order to excite male initiative that would spill over into the public domain'. This strategy of representing Reason or Liberty as female gelled with available political meanings of the feminine and so enabled counter-revolutionaries to attack the Republic as a whore (or a terrifying female spectre).

Tom Furniss

DIALECTICS

J. D. Hunley, *The Life and Thought of Frederick Engels: A Reinterpretation*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1991. xiii + 184pp., £14.00 hb, 0 300 04923 4.

Engels has here found an unlikely defender in the US Air Force, where Hunley holds the post of Deputy Command Historian. Needless to say, he hastens to declare 'I am in no sense a Marxist'. In spite of his evident regard for Engels, the axe he has to grind is scholarly, not political.

Engels's fame rests largely on his role in defending and popularising Marx. The need for 'reinterpretation' arises because Hunley objects to what he sees as a new orthodoxy, which he calls 'the dichotomist portrait': this opposes Engels's views to those of Marx in some fundamental way. The bulk of the book is an intervention in this debate. Hunley argues strongly that Engels did not disagree with Marx about important issues and did not distort Marx's views after the latter's death.

In the first two chapters, on Engels's life, Hunley makes clear his admiration for 'the most learned man in Europe', a man who knew twenty-six languages. Hunley especially praises Engels's grasp of military strategy and his far-seeing analyses of international relations. Unfortunately, Hunley's book was in press before he became acquainted with the biography of the leading Engels scholar, Terrell Carver (*Friedrich Engels: His Life and Thought*, 1989). Hunley simply notes that he disagrees with Carver's emphasis on the influence on the adult Engels of his original Young Hegelianism. But there are some striking continuities: for example, as early as 1843 Engels claimed that 'the philosophical efforts of the German nation, from Kant to Hegel, must end in Communism'; and this is the same belief that lies behind his testament of 1886 that 'the German working-class movement is the inheritor of German Classical philosophy'.

The third chapter reviews the 'dichotomist' literature, dating from 1961 with Lichtheim's influential book on Marxism, and going on through Tucker, Schmidt, Averini, N. Levine, Jordan, Carver, Bender, and Kain. As Hunley is aware, the odd feature of this literature is that the authors disagree amongst themselves on the substantive issues involved; although it is always Marx who is the good guy, and Engels the villain. Thus an author with a taste for dialectic will praise Marx's dialectical subtlety, while condemning Engels for his positivism; conversely, an author with a distaste for dialectic will attribute this aspect of Marxism to Engels's metaphysical inclinations, and rescue the sober scientist Marx from its baleful shadow.

The remaining chapters of the book refute the dichotomist portrait. Hunley's approach consists largely of 'quote-throwing'; but this is enough for his purposes. However, he makes things easy for himself by concentrating on the following areas: appearance and reality; reformism and revisionism; humanism and science. He has no difficulty demonstrating that any problems in these areas were shared by both writers.

In my view the most awkward issue is whether or not we can saddle Marx with 'dialectical materialism' as we have come to know and hate it. This philosophical outlook derives from Engels's *Anti-Dühring*. Hunley should have gone into this more thoroughly. Of course, he stresses that Marx sent Engels some material on political economy for the book, and never dissociated himself from it.

Perhaps Marx, being old and ill, did not consider it worthwhile to question his old friend's achievement. If that is so, then we need to take all the more seriously Carver's claim (in *Marx and Engels: The Intellectual Relationship*, 1983) that these views are foreshadowed in any essay Marx would have taken a

close interest in, namely Engels's review of *Das Volk* of his 1859 *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* – a precursor of the first part of *Capital*. Carver exaggerates grossly: indeed, Engels here warns against exactly that procedure he will himself adopt in *Anti-Dühring*; the Hegelians, he says, 'appropriated only the most simple devices from the master's dialectics and applied them to anything and everything, often moreover with ludicrous clumsiness'.

Marx was closely involved with *Das Volk* at that time, and pushed Engels to do the review. Submitting the first part to Marx, Engels specifically advised him that he could 'tear it up', or 'dress it up', if he did not like it. Thus it seems that the review had Marx's *imprimatur*. Yet an extraordinary thing about the review is that, without much evidence from the book, Engels situates Marx's work in the context of German philosophy, and more particularly Hegelian speculative science; he goes on to foist on the book a 'logical-historical' method. Three puzzles arise: (a) was it useful to drag in Hegel? (b) was Marx's method 'logical-historical'? (c) if either of these are to be answered in the negative, why did Marx allow the review to pass (and exult when it was widely reprinted)?

- (a) Carver holds that the tradition of approaching Marx's work through Hegel was first established in Engels's review. Of course, Marx himself adhered to this tradition in the second edition of *Capital*, in so doing appropriating from the review the metaphor of a rational 'kernel' in 'idealistic wrapping', where Hegelian logic is concerned. But why did Engels bring in Hegel in 1859? Apart from his own views (mentioned above), Engels had the evidence of a letter from Marx (14 January 1858) in which it is noted that Hegel's *Logic* was of assistance in 'the method of analysis'. I conclude that Engels was entitled to refer to Hegel.
- (b) In his review Engels tried to restore Hegel's reputation by pointing to his 'tremendous historical sense'. Engels was thereby led to make the fateful step of inventing a method of exposition which, while 'logical', is yet 'nothing but the historical method, only stripped of ... disturbing fortuities'. This flatly contradicts Marx's explicit statement in his draft 'Introduction' of 1857 (presumably unknown to Engels) that the categories should *not* be presented in order of historical evolution, but in accordance with the articulation of the existing system. (Furthermore, Engels's view cannot properly be ascribed to Hegelianism; for Hegel in his systematic dialectics, such as *The Philosophy of Right* (see para. 32 and Add.), is at one with Marx.) However, Engels *did* have on file an extremely confusing outline by Marx of his project (letter of 2 April 1858), in which he spoke of transitions which are 'also historical'.
- (c) I think Marx let the review pass because he was still undecided on the issue. Indeed, if one considers the basic value-forms, then the sequence commodity–money–capital could be both logical and historical; each cannot be understood without its predecessors, with luck the concept of each could be derived from its predecessor through a dialectical development, and historical contingencies did indeed make this progression possible. (The book Engels reviewed dealt with commodities and money only, remember.)

Hunley considers all this 'a minor point'! But it is very important for assessing the value of dialectical method; and it has generated much debate in recent years. In the end, of course, the really important issues are the substantive ones, and not whether, and upon what, Marx and Engels agreed.

Chris Arthur

THAT GUY

Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, translated by Malcolm Imrie, London, Verso, 1990. 94pp., £24.95 hb, 0 86091 302 3, £8.95 pb, 0 86091 520 4.

Mike Gane, *Baudrillard: Critical and Fatal Theory*, London and New York, Routledge, 1991. 243pp., £35.00 hb, 0 415 03774 3, £10.99 pb, 0 415 03775 1.

It is rumoured that Baudrillard and Debord used to hang out together, young bohemians in post-war Paris anticipating tastes later inscribed in their writings; one preferred the brothel while the other liked to drink. Only a rumour, but a nice commentary on the common beginnings and interlocking histories of these two writers.

In their early years, Baudrillard and Debord shared an intellectual project as well. Baudrillard's 1960s writings have much in common with Debord's situationist critiques of consumer society, and even his attachment to the notion of symbolic exchange retained some connection with the situationist milieu. Not until his recent discourse on postmodernity does it appear that Baudrillard has departed from Debord's world of spectacle, situation, production, and image. Cutting the critical ground from beneath Debord's feet, Baudrillard's world is that of the hyperreal, the obscene, seduction, and simulacra; terms which are used to develop a theory fatal to the beautiful souls who still believe in the meaningful and/or the real. Certainly he has been the more successful of the two, if academic and media stardom is anything to go by: while Debord devoted himself first to *Internationale Situationniste* and then to paranoid obscurity, Baudrillard pursued a career which has lately found him at a postmodern vantage point from which situationist writings seem like letters from afar. But his writings are soaked in nostalgia and loss, his critiques are coming from nowhere. Debord may be abandoned, isolated, and even misguided – legal wrangles plague new editions and translations of his work; French reviewers welcomed the first volume of his autobiography, *Panegyric*, in tones reserved for interesting, but minor, eccentrics – but his writing retains a forceful energy which at least suggests that he has something to say.

Comments on the Society of the Spectacle can be read in fascinating tandem with many of Baudrillard's more recent writings; intelligent and succinct, it does in fact express much of what Baudrillard has spread across several re-hashed texts. Debord's book is a commentary both on his 1967 *The Society of the Spectacle* and on what he still wants to define as spectacular society itself: a world in which the increasing confusion of appearance and reality conspires to preclude the possibility of critical negation. And this is indeed a conspiratorial text: invoking a world of intrigue, surveillance, secrecy, disinformation and purposeless communication, Debord rails against the dominion of the image and fumes at the simulacrum. He still speaks the language of the situationist project, of course: in part, *Comments* is a vindication of his earlier critiques of advanced capitalism as a closed and spectacular version of itself. All that happened in the frozen history of the last twenty years, he insists, was an exacerbation of the disengagement and emptiness which characterise advanced capitalism. Debord cannot be optimistic about his observations. But, peppered with veiled threats of instability and appeals to those for whom the spectacle is both visible and vulnerable, the book retains Debord's mischievous arrogance. The philosophical position he occupies may well be untenable, the negation of which he continues to dream may well be a nightmare. But *Comments* is more than an anachronism: beauti-

fully crafted, well translated, and conjuring its own obscure notoriety, it is a provocative and intriguing text. Debord says nothing new, but few writers are in a position to claim otherwise. Least of all Baudrillard.

Comments on the Society of the Spectacle does not find its way into Mike Gane's *Critical and Fatal Theory*. But Gane does pick up on the earlier connections between Debord and Baudrillard. In a discussion of Baudrillard's 'essential background and context', Gane gives 'Saint Guy' a place in an intellectual canon which includes Saints Roland, Julia, Louis, and (surely Pope?) Jean-Paul. Extending this contextualisation beyond the 'saints' of the Parisian intelligentsia to figures like Marcuse and Durkheim as well, Gane refuses to accept the ahistorical and free-floating impression which Baudrillard's work so often gives. This ability to situate Baudrillard enables Gane to develop an engaging account of the interests and arguments which run through Baudrillard's work. Keen to stress Baudrillard's distance from the postmodernism with which he has been associated, Gane presents him as a critic, rather than a protagonist, of the postmodern condition, and identifies a 'coherent and stable framework' at work throughout his writing. Symbolic exchange, he argues, remained the guiding principle



of Baudrillard's thought long after it appeared to have left the scene: it is always against symbolic exchange that Baudrillard measures the superficialities of Western culture. This would certainly explain the nostalgic regret which suffuses Baudrillard's recent writings, and here again, Gane is to be commended for his refusal to take Baudrillard at face value, his ability to see the melancholia that comes free with Baudrillard's ecstasy, and the traps which his work inevitably sets for itself. Organising Baudrillard's entire opus around the principle of symbolic exchange, however, Gane often finds himself defending Baudrillard's own failure to recognise the basis of his own position. One consequence of this, clear in Gane's rather equivocal discussions of Baudrillard's relation with feminism, is that he sometimes has little to write beyond descriptive accounts of Baudrillard's positions and those of his critics.

Though not the most elegant of writers, Gane presents a well-constructed text and offers a very different Baudrillard from the one we are used to consuming. His 'Saint Jean' is a rigorous critic, not at all a thinker who attempts to subvert and displace the critical function itself. This is a sociologist's Baudrillard, whose writings take the fatal form of a commentary on Western culture in order to be critical in their content. Such an account requires rather more substantiation than it receives in this book, but *Critical and Fatal Theory* nevertheless provides a welcome antidote to more superficial and selective readings of Baudrillard's work.

Sadie Plant

FREE SCHOOL

Nigel Wright, *Assessing Radical Education: a Critical Review of the Radical Movement in English Schooling 1960–1980*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1989, xii + 244pp., £9.99 pb, 0 335 09228 4.

Nigel Wright, *Free School: the White Lion Experience*, Bristol, Libertarian Education, 1989. xi + 73pp., £3.95, 0 9513997 1 3.

In passing, Nigel Wright criticises *Radical Philosophy* for its comparative uninterest in educational matters as well as its retention of the formalism, technicality and the sheer *difficulty* of philosophic discourse. The central and unacknowledged theme of his timely and admirable book is the contradiction between what for Yeats was 'the fascination of what's difficult' – let us call this the necessity of theory – and popular education's no less necessary commitment to plain speaking in the real language of men as well as, since 1968, the real and other language of women.

The contradiction – the twistpoint – is of course a longstanding topic for debate among the intelligentsia, as well as for quarrelling and bloody mayhem among the groupuscules, as Wright well knows. And in the first place, his book is less an assessment (a word with disagreeable resonances today) than a historical rollcall, *honoris causa*. He provides a potted history of those many minority and generally short-lived movements for radical education which were his own honoured formation, which gave educational life in the years (roughly) of 1965 to 1975 its colour, noise and optimism, and which added their glowing residue to the deposits of radicalism in the culture, a source of energy to future generations, now ignored, some time to be tapped.

Given this history and its pieties, one can only be grateful; but even given the fact that Wright was composing his book before the Fall of the Wall, there is an unnerving lack of recognition on his part of just how sclerotic a state socialism itself was in at that moment, and how downright silly the much-initialled arguments of the sects had seemed to teachers and children alike since long before that date.

He partly sees this problem, although he never brings out its centrally geographical feature, that all the radical activity he describes was overwhelmingly based in London, and rarely got beyond it. I would also guess from his tone that he is in the usual position of Left-polemical writers in Britain of writing with a keen eye on a special audience who will only applaud if their sharp ears are satisfied by his political correctness.

This being so, Wright has brought off a neat turn of balancing. He tells off many of the groups for their errors – for unrealism of political aims here, for sentimentalising of children there, very properly chastening A. S. Neill himself for self-contradiction on the way – but hangs on to his generous sense that it is radical (rather than socialist) progressivism which, still, is most likely to water the desert lands of the modern comprehensive school in Britain.

He can't do everything. He says little about the difficulties brought on themselves by the multi-culturalists, who so conspicuously can't decide as between the freedoms of classical liberalism and the claims of black identity where these may well include the antique and hateful absolutes of fundamental Islam. He might similarly have been sterner on his friends at the *Children's Book Bulletin* for assortedly ridiculous sanctimonies about sexism in Arthur Ransome or Mark Twain.

But, keeping to a conversational idiom and a calmly egalitarian

stance, he succeeds in each of the three parts of his book: a short history of radical groups; a sympathetic critique of radical pedagogy; lastly, an earnest commendation of the radical project which, apart from the odd lapse into platform hortation, is soundly practical, especially as it counsels *praxis*.

Wright keeps his and our courage up. In these dark times for all those loyal to the standards of a sufficient welfare state, that is a victory. But it is, I must add, still so intellectually dismaying that he lets go by with a mild reproof the sheer anti-intellectuality, the offhand and philistine way with culture, the downright stupidity about the art of the possible, of so much purportedly radical education. In doing so, he also misses so much that might have stiffened his thesis and raised his spirits. He misses the radicalism of *subjects* with a mere note on English teaching and *Teaching London Kids*: nothing about NATE and the radical critique so many teachers of English took and take from the origins of their subject, and took moreover into teacher training colleges at a time when the status of the job was turned up several notches into an all-graduate profession.

It's tough to carp, when he has done so much work, and done it by himself as well. Perhaps what his book lacks is brought out by his little monograph on the White Lion School. It reads painfully like a recent M.Ed. thesis, solemnly footnoted and sprinkled with on-the-spot interviewing. Why couldn't he have told it as the rattling good yarn it so definitely was? And then, in turn, why couldn't he have assessed radical education sweepingly and sharply, taking in the whole of that full field, books, professors, experimental curricula, free schools and all? He has the grasp and the gifts; goodness knows, we need the book.

Fred Inglis

AFTER ADORNO

Andrew Benjamin, ed., *The Problems of Modernity. Adorno and Benjamin*, London, Routledge, 1991. xi + 220pp., £9.99 pb, 0 415 06029 X.

David Roberts, *Art and Enlightenment. Aesthetic Theory after Adorno*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991. ix + 249pp., £19.99 hb, 0 8032 3897 5.

These two books, the first of which has been recently reissued in paperback, promise to make a substantial contribution to the ongoing debate on modernity and the post-modern. David Roberts's book on Adorno's aesthetic theory focuses on the latter's analysis, in *The Philosophy of Modern Music*, of the breakdown in traditional musical forms, a process that constitutes a microcosm of the wider problems of art and Modernity.

Roberts offers a thorough, if occasionally dense, account of Adorno's interpretation of Schoenberg and Stravinsky. Schoenberg is seen as the authentic artist of modernity, pursuing the dialectic of total rationalisation to its logical endpoint of absolute indifference in his turn first to atonality, then to twelve-tone music. In contrast, Stravinsky gains Adorno's opprobrium for merely 'tinkering around' with the disparate fragments of the tradition, resulting in meaningless pastiche and the complete liquidation of subjectivity. Adorno's analysis is important for Roberts because it suggests that the distinction between modern and post-modern is not so much a distinction between two periods, as Lyotard or Jameson would have it, but rather descriptive of two alternative responses to the death of tradition accom-

panying the advent of Modernity. From the evidence of Stravinsky's work alone, Roberts insists that the characterisation of post-modern art as pastiche, as schizophrenic, applies equally to artworks from the '20s onwards as well as to contemporary ones.

So is Roberts attempting to assimilate post-modernism to the project of modernity? Not exactly, since he is also anxious to indicate the flaws in Adorno's dialectic of modern art. Throughout Adorno's account it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between progress, i.e. Schoenberg as the authentic artist pursuing the rationalisation [subjectification] of musical language to its limit, and decadence, i.e. the fact that, following Adorno's understanding, authentic modern art 'lies at the limit of progress'. Adorno's inability (or reluctance) to recognise that the dialectic of progress becomes its own undoing in Schoenberg's dissolution of musical language and tradition indicates the considerable limitations which accompany his dialectic of the modern. This weakness explains, too, Adorno's critique of Stravinsky's 'post-modernism', which can only give it a negative value. Yet, as Roberts points out, the ghost of Adorno has yet to be exorcised, since it inhabits accounts of the post-modern by Bürger as well as Jameson, Eagleton and others, who are forced to define the post-modern in negative terms. Instead, Roberts argues, we need a paradigm change, one which can escape the grasp of the dialectic and allow a recognition of the contingency of the artistic tradition and 'of all social formations'. If we take this into account, Roberts maintains, we need not dismiss the post-modern appropriation of past forms as mere 'pastiche' but as an authentic attempt to confront that death of tradition which is the hallmark of modernity.

Where Roberts's book does leave one somewhat puzzled is firstly in his contention that Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* adds very little to the substance of the essays on music, and second in his curious reading of Brecht as the authentic post-modern dramatist. Regarding the latter, Roberts is aware of the tension between Brecht's commitment to scientific Marxism and the putative elements of contingency in his drama, such as epic form, '*Verfremdung*' and so forth, but fails to really get to grips with this problem. However, that notwithstanding, Roberts's book still offers much food for thought.

A more appropriate title for the collection of papers edited by Andrew Benjamin would perhaps have been 'The Problems of Post-modernity', since many of the essays included demonstrate the danger in neatly separating modern and post-modern (increasingly equated with post-structuralism), indicating the many problems in much 'post-modern' thought. For example, the essays by Joanna Hodge and Janet Wolff emphasise the considerable similarities between the two in their treatment of the feminine. Wolff reminds us that Walter Benjamin's description of modernity is a peculiarly masculine one. Noting the increasing nineteenth-century division between 'male' public life, and 'female' private life, she observes how the fragmented experience of the flâneur is largely a male preserve, and the description of modernity largely the description of *men's* experience of modern life. Similarly Joanna Hodge observes that, while post-modern or post-structuralist theorising should be assimilating the work of feminism, both liberal and radical, it tends to perpetuate the exclusion of the feminine. The 'canon' of post-structuralist thinkers tend to consist almost exclusively of men such as Derrida, Lyotard, Deleuze and Guattari, while those such as Kristeva, Montrelay, Cixous or Irigaray are still seen as 'other', the feminine as the 'beyond' of representation. In the question of the feminine the division modernism/post-modernism misleads us by masking common difficulties in overcoming certain forms of marginalisation.

Turning to the issue of subjectivity, Peter Dews' essay on the critique of identity uses Adorno's work to examine the problems inherent in the post-structuralist dissolution of subjectivity. Dews points out the suspicion of 'identity thinking' shared by Adorno and post-structuralism, then mobilises Adorno's dialectic of identity and non-identity to form a critique of the contemporary affirmation of the purely non-identical, whether it be *différance* or Lyotard's libidinal band. As Dews notes, if we simply discard the identical, we fail to understand the tension at the heart of subjectivity, in effect avoiding some of the more important issues concerning the constitution of selfhood.

A review of this length cannot do justice to all of the essays assembled here. Suffice it to say that this collection, together with David Roberts's book, are a timely reminder of the significance of Adorno's work. His thinking occupies a position assimilable neither to the post-modernism of Lyotard or Deleuze, nor to Habermas's or Wellmer's praise of modernity, one which either side in the debate ignore at their peril.

Matthew Rampley

ON LIMITS

David Wood, *Philosophy at the Limit*, London, Unwin Hyman, 1990. 162pp., £25.00 hb, 0 04 445625 5, £8.95 pb, 0 04 445624 7.

The position taken by David Wood in this book is that philosophy is constantly regenerated by its own sceptical resources, 'an everlasting fire' which feeds itself in consuming its own heart. In order to keep its concerns burning, it must be both passionate (or fiery) and vigilant, continually examining its limits as it exceeds them.

Wood finds this self-critical practice most pronounced in thinkers in the 'Continental' camp, which for him takes in Wittgenstein, Hegel, Derrida, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Gadamer. He does not suggest that Continental philosophy has the monopoly on 'healthy' scepticism, but that its versions of the sceptical attitude are more productive for philosophy as self-regenerative. This is because these thinkers are more concerned with the question of strategy in philosophy, a scepticism about their own methodology and means of engaging in philosophy.

For Wood, this question 'both allows and forces us to re-think the question of ends, of beginnings, of margins, of limits, thresholds – the very space of philosophy. There is no thinking of limits which does not deploy a certain model of space'. The dominant model is that of 'a simple and continuous dividing line on a two-dimensional surface', responsible for the representational and conceptual divisions of inner and outer, presence and absence, and other dualistic distinctions. Wood identifies three challenges to this model. The first is from mathematics and physics (the Kleinian bottle and black holes being two examples which unsettle fixed boundaries in space). The second is in the experience of the body as 'a site of boundary ambiguity', its orifices and dimensions being neither inner nor outer (a conception explored in Merleau-Ponty's late philosophy). The final challenge is the way that language acts to undermine its own sanctity through equivocal meanings (metaphor and irony, for example). It is this challenge which Wood takes up.

The issue of limits in philosophy then becomes one of topology or topography. The limits or boundaries to philosophical enquiry can be expanded to take in philosophy's responsibility to

RECONNECTIONS

David McLellan and Sean Sayers, eds, *Socialism and Democracy*, Basingstoke and London, Macmillan, 1991. viii + 181pp., £35.00 hb, 0 333 54555 3, £14.99 pb, 0 333 53556 1.

Contributors to this useful collection unite in a twofold conviction. The first is that democracy is today, more than ever, a central issue for the Left; the second, that 'socialist ideas about democracy now require the most fundamental and radical reassessment' (Sayers). The spectacular decline of Stalinism in the East resonates through the pages of the book as, indeed, does the rather less dramatic retreat of social democracy in the West. For Gamble the meaning of both is clear. No longer, he argues, can the relationship between socialism and democracy be taken as axiomatic; the connection between them 'has to be demonstrated'. All of the writers here seem keen to re-establish it. Not merely should socialists make their peace with 'liberal' advocacy of political pluralism and civil liberties, most authors agree, they should actively appropriate and champion these ideals. Only if they do so might they hope plausibly to find a language in common with the anti-communist revolutionaries of the East. While critical of the liberal democratic *status quo*, some writers, like Keane and Claeys, warn against what they perceive as unrealistic attempts to 'perfect' democracy or society more generally. Other contributors, like Rustin, Wainwright and Showstack Sassoon, continue to search for a more radical reading of traditional liberal commitments.

An encouraging feature of this book is its willingness – in informative contributions by Sakwa and Ferdinand – directly to reckon with the nightmarish legacy of 'actually existing socialism' in the USSR and China respectively, as well as (in articles by Claeys and Whitmore) with British socialism's own, decidedly mixed, historical record.

This collection offers a great deal of persuasive diagnosis of socialism's current dilemmas – Gamble is admirably relentless in this regard – but rather less by way of formulas for its rejuvenation. This imbalance is, as Whitmore reminds us in the case of Britain, consistent with a longstanding reluctance amongst socialists to imagine the details of a future order. Of the contributors who do flesh out some of those details, Michael Rustin and Hilary Wainwright offer the most distinctive and interesting accounts. Rustin makes a plausible case for extending rights of citizenship from the political to the economic and social realms, specifying some of the concrete mechanisms through which this might be accomplished. Wainwright addresses thoughtfully the ways in which Left governments in power might relate to autonomous social movements and vice versa, mobilising their 'different sources of power' without compromising the latter's independence. In the process she hints at a radicalisation of the currently fashionable 'civil society' theme.

The book's overall uncertainty (if not quite pessimism) about possible socialist futures is understandable in the aftermath of 1989. But that does not quite explain the disappointingly sparse and conservative contribution of John Keane, a writer who has elsewhere published much that is important and salutary. His anxiety not to 'foist the principle of direct democracy on to representative institutions' seems alarmist when judged against the several known instances – recall, referenda and popular initiative at state and local level in the US, town hall meetings in New England, referenda in Switzerland, to name a few – where the 'principle of direct democracy' coexists comfortably with quite conventional representative institutions.

its practical implications, or act as a reminder of its own limitations in relation to other disciplines. Either way, the description and re-description of these boundaries is crucial, and must involve language or 'style'. But this point depends on a conception of language as self-critical, which is the real theme of the book. Wood traces versions of language-subversive methodologies through various thinkers, arranged in a somewhat haphazard fashion (Derrida, Hegel, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Derrida and Gadamer), but Derrida is always the reference point.

For Wood, there are two main advantages to this analysis. First, it should help the philosophical discipline to guard against developing an inflated sense of its own importance and presuming to legislate or pronounce on every topic with authority. This 'unlimited' version of philosophy is challenged by historical shifts and transformations, and by the fact that philosophy has to be practised in 'more or less messy languages' rather than a pure logical space. As Wood points out, attempts to translate philosophical thinking into a pure or formal language run the risk of producing pure or formal solutions.

The second advantage is that it should encourage practitioners of philosophy to be critically vigilant about the relation of philosophical theory to the community in which it takes place, asking how philosophy can become more answerable to the practical implementation of its philosophical ideals of community.

The two dangers to philosophy are thus seen as abstraction into universality and an accompanying irrelevance to more particular practical concerns. In this context perhaps one of the more provoking chapters deals with the debate (or non-debate) between Gadamer and Derrida on the possibility of dialogue, a possibility which must be the crux of the disputes between hermeneutics and deconstruction. Gadamer's attempt to engage in an 'open' debate about the political and ethical future of philosophical communication and community is problematised by Derrida's 'refusal' to take openness and communicability for granted. But does this refusal just amount to a deferral of discussion on the part of Derrida, which is also a kind of deafness? For Wood, Gadamer's trust in communication makes certain assumptions. Derrida remains sceptical about the extent to which 'otherness' or difference of the other is ethically compromised by these assumptions.

David Wood writes in an admirably lucid style, all the more admirable when the topic is style itself. To avoid oversimplification on the one hand, and the pitfalls of infinite regress or the exuberant excesses of sub-Derridean critics on the other, requires a sure-handed philosopher. Wood demonstrates his commitment to elucidation and accessibility without lessening the significance of the issues involved. But he is drawn to question his own approach in the final pages of the book. He asks whether, in attempting to 'vindicate a certain species of difficulty in philosophy', he is not merely engaged in presenting 'a kind of domesticating analytical translation of all that is of lasting value to Continental philosophy'. However, since the stated aim of the series in which his book appears, 'Problems of Modern European Thought', is to present Anglo-American studies with issues, concepts, texts and authors which may be unfamiliar to them, a certain amount of translation seems inevitable. If the regenerative possibilities of philosophy do indeed lie with a constant restlessness as to its topics and methodologies, in conjunction with a desire to make it relevant, popular and political, Wood's book counts as a solid contribution to these concerns.

Alison Ainley

These direct-democratic techniques and structures are not unproblematic, and representative democracy enjoys some genuine advantages which they do not: but their existence appears to pose little threat to the integrity of the wider representative framework, and might in important ways enrich it. Likewise, Keane declines to demonstrate his case that it is public economic ownership as such – as opposed to more plausible candidates like the monopolistic party state, the absence of independent trade unions and a commandist theory of economic management – which exposes citizens to the ‘whims and calculations’ of those who simultaneously perform the functions of ‘policeman, administrator, social worker and employer’. (Private employers too can fire union activists or employ blacklists, and their record on tolerating dissent is not as a rule better than that of civil service or local council employers or managers of nationalised industries.)

I am also unpersuaded by Anne Showstack Sassoon’s fresh statement here of the now widespread notion that universalistic principles of political equality are hostile to the ‘difference’ she wishes to celebrate, or to intervention by women and minorities in the public realm, or indeed to programmes of affirmative action to redress past inequalities and meet special needs. Though not a position I share, this is one that *can* be plausibly defended. The problem with Showstack Sassoon’s piece is that she fails to identify the actual connections through which an apparently empowering discourse comes to exclude and disable a section of its subjects. Without such detail her piece is left stranded at far too high a level of generality.

It may be that both Keane and Showstack Sassoon suffer from having to make highly compressed arguments, leaving too much to interesting but contentious claims which in a more spacious book they might have had room to substantiate. The obverse of this book’s undoubted and commendable accessibility is its (sometimes frustrating) littleness.

Daryl Glaser



FOUCAULT IN FLIGHT

James W. Bernauer, *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight*, New Jersey and London, Humanities Press International, 1990. xii + 261 pp., 0 391 03635 1.

Bernauer borrows his title from a little-known essay by Foucault on a series of paintings by the French artist Paul Rebeyrolle. These powerful mixed-media works depict a dog's escape from a confined space. In the final canvas, the greys and whites give way to a vibrant blue as the prison wall cracks. Foucault comments: 'In the struggle of men, nothing great is achieved by way of windows but everything is always achieved in the triumphant collapse of walls.' For Bernauer the essay and the paintings it discusses are emblematic of the passion that inspires Foucault's work: the constant denunciation of all forms of imprisonment or confinement and the exhilaration of escape.

Foucault has often been read as though his work were a series of fragments, with critics concentrating on specific texts or 'periods'. That approach no doubt reflects the seemingly deliberate avoidance of systematicity, the refusal to be defined as either philosopher or historian, and the sudden turns on the slalom run that took Foucault from the baroque splendours of *Madness and Civilisation* to the austerity of the final volumes of the unfinished *History of Sexuality*. For Bernauer, it is precisely the relentless questioning (and self-questioning), the movement of flight itself, that gives Foucault's writings their coherence and passion. Their consistency is not to be found at the level of theme or discourse, but in the demand for an ethics. Thought itself becomes a form of action which must be interrogated as the source of the knowledge that informs and deforms political action, and the individual's relationship to the self.

Bernauer takes as his corpus virtually all of Foucault's writings, the only significant text not to be discussed being *Le Désordre des familles*, the anthology of eighteenth-century letters requesting the confinement of deranged, debauched or criminal husband, wives, children and neighbours coauthored with Arlette Farge in 1982 but never translated into English. Despite that omission, this must be the most complete survey of Foucault's immense output. The simple tactic of analysing such a wide corpus in the chronological order of its production gives some surprises. *The Order of Things* gained notoriety for its proclamation of the death of man, but a very similar formulation can be found in the last lines of the study of Kant that was submitted, together with *Madness and Civilization*, for a doctorate in 1961. In the face of such evidence it becomes increasingly impossible to view even the Foucault of 1966 as a 'structuralist' or 'technocratic' anti-humanist.

Although Bernauer provides exemplary readings of the well-known archaeological and genealogical texts, his major strength is the exploration of less familiar areas. He gives a particularly impressive reading of the early work on psychology – subsequently disowned by Foucault himself – which usefully complements the recent and rather different work of Gutting in his *Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason* and Forrester in his *Seductions of Psychoanalysis*. Foucault's attempt to combine or reconcile Binswanger and Pavlov ends, perhaps predictably, in failure. This time, it is a wall of humanism and positivism that collapses. Foucault's liberation is traced through the group of essays and reviews published in the early 1960s (on and of authors such as Klossowski, Blanchot, Bataille, Roussel and Laporte), which certainly deserve to be better

known. They are seen here as providing the means of escape from the epistemological prison of the project for an anthropological psychology by opening up an infinite space of possibility in which language speaks without end. Language becomes the material element for the emergence of the human and the foundations of anthropology are shaken to the ground.

The identification of an ethical strand in Foucault enables Bernauer to read the final volumes of *The History of Sexuality* not as a collapse into narcissistic solipsism, but as the exploration of the modern experience of the self that manifests the free, ethical activity of thought, as a form of love and self-love that can resist and survive in a culture that has lost its way. It also helps him to read Foucault's involvement with a variety of political projects not as a voluntarism, but as an ethical protest against the intolerable, to use the generic title of the pamphlets produced by the Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons.

Bernauer is not merely an exemplary reader. He is also a textual archaeologist who carefully unearths the confused and

lacunary history of the final texts. He succeeds in placing Foucault in context by reading, for example, *Discipline and Punish* against the background of its author's involvement in political struggles in and around prisons, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* against the *Annales* historians' transformation of documents into monuments, Foucault's foregrounding of historical discontinuities against the scientific epistemology of Canguilhem. Two appendices, finally, chart the differences between the two editions of *Mental Illness* and *Birth of the Clinic*.

Foucault is a biographer's nightmare. Bernauer provides a feast of a biography – the most comprehensive available to date in any language, though there are inevitably some minor omissions. It will remain indispensable until the French edition of Foucault's hitherto uncollected writings, announced but repeatedly delayed, finally appears. For non-Francophone readers, its importance will obviously not be diminished by that event.

David Macey

Bob Jessop, *State Theory: Putting the Capitalist State in its Place*, Cambridge, Polity, 1990. xii + 413pp., £39.50 hb, 0745602894, £12.95 pb, 0745602908.

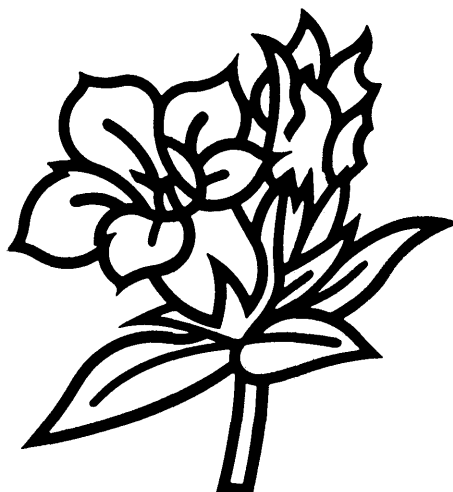
Bob Jessop was one of the first generation of British state theorists on the Left, making judicious applications of Marxist and structuralist accounts of the state – particularly with ideas drawn from Nicos Poulantzas. With the notable exception of his analysis of Thatcherism (*Thatcherism: a Tale of Two Nations*, 1988), much of his output has been academic. This volume collects together his best articles and critiques over the last decade and a half. Jessop and his editors have done their best (with introductory material, detailed index, and analytical contents list) to counter the drawbacks inherent in such collections. The book may prove handy for the student who wants a quick critical account of any significant recent line of thought – from Corporatism to Regulation Theory. But it remains primarily something for aficionados of the sociological theory of the state.

Jessop has confronted, absorbed and built upon a number of the currents which have appeared in state theory since he began writing in the 1970s – most of them hostile to Marxism. Following its Leninist-Althusserian phase, Marxist state theory has had to weather the attacks of 'state-centred' theories, the advance of systems theory, the (possibly enfeebling) embrace of discourse theory, and post-structuralist attempts on the entire logic it deployed to analyse social and political conflict. But Jessop attempts to salvage a viable marxist position from these many challenges. Without attributing to the 'capitalist' state either a single logic, a global strategy or the power of a unified

subject, he manages to define it in terms of the social processes it tends to sustain. His is a 'strategic-theoretical' perspective, in which (extending the work of Poulantzas and Gramsci) the state is seen fundamentally as a site of the interplay of strategies. It is the cluster of institutions where the paradoxes inherent in directing and holding society together ('societalization') are brought acutely into conflict.

Jessop is able to absorb into that theoretical setting many of the gains from the rival positions that he examines. While not conceding systems theories' overall vision of entirely autonomous systems, for example, he can identify various social sub-systems that are 'structurally' or 'strategically coupled' through the points where they interact. Again, while countering discourse theory's sweeping dissolution of both state and society, he has learnt from it to think of the state as 'fluid inter-discursive space' against which Marxism and the Left can still direct their efforts.

Noel Parker



J. Claude Evans, *Strategies of Deconstruction: Derrida and the Myth of the Voice* Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1991. xxiii + 205 pp., \$39.95 hb, \$14.95 pb., 0 8166 1925 5 hb., 0 8166 1926 3 pb.

If your hackles are raised by the self-indulgence of some of Derrida's more recent essays – by what is solemnly termed their 'ludic' quality – you are likely to be directed to the more conventional works which he published in the 1960s. 'When he wants to be, Derrida can be as scrupulous in his scholarship and as rigorous in his argumentation as anyone,' you will be told, in rather the way that sceptics about 'modern art' used to be rebuked by the observation that Picasso started off by being brilliantly skilful in academic drawing. Derrida's dense work on Husserl in *Speech and Phenomena*, in particular, is commonly regarded (even by those who have not read it) as a subtle demonstration that Husserlian phenomenology, and perhaps everything else in Western philosophy, is a symptom of 'logocentric' obsession which is in turn based on 'phonocentrism', or the myth that meaning can be gathered directly from the personal experience of a 'living vocal medium'. J. Claude Evans confronts this orthodoxy head on. He works his way patiently through each chapter of *Speech and Phenomena*, showing how violently Derrida has had to twist and dismember Husserl's writings in order to present them as celebrations of 'the excellence of the voice'. If Evans is right, this interpretation is no more than a projection of Derrida's preconceived and reductive – not to say logocentric – concept of phonocentrism. After dealing, much more briefly but no less convinc-

ingly, with Derrida's treatment of Aristotle and Saussure, Evans concludes that Derrida's early writings as a whole, with all their claims to rigour, 'overwhelmingly fail to live up to their own standards'. It is a 'discouraging' result, as Evans admits, but it makes for an important and necessary book.

Jonathan Rée

Penelope J. Corfield, ed., *Language, History and Class*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1991. viii + 320pp., £39.95 hb, 0 631 16732 3, £11.95 pb, 0 631 16733 1.

Here is an attempt to chart the relationship between historiography and linguistics, and to apply this to a case of the language of social distinction and domination, the language of class, estate and degree, and of power. The first task is fulfilled by the first and last essays. P. J. Corfield's text, written for historians, is a competent account of the state of the art within the structuralist problematic that seemed particularly urgent in the '70s, when linguistics was seen as the model for all the social sciences to imitate: what conceptual tools can historians borrow from linguistics? William Downes envisages the converse question (how can the linguist deal with the peculiarities of the historian's pragmatic position?) from the more recent point of view of discourse linguistics and philosophy of language: he analyses the hermeneutic paradoxes of historiography in the light of Putnam, Grice and the concept of relevance (Sperber and Wilson), and applies his findings to the case study of Paul Robeson's appearance before the Committee on Un-American Activities – and it appears that the intentional theory of meaning cannot adequately capture the intricacies of meaning and understanding of historical documents. The intervening essays, written by historians, account for the constitution of the semantic field of class in Great Britain (Tudor and Stuart England, eighteenth-century Britain and the Victorian period), with an extension to the range of the study to other European countries (Spain, France and Germany), and to other continents (India, China, the US). Perhaps because it was more exotic to me, I found David Washbrook's analysis of the penetration of and adaptation to the European ideologies of language in the Raj particularly compelling. Even if this collection does not really bring new light on the theoretical relationships between the two fields, it is excellently conceived and executed and, a rare thing in such cases, it reads as a single text, not a medley of discordant tunes.

Jean-Jacques Lecercle

Julian Pefanis, *Heterology and the Postmodern: Bataille, Baudrillard and Lyotard*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1991. ix + 170pp., £28.50 hb, 0 8223 1075 9, £13.95 pb, 0 8223 1093 7.

Writing on the postmodern appears to be going through a curious bout of nostalgia as iconoclasm begins to look for its ancestors. In a series of sympathetic readings of the triumvirate of his title, Pefanis identifies Bataille as the key mediator in the constitution of the problematic of postmodern philosophy. Bataille, the theorist of excess and of a general economy based upon the destructive consumption of surplus, is at last beginning to emerge as a key figure, but behind him there are other key figures, notably Kojève, whose studies of Hegel influenced a whole generation from Queneau to Lacan. Behind Bataille stands the shade of Mauss and his theory of the gift, but behind Mauss stands the figure of Durkheim and the 'total social fact'. In his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, Foucault speculated that the whole of modern thought might be no more than an attempt to escape Hegel, adding that it was quite possible that Hegel had outwitted us once more and that we might find him waiting for us, immobile and already elsewhere. Hegel might not be the only ghost lying in wait for us. The ghosts in question are probably more familiar in France than on this side of the Channel, and Pefanis does well to conjure them up.

The readings offered here are patient and cogent. Pefanis ranges from Clastres on sacrifice and violence to the Situationists, and provides sympathetic but not uncritical examinations of Lyotard and Baudrillard. He is cagey about claiming Bataille as a precursor of the postmodern, being anxious to avoid 'the mistakes of modernism in the construction of a revised pantheon of universal values', but in fact demonstrates the case very convincingly. He does rather more than continue the narration of the heterodoxical tradition in French thought (his stated ambition), and succeeds in locating it in its political and cultural context. Pefanis also displays, perhaps unwittingly or unwillingly, some very pre-postmodernist virtues. When he speculates that Lyotard's 'crisis of the meta-narratives' can be seen as Lyotard's own loss of political faith and his own crisis with the meta-narratives of Freud and Marx, he is probably right. But he is also coming very close to a very traditional author-based history of ideas.

Sadly he misses the irony of Lyotard's position: the story of his or our incredulity at 'Great Narratives' has surely become a great narrative in its own right.

Pefanis writes engagingly and wittily, but the plethoric use of prefixes like 'pre-' and 'post-' does become irritating. Not the least of the text's attractions is that Pefanis, like Baudrillard in his lighter and more convincing moments, at last gives space to Jarry. For all its distrust of seriousness and its insistence on play, the postmodern is all too often too serious for its own good (Baudrillard's lugubriously ponderous *Cool Memories* being a case in point). Bored and sceptical theorists could do worse than revive Jarry's putative 'pataphysics' or science of imaginary solutions. *Heterology and the Postmodern* appears in a new series entitled 'Post-Contemporary Interventions'. Somewhere, Jarry's Dr Faustroll must be laughing. Born at the age of 63 in 1898, when the twentieth century was minus two years old, he was obviously always destined to be the patron saint of the post-contemporary.

David Macey

Allen W. Wood, *Hegel's Political Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990. xxi + 293pp., £30.00 hb, 0 521 37432 4, £10.95 pb, 0 521 37782 X.

Since its very beginnings with Russell and Moore, analytical philosophy has generally regarded Hegel as the paradigm of error and illusion in philosophy. What, then, is a respectable analytical philosopher like Wood doing writing a book on the man? Wood wastes no time in allaying any suspicion that he has succumbed to Hegelian temptation. 'Speculative logic is dead', we are told at the outset: Hegel's dialectical approach is nothing more than an 'utterly unconvincing' mishmash of 'shallow sophistries' (p. 4). After this inauspicious start, however, Wood has gone on to write a remarkably good book. Its topic is, as its title indicates, Hegel's ethical thought. It gives an excellent – clear, scholarly, useful and, on the whole, reliable – account of Hegel's central ideas in this area. The main focus is on Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*; though, where necessary, a full account is given of Hegel's other works. Hegel is portrayed as advocating a distinctive ethic of 'self-actualization' which cannot be assimilated either to more familiar deontological or teleological approaches in ethics. Wood shows how the *Philosophy of Right* presents a series of 'images'

of the development of freedom and self-consciousness, in which the human agent conceives of itself 'successively, ever more concretely and adequately, first as a "person" possessing abstract rights, then as a 'subject' with a moral vocation, then in the concrete spheres of ethical life as a family member, burgher, and finally as a citizen' (p. 32).

The book contains detailed and informative accounts of Hegel's views on freedom, rights, property, punishment and 'ethical life' (*Sittlichkeit*). Perhaps one should not ask for more. As it turns out, the rejection of dialectic is less damaging than one might think; and yet, inevitably, there is a cost. In characteristic analytical style, Wood tends to treat Hegel's ethical thought as a series of independent and separate doctrines on various issues. What is abandoned with dialectic is the systematic interconnections that Hegel sees between them – his attempt to unify his ethical ideas into a larger systematic whole. Indeed, the very subject of Wood's book illustrates this. For in Hegel's work, morality and ethics are only the initial parts of the larger whole treated in the *Philosophy of Right*. Wood's account takes us only up to the stage of 'ethical life', and stops short of the discussion of the State and political institutions with which the *Philosophy of Right* culminates.

Perhaps, as Wood asserts, the systematic and speculative side of Hegel's thought is in many respects flawed and untenable. However, that is surely an issue which needs to be investigated and discussed in any fully adequate treatment of Hegel's philosophy. If Wood is too quick to dismiss Hegel's dialectic, his treatment of Hegel's ethical ideas suffers at times from the opposite fault. Wood often confines himself to a descriptive exposition of Hegel's views. To be sure, Wood does an excellent job of this; but at times one wishes for more critical engagement with Hegel's ideas and more attempt to bring them into relation with modern discussion – and, yes, for intelligent criticism of them from an analytical perspective. Nevertheless, as an account of ideas which are often ferociously obscure and difficult, this book does an excellent and much-needed job. It contains perhaps the fullest and best treatments of Hegel's ethics available in English. For that Wood deserves the gratitude of even the most committed Hegelians.

Sean Sayers

C. Fred Alford, *The Self in Social Theory. A Psychoanalytic Account of its Construction in Plato, Hobbes, Locke, Rawls and Rousseau*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1991. viii + 229pp., £20.00 hb, 0 300 04922 6.

In this book the author sets out to show that a 'strong' concept of the self needs to be placed at the centre of debates in political philosophy. He seeks to expose an 'intractable problem' at the heart of the Western tradition of political theory from Plato onwards: namely, that a political appreciation of the self must respect the complexity of the self while at the same time making it safe for society. The conclusion reached is that in social theory the freedom of the 'subject' is compromised for the sake of social order (and perhaps for the subject's sake too, as in the Rousseauian dictum of forcing the self to be free), for 'there is no alternative. Or rather, the alternative is to do what all the theorists considered (except Hobbes) do, Rousseau most of all. Representing this compromise as if it were actually the realization of true selfhood and the like – that is, tell the lie'. Alford wishes to maintain a delicate balance between the demands of both self and society, recognising the necessity and benefits of social order without jeopardising the integrity of the self. In the opening chapter he usefully situates his argument in the context of recent work by Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel, and Charles Taylor. He wants to avoid the pitfalls of the aforementioned communitarians who, he argues, surrender the freedom and integrity of the self to the community (individuation is both constituted by the community but independent of it too), and of the liberalism of someone like John Rawls which relies on such a thin or 'weak' notion of the self as to render it trivial. The originality of his approach is to be found in the novel way that he draws on psychoanalysis – that of Heinz Kohut and Lacan much more than Freud – to give substance to his call for social and political theory to develop a deep or strong notion of the self.

Why the author has chosen the particular thinkers he has to examine the problem of the self in social theory is never explicitly justified (there are a few references to a vague entity called 'liberal traditionalism'), and the selection frequently assumes an arbitrary character. Part of the reason probably lies in his rejection of an historicist approach (which would seek to show that the self is first and foremost a historical concept) as he does not wish to assume – to give one example – that the self under capitalism must always be a possessive individualist. While this anti-reductionist posture mer-

its respect, it does mean that the book lacks a real coherence owing to some glaring omissions: is it possible to discuss such a topic as the self without any reference to Nietzsche? (The argument that Nietzsche is of no relevance to political theory has now been rendered obsolete with some major studies on this topic in recent years.) Kant and Hegel are only mentioned in passing, as is Foucault (whose late work should be crucial to Alford's concerns), and nothing is said about Richard Rorty's 'post-modern' reading of Rawls. In many instances, therefore, the book has the flavour of a 'work in progress', cutting slices into the texts of some of the key thinkers of the tradition of political theory; and while the readings of particular thinkers are often incisive and instructive (the one on Rawls is the most novel), the book as a whole lacks a coherent unifying narrative which would lend (even more) instruction to the important story of the self the author wishes to relate. Despite these flaws, the book is a thought-provoking contribution to political thinking, adventurous in approach if limited in scope.

Keith Ansell-Pearson

Peter Singer, ed., *A Companion to Ethics* (1991), Oxford, Blackwell, 1991, £60.00 hb., 0 63116 211 9) forms part of the Blackwell Companions to Philosophy, a reference series designed to cover not only analytic philosophy but Continental and non-Western traditions as well. The collection is made up of 47 original essays which are divided into sections, each addressing a different aspect of ethics. These range from a historical outline of Western ethical traditions to a consideration of specific themes: how we ought to live, the nature of ethics and an overview of the application of ethics to contemporary problems. The strengths of the collection lie in the inclusion of a section on non-Western ethics (Indian, Buddhist, Islamic and classical Chinese ethics), areas that are not usually covered in histories of the subject, and papers mapping the new directions ethics is currently taking, for example feminist and environmental ethics. The collection is extensively indexed with valuable cross-references which, together with useful bibliographies and further reading suggestions that are included at the end of each entry, aid the book in its aim as a reference volume. This is more a collection for those already acquainted with the subject, and the originality of the papers makes it interesting reading for those who are.

Lucy Frith