REVIEWS

SWEET RAISINS

Jon Elster, *Political Psychology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993. viii + 204 pp., £30.00 hb, £9.95 pb, 0 521 41110 6 hb, 0 521 42286 8 pb.

This volume is the latest in a series of works in which Jon Elster has been concerned with the elaboration, revision and refinement of a methodological programme for the social sciences. This enterprise dates back to the early 1980s, when Elster emerged as one of the leading figures in the development of a 'rational choice Marxism'. As the locus of Marxist philosophy migrated to the Anglophone academy, Marxism was encouraged to leave its methodological baggage at the border-post. The programme's survival now depended upon a dual liberation: both from its roots in nineteenth-century thought ('shallow Hegelianism', combined with 'naive scientism'), and from its adopted domicile in Continental Europe ('obscurantism, utopianism and irresponsibility'). The exponents of this self-professed paradigm sought to play Pip to the tradition's Miss Haversham, throwing open the curtains and exposing Marxism to the daylight of a bracing Anglo-American intellectual climate. But, in Elster's case at least, analogies with *Great Expectations* continued up to the final dénouement. While the flames consumed both the general theory of history and the special theory of capitalism, he was to be found sifting through the surviving debris in search of those 'isolated insights' adjudged fit to enter the 'mainstream of social science'.

For better or worse, there is scant evidence of any residual commitment to the Marxist programme in Elster's more recent work. What remains is the preoccupation with methodological issues. But here too he has moved some distance from his original position. Not content with making (non)sense of Marx in a frenzy of blue pencil, he has since turned upon the pencil: both Marxist theory and an unqualified rational choice approach obstruct further progress within the social sciences.

Elster's interest in 'political psychology' must be understood in this context; both with reference to his enduring commitment to the doctrine of 'methodological individualism', and to his increasing reservations concerning the explanatory purchase of rational choice theory. Much of this book is concerned with the identification and cataloguing of 'psychological mechanisms' through a close engagement with the works of Paul Veyne (historian of classical antiquity), Alexander Zinoviev (Soviet dissident writer), and Alexis de Tocqueville (political theorist of American democracy). But the exegesis and discussion serve a more fundamental objective: 'the book is a running argument for the importance of mechanisms, as opposed to general theories.' The identification and cataloguing of 'mechanisms' – 'specific causal pattern[s] that can be recognised after the event but rarely foreseen' – is to replace the misguided project of constructing general social theories – anyway too undemanding a task to detain the political psychologist: 'Anyone [!] can spend his [*sic*] life constructing a comprehensive general theory, which will soon be refuted and outdated. The gifts of setting out, in a few lines, a precise, novel and fertile causal analysis is far rarer.'

The mechanisms identified are invariably psychological ones, but these supposedly provide the basic 'building blocks' for the construction of sociological explanations. This reduction of social theory to political psychology might appear to be implicit in the doctrine of methodological individualism – at least, once the assumptions of rational choice theory have been either abandoned or suspended. Elster here reaffirms his commitment to this 'essentially trivial doctrine' which – as explicitly formulated – amounts to little more than a corrective for an elementary category-mistake: only individuals – and neither humanity nor social classes – can act. We are advised that this doctrine implies neither atomism, nor egoism, nor rational choice, nor the innate character of desires, nor political individualism, but merely directs us to the study of 'the individual human action as the basic building block of aggregate social phenomena'.

Social theory is not concerned with the particular beliefs, desires and actions of definite historical individuals – this is the business of a certain genre of historiography. A programme for the social sciences premised upon this doctrine requires some generalising assumptions. The *methodological* individual was originally to be conceived as a rational utility-maximiser: 'A rational-choice explanation of action involves showing that the action was rational and was performed because it was rational. That the action is rational means that given the beliefs of the agent, the action was the best way for him [*sic*] to realise his plans or desires. Hence rationality goes together with some form of maximising behaviour.' In *Making Sense of Marx*, Elster had therefore proposed the following methodological protocol: begin by assuming that any social event or phenomenon occurs as a consequence – intended or otherwise – of the actions of individuals who are both rational and self-interested; if no such explanation is sustainable, then relax the assumption of self-interestedness but retain the assumption that individuals are rational in their pursuit of non-selfish goals; should even this fail to provide any tenable

explanation, then 'as a rather last ditch attempt, we might feel compelled to assume that the agents act irrationally when engaging in collective action'.

Elster now mostly inhabits the last ditch. He has recently conceded that rational choice theory is not after all appropriate either to 'small problems' or to 'large problems': '[a] rough conclusion is that rational choice theory is applicable to one agent or many agent problems of intermediate size.' The theory is primarily a normative one: an explanatory theory can be derived from it only once it is assumed that agents do act rationally in the 'normatively appropriate sense'; they often do not. One consequence of this shift in emphasis has been that the analysis of 'sub-intentional' psychological mechanisms is no longer to be regarded as supplementary to the rational choice programme. Originally, beliefs and desires were to be taken as given for the purposes of the explanatory theory. If rational choice theory is now to be understood as primarily a normative theory, however, then it will not do to describe an action as rational where it reflects desires and beliefs that have been shaped by 'psychic processes' operating behind the backs of 'rational' individuals. Discussion of those psychological mechanisms that distort the formation of beliefs and desires has long been among Elster's central preoccupations – the chapters on Paul Veyne and Alexander Zinoviev in this book are reworkings of articles originally published as early as 1980 – but, in the light of these recent revisions to his methodological programme, this project has assumed ever greater importance.

In *Political Psychology* Elster identifies a vast array of psychological mechanisms (motivational and cognitive) which distort the formation of beliefs and desires. Some examples will serve to indicate the sorts of mechanisms he has in mind. The formation of desires may be distorted by the operation of (unconscious) motivational mechanisms. Consider the 'reduction of cognitive dissonance': in an effort to maintain our inner equilibrium we adjust our desires to our beliefs (and vice versa). For example, socialists might become so disillusioned regarding socialism's prospects that they discover themselves convinced that all they ever really wanted was a Labour government; and then so disillusioned regarding Labourism's prospects that they find that they no longer much care for even that. But Elster adds that the opposite mechanism is also sometimes observed: the 'case-hardened pessimist' may find herself converted to Labourism precisely because she is convinced that it has little prospect of success. Consider also the 'sour grapes syndrome' – subject of an earlier book by Elster, and discussed again here with particular reference to the works of Veyne and de Tocqueville. Unable to get at the grapes, La Fontaine's fox convinced itself that they were sour anyway. This is a paradigmatic instance of a common enough phenomenon: desires and beliefs are adjusted so that unobtainable goals are devalued. But again, the opposite mechanism can also be observed: unable to get at genuinely sour grapes we might – in an effort to maintain our inner disequilibrium – somehow manage to convince ourselves that they are sweet raisins. Indeed, Elster argues that there is nothing at all contradictory in being pulled in various directions at the same time. For example, the fox may come to believe that the grapes are just a little bit sour. Rather casually, we might then diagnose a mild case of sour grapes; but it is equally possible that the fox is suffering from chronic sour grapes plus a mild dose of sweet raisins. As well as these motivational mechanisms there are some obvious – and less obvious – cognitive failures that distort the formation of both beliefs and desires: '[t]he realm of error, sophism and fallacy is a particularly rich source for political psychology.' In the course of a painstaking reprise and examination of these sorts of cognitive and motivational failures, Elster analyses everything from the nature of political authority to the belief in Father Christmas.

But if the analysis of sub-intentional causality has assumed increasing importance in Elster's recent work, it is partly because he has lost faith in the explanatory purchase of rational choice theory even where the concept of rationality retains its original 'thin' sense. This is for two main reasons. Firstly, he has acknowledged that individuals habitually undertake courses of action that evince a wanton disregard for consequences. This is particularly the case with norm-governed behaviour. Consider one of Elster's favourite examples: norms of vengeance. Such norms may command me to challenge the fastest draw in town to a shoot-out simply because she has made some faintly disparaging remark about a distant relative. They also require that my associates enforce sanctions in order to ensure that their friend walks out at dawn to an almost certain death. The operation of this norm may wipe out whole generations; therefore no rational instrumentalist would endorse it. Or again, consider the operation of norms preventing me from offering my neighbour money to wash my car, or forbidding me from offering you cash payment for your place in a cinema queue. Elster has argued that such norms prevent us from entering into mutually beneficial exchanges: for example, you would prefer the twenty pounds to seeing the movie, but offering money in this situation is just not done. However bizarre their preferences, you just don't offer your boss, supervisor, or an elderly aunt a fiver to wash your car.

Secondly, rational choice theory fails to provide an adequate explanation of all sorts of collective actions that occur all the time, including voting, being active in a political party or trade union, and participating in a demonstration or a revolution. Imagine we are all rational utility-maximisers making up our minds whether or not to join the revolution scheduled for tomorrow morning. Presuming that we are all committed to its goals, and would be prepared to participate if we were assured that our actions would be efficacious, what we decide to do will all depend upon strategic calculations regarding the probable actions of other 'players'. To take two extreme examples: we will not participate if we assume that there will only be about twenty-five of us – we would not achieve our objective, and could repent of our strategic incompetencies while serving out our prison sentences (the 'sucker' problem); but nor would we bother to get involved should we calculate that there would be more than enough revolutionaries to pull it off without us – we could enjoy all the advantages of their revolution while surrendering none of the comforts of our settee (the 'free rider' problem). Elster concludes that in the absence of coordinating mechanisms we will invariably opt for abstention; non-participation is therefore the 'dominant strategy'. Rational choice theory tells us to expect no revolutions, but there are revolutions; we are driven into the last ditch.

This brings us to one of two examples of applied political psychology that Elster offers here in order to demonstrate the nature and importance of this approach to sociological explanation:

the political psychology of revolutions (the other example concerns the process of constitution making). This analysis – partly developed with explicit reference to recent events in eastern Europe – gives a clear indication of the current trajectory of Elster's thought. To get a revolution off the ground a small vanguard of committed revolutionaries is required. This leadership is typically irrational: some may be inspired by something like the categorical imperative (irrational); some may have nothing much to lose (ambiguous?); some may be perverse or plain mad (irrational); some may just get their kicks out of agitation (rational). This vanguard then begins to gather together a larger group of variously motivated supporters: some are motivated by threats and promises of rewards from the leadership (rational); others believe that their actions may have some instrumental efficacy (rational); some are historical tourists who just don't want to miss out on all the fun – a spot of revolutionary politics making a welcome break from their 'everyday ties and responsibilities' (rational). At about this point the regime begins to get the wind up: it may grant concessions, or attempt to repress the movement, or both. Such actions may increase the legitimacy of demands for reform or signal the weakness of the state, but they may also increase the costs of joining the movement. Suppose the net result is to encourage more people to throw in their lot with the revolution. There will be those who are motivated by an unconditional commitment in a 'norm of fairness' (irrational). They are not concerned with the instrumental consequences of their actions, but are convinced that they have a moral obligation to participate so long as a sufficient number of others are participating (the relevant numbers here varying between individuals). As these fair-minded people come forward, the chance of a successful outcome increases, and therefore another batch of utilitarians (rational) may arrive in their slip-stream. But these mechanisms unfortunately repel as well as attract participants: historical tourists get bored; utilitarians calculate that the revolution can now get along without them; some of those committed to the 'norm of fairness' conclude that enough others are drifting home to allow them to do so with easy consciences. But if too many participants throw in the towel, the tide turns again: utilitarians rejoin as numbers fall; some of those committed to the 'norm of fairness' now return in their slip-stream; even the historical tourists might perk up a bit given all this toing and froing ... and so it goes on. Elster concludes that 'individuals of different types attract and repel each other in an endless saraband' – 'to make a revolution a streak (or more) of irrationality is needed.'

What are we to make of all this? Well, it hardly comes as a revelation to discover that people participate in collective actions for lots of different reasons: out of a sense of duty; because they believe that their actions will contribute to the realisation of a desirable goal ... even for the sheer hell of it. Elster is also on pretty firm ground when he reminds us that not everyone is committed to consequentialist ethical theories. A persistent tendency to pass off the obvious as if it amounted to some profound theoretical insight is further encouraged here by Elster's original commitment to the patently false. If these sorts of commonplaces support the radical scaling-down of the explanatory pretensions of rational choice theory – now to concern itself only with such 'medium-sized problems' as purchasing a house or car (!) – then it is difficult to imagine how Elster could ever have advocated it in the first place. In the introduction to *Analytical Marxism* (1985), John Roemer had thrown down the gauntlet to critics inclined to question the ideological neutrality of rational choice theory: 'If Marxists wish to impugn the intellectual unbiasedness of rational choice methods they must show precisely where the dirty work is being done.' Elster's recent work speaks volumes concerning his own point of departure. According to his 'theory' of revolution, utilitarians are 'rational', but not those who are motivated by commitment to a 'norm of fairness'. According to his recent discussions of social norms, those who freely engage in unlimited market transactions are 'rational', but not those who hold back from purchasing places in queues – presumably health service queues as well as cinema ones – or from employing neighbours to mow their lawns. This is a truly remarkable termination point for this champion of rational choice Marxism: far from being an ideologically neutral tool of social analysis, rational choice theory becomes a normative theory arguing in favour of consequentialist ethics combined with the unrestricted operation of free markets.

Given Elster's often insightful works over the past decade, it might seem unfair to accuse him of a tendency to labour the blatantly obvious. Writing in a review reprinted on the jacket of this edition, Ian Ryan praises Elster for not being one of those 'briefly fashionable' social and political theorists who 'are later seen to be all hot air and bluster'. But a distinctively analytical form of 'hot air and bluster' has in fact pervaded Elster's work: a flatulence of precision. Consider a favourite example from *Solomonic Judgements – Studies in the Limitations of Rationality* (1989):

> Solomon's first decision, to cut the child in half, followed the principle of absolute equality at the expense of efficiency. Usually, however, the principle of absolute equality is not applied when the good cannot be divided without loss of value. ... Cutting a child in two would reduce its value to nothing. Cutting a seamless coat in four parts would reduce its value substantially. In these cases, the criterion for value reduction is that each applicant would rather have the undivided object than the parts into which it is divided, even where he [particularly *sic* in this context] gets all of them.

Solomon, as it turns out, had wisely calculated that the real mother would prefer the child to remain in one piece – and this even were she to be offered both pieces of the divided child. He had deliberately adopted the entirely inappropriate principle of 'absolute equality', in the expectation that the real mother would be more or less bound to point out that this would involve some sacrifice in 'efficiency'. A dead child is an inefficient child. If this is the depth of the insight to be had from a rational choice approach, then one can only welcome the subsequent shift in the direction of political psychology. That is, one might have welcomed such a reorientation if Elster were simply arguing that the study of psychological mechanisms is an important and interesting area for social and political inquiry. His often engaging discussion of the works of the three featured writers gives plenty of indications that this is indeed a game that is worth the candle. But Elster does not stop here: he further argues that the telling of 'little tales' – such as his own (hypothetical) account of the genesis of a

revolutionary movement – is the only viable strategy permissible for mature sociological investigations of large-scale social phenomena. It is only because we can identify those psychological mechanisms that can be expected to be found operating in any revolutionary situation that we are not condemned to settle for a merely descriptive approach. The crucial question, then, is not whether political psychology should be provisioned with candles, but whether it is a game worth the entire power grid.

Elster offers precious little argument in support of such a drastic curtailment of the theoretical pretensions of the social sciences. What we get are two highly misleading dichotomies. Firstly, between 'theory' and 'mechanism'. But the aim of 'theory', or so we are told, is 'to establish general and invariable propositions': to abandon 'theory' in favour of 'mechanism' is to do no more than 'to go from "If A, then always B" to "If A, then sometimes B". Either one favours 'nomonological thinking' (nonsense), or else one signs up for political psychology (sense). Perhaps there are one or two other alternatives? Certainly, Elster would be hard pressed to find any contemporary social theorist prepared to defend 'nomonologism'. This brings us to the second dichotomy: between 'methodological individualism' and 'holistic obscurantism'. Allowing for hyperbole, either one is now to concede that individuals are uniquely capable of thinking, believing, desiring, planning, acting, etc. (sense), or one is half-expecting to encounter substantiated predicates taking the air in the local high street (nonsense). But how can a doctrine as 'trivial' as this support the wholesale reduction of social theory to political psychology? Elster has recently declared that 'There are no societies, only individuals who interact with each other.' (Margaret Thatcher's reference to 'their families' presumably evinces an uncharacteristic lapse into 'holistic obscurantism'.) This would be unobjectionable – although somewhat less than earth-shattering – if all that was intended was to point out that the term 'society' does not designate some ontologically independent thing. But consider a subsequent definition: 'the term "society" refers to any area which has a local maximum of cohesiveness, so that any slightly smaller or slightly larger area has a lower coefficient.' This is nonsense: this is not what the term 'society' refers to at all. Everything here hinges upon a problem that Elster has consistently failed to address: the precise explanatory relationship between structure and agency. Social structures evidently do possess properties that are irreducible to the psychological states of individuals; and Elster's more inflated claims for the explanatory purchase of political psychology are – for this reason, if for no other – implausible. It is therefore possible to object to this programme without being a philosophical neanderthal. This possibility is a barely acknowledged one: Elster is increasingly to be found shadow boxing with old adversaries, rather than addressing himself to serious criticism.

There are some good things in this book – although little that will be new to anyone familiar with Elster's recent work – but nothing that should finally convince us to abandon social theory and – having finally obtained our intellectual maturity – to settle down to the compiling of catalogues of psychological mechanisms and the endless narration of 'little tales'.

Marcus Roberts

MISSING INGREDIENTS

Lin Chun, *The British New Left*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1993. xviii + 230 pp., £30.00 hb, 0 7486 0422 7.

Given its salience, in one form or another, over three decades, there has been surprisingly little analysis of the origins and mutations of the New Left in Britain. The difficulty of composing such history from the inside is evident from the mutually non-corrective biases of the available memoirs, (counter-) polemics and anthologies – whether David Widgery's *The Left in Britain* (1976), E. P. Thompson's *The Poverty of Theory* (1978), Perry Anderson's *Arguments within English Marxism* (1980), or the conference papers by Stuart Hall, Raphael Samuel and others, collected in *Out of Apathy* (1989).

A Research Fellow at Boston University and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Lin Chun has the advantage of being outside this particular whale, unfettered by ties that necessarily bind and potentially blind. Her book, based upon extensive interviews as well as exhaustive scrutiny of the primary and secondary literature, will be indispensable for students of the subject. Yet it promises more than it delivers – in part, one suspects, because of the corresponding disadvantages attaching to outsider status. These are, in the first (and forgivable) instance, linguistic: judging from her Preface, the manuscript of *The British New Left* did not want for readers; but it ultimately lacked an editor (a fact attested by a dust-jacket which features, alongside such New Left names as Williams and Thompson, that venerable liberal signature: Bertrand Russell). Syntactic convolution too often breeds conceptual obscurity; and it is scarcely an exaggeration to suggest that in order to get the most out of this book, the reader must be more or less initiated already.

A second cause for dissatisfaction is that whilst Lin Chun's account begins, conventionally enough, with 1956, it terminates, quite arbitrarily, in 1977. This is rationalised with the elliptical claim that by then, 'the long-awaited exhaustion of the New Left as a political movement was ... in conjunction with the completion of the body of its theoretical work.' A deleterious consequence of this self-denying ordinance is that it prevents empirical testing of Chun's preliminary hypothesis: namely, the 'political incapacity', but 'cultural permeation', of the New Left. (Two subsequent movements – CND/END and Charter '88 – owe different debts, of programme and personnel, to it.) In view of the plurality of contenders to its singular (and self-ascriptive) title, a suitably broad definition of the object of study is adopted. However, the intention to 'follow the tracks of ... four parallel institutional New Left tendencies, which made up the general development of the movement' – viz., *New Left Review*, *Socialist Register*, History

Workshop and the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies – indicates an exclusively 'culturalist' focus (and corresponding neglect of the history of, say, the Socialist Labour League and the International Socialists). Moreover, it imposes obligations which can only fitfully be discharged within the compass of a medium-length book. Finally, as a non-comparative history, *The British New Left* is inhibited from sampling the requisite evidence to corroborate its claims for the distinctiveness of the national variant of a continental phenomenon (the term 'New Left' was, after all, borrowed from its French counterpart, *la nouvelle gauche*).

As regards 'The Making of the New Left' (Thompsonian title of Chapter 1), Lin Chun is a reliable guide. It emerged in a post-war conjuncture marked domestically by consumer capitalism, and internationally by the Cold War. Its political precipitant was the dramatic events of 1956: Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech', incriminating Stalin, at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in February; and the simultaneous Anglo-French-Israeli invasion of Nasserite Egypt, and Russian suppression of the Hungarian rebellion, that autumn. In search of a 'third way' between the revisionist/Atlanticist social-democracy of the Labour Party, and the bureaucratic authoritarianism of Stalinism-without-Stalin (as relayed by the Communist Party of Great Britain), it proposed a regenerated 'humanist' socialism. 'Stalinism,' E. P. Thompson wrote in 'Through the Smoke of Budapest' in November 1956, 'is socialist theory and practice which has lost the ingredient of humanity.'

Restoration of the missing ingredient was a common ambition of two journals spawned by this turbulence. *The New Reasoner*, rooted in the northern labour movement, edited by Thompson and John Saville, and rallying ex-Communists, conceived itself as 'a journal of the democratic Communist opposition'. In the words of its first editorial: 'We have no desire to break with the Marxist and Communist tradition in Britain. On the contrary, we believe that this tradition ... is in need of rediscovery and reaffirmation.' Where the *New Reasoner* was dissident-communist, *Universities and Left Review*, based at Oxford University, and edited by Stuart Hall, Gabriel Pearson, Raphael Samuel and Charles Taylor, was independent-socialist, aiming 'to provide a forum where the different fruitful traditions of socialist discussion are free to meet in open controversy'. In the event, despite generational and intellectual-political divergences, skilfully mediated (as Lin Chun notes) by Raymond Williams, there was considerable interchangeability of personnel, and in 1960 the two journals abolished their division of labour, fusing to form *New Left Review* (*NLR*), under the editorship of Stuart Hall. 'The Labour movement is not in its insurrectionary phase. We are in our missionary phase', he announced in his inaugural editorial.

The mission – in sum, a transformation of the British labour movement – comprised three principal concerns: an adequate analysis of contemporary welfare capitalism (the 'affluent society'); a critique of the culture of post-war Britain (the 'consumer society'); and an exploration of the nature of a future post-capitalist order (socialism as 'a whole way of life'). Its intellectual fruits are perhaps best exemplified by the marvellous collective volume *Out of Apathy*, published in 1960 and featuring contributions from (among others) Thompson, Hall and Alasdair MacIntyre. Thompson's 'At the Point of Decay' stressed the need to construct a strategy for a 'democratic socialist revolution' as a matter of immediate practical urgency – a task which he sought to initiate in his closing chapter on 'Revolution'. Hall's 'The Supply of Demand' mounted an exhilarating assault on the accommodations of Gaitskellism ('Has the Labour Movement come through the fire and brimstone of the last fifty years to lie down and die before the glossy magazines?'). MacIntyre's 'Breaking the Chains of Reason' advanced an impassioned critique of the reigning 'ideology of apathy and conformism', concluding with the contrasting images of 'Keynes with his peerage, Trotsky with an ice-pick in his skull. They are the twin lives between which intellectual choice in our society lies.' (Twenty years later, Keynes had dropped out of the frame, in favour of Saint Benedict, with whom Trotsky was now aligned.)

As Stuart Hall insisted at a retrospective conference held in 1988, the New Left, while not presuming to compete with existing working-class organizations, aspired to constitute a 'movement', embodied in the 'New Left Clubs', and not merely a journal. Barred from independent involvement in the (anyway depleted) Communist Party, it adopted a strategy of 'one foot in, one foot out' vis-à-vis the Labour Party – a stance requiring no little pedal dexterity – and concentrated its political energies on furthering the cause of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, founded in 1958. At a time when the Communist Party opposed 'unilateralism', the New Left militated for a 'positive neutralism' for Britain, outside the Western or Eastern blocs, as the foreign policy analogue of its domestic non-alignment to either Stalinism or social-democracy.

The passage of a unilateralist motion at the Labour Party conference in October 1960 proved to be the high-tide of CND and the original New Left alike. Thereafter, the nuclear *status quo ante* was restored in Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, while the focus of British politics abruptly shifted with Macmillan's decline and Wilson's rise. By the time *NLR* was reorganized in 1962, under the control of a younger cohort lacking the political pedigree of their elders, the first New Left was, as Lin Chun notes, deadlocked as a practical movement and had – or so their inheritors would maintain – exhausted much of its intellectual dynamism. Disconcerted by alien, Andersonian jurisdiction, the pioneers dispersed – Saville to establish and co-edit the *Socialist Register* with Ralph Miliband (1964); Hall to act as Richard Hoggart's deputy at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham (1964); Samuel to start the History Workshop at Ruskin (1966); and Thompson to direct the Centre for the Study of Social History at Warwick (1965). The ingredient of humanity, it seemed, was not so easily mixed.

In his contribution to the 1988 conference, Samuel shrewdly observed that the 1956 rupture with the 'Old Left' was not as consummate as it appeared to its protagonists. The transition to the second generation New Left – Perry Anderson, Tom Nairn, Ronald Fraser, Robin Blackburn *et al.* – invites a similar judgement in certain respects. The 'discrepancy between cultural vitality and political weakness' detected in the first New Left by Michael Rustin persisted, and arguably deepened, in the second.

Its main social base was similar: the enlarged stratum of intellectual and cultural producers generated by post-war capitalism – a social category swelled by the massive expansion of tertiary education in the 1960s. Conforming, perhaps, to Schumpeter's

law of the 'overproduction of intellectuals' – 'capitalism, by virtue of the very logic of its civilization, creates, educates and subsidizes a vested interest in social unrest' – this development supplied permissive conditions for the advent of a mass, oppositional intelligentsia in Britain – one unintegrated into the traditional 'intellectual aristocracy' of Lord Annan's admiring portrait, and disinclined to relate to its society 'as if' (in Anderson's words) 'it were an immutable second nature'. But if the logic of capitalism provided permissive conditions, Labourist administration of its British sector, dashing the hopes of 1964 by breach of promise at home and support for imperialism abroad, supplied sufficient conditions for a cultural fronde that climaxed in 1968. (Where Conservatism had been the party of the 1950s 'Establishment', Labour became the party of its 1960s, counter-cultural equivalent: 'the System'.) Yet whereas the first New Left had regretted, and sought to bridge, the mutually injurious gulf between culture and politics, 'theory' and 'practice', intellectual and manual workers, their successors made, as it were, a virtue of necessity. Assuming a posture of *separatism* vis-à-vis the institutions of actually existing British socialism, *NLR* Mark Two eschewed what it regarded as the defining characteristic – and abiding vice – of its precursor: populism.

The 'mild-mannered desperadoes' of Carlisle Street (to borrow Beatrice Webb's sobriquet for the Communist intellectuals of the 1930s) may have repudiated the perceived populism of Thompson, whose injunctions 'to draw the line ... between the monopolists and the people', or invocations of 'the long and tenacious tradition of the British commoner', they disdained as sentimental, unavailing ingratiation. But they were equally *culturalist* – albeit of the 'international', rather than 'national', and 'high', rather than 'popular', varieties. (In arresting contrast to the first generation, for whom culture had been ordinary – and political – analysis of popular culture was largely abandoned.) In place of the Romantic anti-capitalism of the 'culture and society' tradition, reconstructed in Williams' classic 1958 study, they renounced local resources for a socialist culture as irredeemably 'traditionalist' and 'empiricist', and discovered selective affinities with Western Marxism. Engaging in what Isaac Deutscher would diagnose as 'national nihilism', and inciting Thompson's furious charge of 'inverted Podsnappery', the 'Nairn-Anderson Theses' – expounded, but not really analysed, by Lin Chun – sought to raze the entire political and philosophical heritage of the British Left. A typology of the typical and the exceptional produced an inventory of the normal and the pathological.

In order that a phoenix might eventually arise from the ashes, a programme of the assimilation of Western Marxism was implemented, and pursued with remarkable singlemindedness over a decade, both via *NLR* and New Left Books. The latter never approximated to the diffusion of its 1930s precursor, launched in 1936 and reaching a peak of 60,000 members and 1,200 groups in April 1939 (by which time it reckoned to have distributed some one-and-a-half million books). But what Lin Chun aptly describes as the pursuit of a cultural revolution succeeded, within limits, in its own terms of cultural permeation: the (anti-Marxist) national culture henceforth included international (Marxist) components. Moreover, the equation of Marxist theory with Communist doctrine, already disrupted by 1956, was irrevocably broken in the 1960s. What Anderson called 'the long night of theory' lifted; and theory became a 'material force' of sorts, in so far as it gripped (some of) the student masses and (rather fewer of) their tutors. In 1956 the Paris *Manuscripts* and the *Grundrisse* remained untranslated; Trotsky circulated solely in limited editions, Lenin only in censored ones; Luxemburg, Lukács and Gramsci were virtually unknown. The classical Marxist heritage had been submerged; the Western Marxist legacy was yet to be received. Thanks to the agency, *inter alia*, of *NLR*, the class of '68 was neither severed from creative contact with continental currents, nor dependent upon Moscow or Beijing (let alone Tirana) for access to the classics. And with the quickening tempo of events either side of the Atlantic, something approaching a hundred flowers – including this journal – blossomed, and a hundred schools of thought contended.

Lin Chun's discussion of 'the encounter with "Western Marxism"' is among the least satisfactory aspects of her book, tending to uphold simplistic verdicts of 'theoreticism' against *NLR* and its progeny, rather in the spirit (if not the letter) of Dimitri Mirsky's rebuke to the 1930s generation: 'System, system, system – this is what British intellectuals run crying after as soon as they lose faith in ... Nanny empiricism.' But *NLR* was no mere dedicated follower of continental fashion. Raymond Williams once drew a distinction between 'legitimating', 'academic' and 'operative' modes of Marxism in Britain. Its personnel mostly outside party and academy, the new *NLR* adhered to an operative conception of its cultural strategy. Yet its extra-territoriality possessed the vices of its virtues, issuing in a recurrent pattern of alternating *attentisme* and *suivisme* that afforded even less political purchase than the old New Left had enjoyed. Wilson, trade unions, students, Celtic nationalists, Bennites; Guevarism, Maoism, Trotskyism; one after the other, these were adopted with enthusiasm, only to be discarded without explanation, as agencies of the detonation of the British state, or sources of the transformation of the global order. (Lin Chun is too acute an observer to fall for its editor's claim that *NLR* was never Trotskyist.) Perhaps the most egregious of the unaccounted disorientations was the quasi-Maoist posture of the Revolutionary Socialist Students' Federation, counselled by members of the *NLR* committee, who advocated transfer of the 'red bases' strategy from Hunan Province to Houghton Street. (Lin Chun quotes Robin Blackburn: 'those who reject the strategy of the Red Base ... will be in serious danger of becoming the objective allies of social imperialism and social fascism.')

With enemies like these, 'social imperialism' and 'social

fascism' scarcely required friends; and pending the 'coming British revolution' divined by some, the weapon of criticism – or the logomachy of 'ideological class struggle' – did not proceed to the critique of arms. Solidarity with Vietnam was not the 1960s equivalent of international brigades to Spain in the 1930s, and Neal Wood's judgement of 1959 obtained a decade later: 'Spain was the first and last crusade of the British left-wing intellectual.'

What rendered the revolutionary Marxism of *NLR – dur*, if not *pur* – at least partially plausible was, of course, '1968'. Even as survivors of the first New Left were reconvening to promulgate their *May Day Manifesto*, its prudent reformism was seemingly being overtaken by May Day manifestations across the Channel – events which portended (or so their successors reckoned) the return of the revolutionary repressed in the OECD order. Lin Chun is in plentiful company in regarding '1968' as 'in many respects a historical myth', and in considering subsequent analysis of it to have been 'poor and sparse'. Yet she avoids false deduction of the 'lessons of May' by evading the issue of its significance. May '68 did not eventuate in the historic rupture identified contemporaneously by the second New Left. Or, if it did, it was as much a 'break' on the Right as the Left. For 1968 was also the year of the New Right: Enoch Powell's hallucination of 'Rivers of Blood' in Birmingham is as authentic an accent of the time as Vanessa Redgrave's denunciation of American imperialism in Grosvenor Square. In the very process of training its rhetorical fire on the post-war settlement, the New Left in effect took it to be inviolable as the form of regulation of advanced capitalism. The result was that, whereas its antonym commenced serious ideological homework on a 'regressive modernization' of the welfare state in the 1970s, the New Left increasingly found itself on the defensive, bereft of any viable domestic – or international – alternative to a Labourism in disorderly retreat before the Thatcherite offensive. Deficits of programme came to compound the deficiencies of agency and strategy that have been a familiar complaint of New Left discourse, from Thompson in 1960 to Anderson in 1980.

As a journal, *NLR* would display extraordinary resilience up to and beyond Lin Chun's terminus of 1977, modulating its editorial line in a period of reaction to one of retrenchment, and renewing co-operation with survivors from the original New Left. And yet it was surely symptomatic of its own repressed history that it marked the twentieth anniversary of 1968 by simply ignoring it. By then, two further attempts to ally cultural energy to political efficacy – the socialist-feminist irruption of *Beyond the Fragments* (1979) and the inter-denominational Socialist Society (1981) – had misfired, while the Old Left – in both its Communist and Labourist variants – was either an extinct or endangered species.

Lin Chun appropriately foregrounds the advent of feminism, conspicuous only by its absence from the New Left moments of 1956 and 1968, as one of the major departures in progressive politics in the 1970s. However, her epilogue, 'From the New Left to the New Social Movements', while consonant with the common sense of a 'post-socialist' generation, is arguably over-indulgent towards it. Just as New Right superseded New Left, so the 'New Social Movements' have been outstripped by some 'old' (or, at any rate, regressive) ones, rendering arguments for a new New Left upon their basis highly problematic. Frequently added, the ingredients of difference are not readily stirred.

Possibly even more contentious are Lin Chun's concluding reflections on 'a return, with qualifications, to the root values of the native ethos' in intellectual work, as 'the Continental ... gave way to the British' – a judgement that somehow overlooks those with an appetite for the schlock of the new, busy enjoining the British labour movement to lie down and die before the glossy magazines. In her final paragraph Lin Chun quotes from an article of Jonathan Rée's, published in this journal in 1974: 'the socialist youngsters occupy the buildings, while the socialist intellectual oldsters occupy the chairs.' But twenty years later, the problem is *not* that radical socialism is confined to academia, with 'theory' the preserve of professors and 'practice' reserved for students. Answering the New Left's initiative, but with all the resources of state power behind it, the cultural revolution instigated by the New Right against one of its adversary's bastions has contributed to the reduction of the margins of 'affordable dissent', and the erosion even of socialism's academic base. Updated for New Times, Rée's verdict might read: the postmodernist intellectual oldsters occupy the chairs, while the environmentalist youngsters are preoccupied making ends meet...

Gregory Elliott

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES DEMOCRACY MAKE?

Ross Harrison, *Democracy*, London and New York, Routledge, 1993. ix + 246 pp., £35.00 hb., 0 415 03254 7.
Anne Phillips, *Democracy and Difference*, Oxford, Polity Press, 1993. vii + 175 pp., £39.50 hb., £11.95 pb., 0 7456 1096 X hb., 0 7456 1097 8 pb.
David Copp, Jean Hampton and John E. Roemer (eds), *The Idea of Democracy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993. x + 449 pp., £40.00 hb., 0 521 43254 5.

We can all agree that democracy is 'a good thing'. However, it is more difficult to agree what are the better *kinds* of democracy. Another less obvious, but no less intractable issue is *why* democracy should be thought a good thing. We have here two distinct questions. The first concerns the ideal democracy, the second the nature of the democratic ideal. Both should trouble those on the Left who can claim, with considerable historical and theoretical warrant, to be principled and prominent defenders of democracy. Yet unambiguous and clear answers to the questions of democracy have not been forthcoming from this quarter. Perhaps this is due to a history of progressive disillusion with the simple faith that universal suffrage and a statistical majority, in the form of an organised and self-conscious proletariat, would be sufficient to deliver socialism. Capitalism has not been voted out of existence and looks unlikely to be so in the future. Social division is not

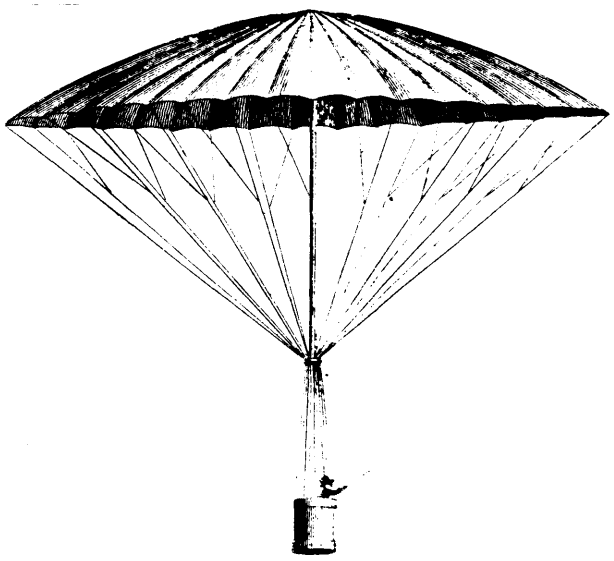
exclusively, or perhaps even principally, class-based. Yet it remains impossibly hard to discard the democratic ideal, whatever one's reservations about the particular shape it assumes in modern capitalist countries.

Anne Phillips' book is that of a socialist and feminist (she acknowledges that a conjunction here is better than a hyphen), who is worried about the first of the democratic questions, the ideal democracy. It collects articles written over the last few years which worry away at the general issue raised by her earlier book, *Engendering Democracy* – namely what difference an awareness of difference (such as gender) makes to our understanding of democracy. As she is honest enough to admit in her Introduction, the background to these pieces is a collapse of faith in the old certainties of radical politics and the literal collapse of actually existing socialism. The essays have a diffident, exploratory quality. There is no final settling of accounts here, rather a careful drawing up of the present balance sheet and suggestions for future improvements, modifications and amplifications. She is a guarded friend of liberal democracy, surprised to find that the object of her suspicions grows more likeable on better acquaintance.

Her major worry about liberal democracy is how far it can accommodate difference. Her minor concern is that the procedural minimalism of liberal democracy undervalues participation. Even here she is cautious. Participative activism is very demanding as survivors of the depredations of organised progressive politics will testify. As Oscar Wilde said, the problem with socialism is that it takes too many evenings. As to the question of difference, Phillips is troubled by a series of interrelated contrasts, such as that between universal citizenship and group identities, between the category of humanity and the existence of distinct genders, general solidarity and parochial loyalties, abstract universalism set against an awareness of particularity. She is concerned that any ideal of universality should not obscure or obliterate the reality of difference, but also that, from the other side, over-attentiveness to such difference should not lead to the destruction of what is and can be shared in common.

It is hard not to be sympathetic to this view. Yet it arguably derives its plausibility from an overstatement of the contrast. It is not clear who, to use her phrase, has 'universal pretensions' in political theory. Even Rawls now argues that his liberalism derives from ideals implicit within the theory and practice of a particular kind of society, namely modern Western democracy. Most North American political theorists are in fact quite cute about the notion of some universalisable moral or political theory. (My reservations about 'universal' theory extend, for similar reasons, to the whereabouts of the fabled creature, 'Enlightenment rationality', which postmodernists like to hunt down.) At the other end of the contrast it is probably better to speak of different kinds of difference. There is, for instance, value plurality, cultural pluralism, the conflict of interests, the categories of gender race and class, and the notion of 'difference' celebrated within postmodernism. Not all of these deserve to be taken seriously or, at least, not as seriously as one another. Clearly Phillips is most interested in the existence of distinct groups identifiable by some shared defining feature, such as gender. But even then there are worries about a progressive politics which recognises these differences to the extent of seeking to give them legitimacy.

How are the groups to be identified? Phillips answers at one



point that 'it is politics that defines the pertinent categories'. But what sort of politics? Are not some groups sustained by undemocratic, even anti-democratic forces? Will a truly democratic politics be equally favourable to the existence of all groups? There is in Northern Ireland, for instance, a persuasive non-republican socialist argument to the effect that a genuine class politics would corrode religious differences by introducing new foci of allegiance and loyalty. To guarantee Catholics and Protestants equal or proportionate power as groups within otherwise broadly democratic institutional structures is, on this argument, to betray the promise of a thoroughgoing, class-based democratic politics. It would simply institutionalise sectarianism. If the recognition of difference serves the end of equalising power, is it an intermediary objective or a permanent feature of any democratic system? Is difference an ineliminable fact of political life to which a modern democracy should accommodate? Or is democratic politics being designed simply to perpetuate difference? Finally, are there democratic criteria by which the value of group identities can be assessed? It is a problem (one which Phillips does acknowledge in passing) that some religious and ethnic groups understand themselves in ways that offend liberal democratic sensibilities. Islam's attitude to women is most strikingly relevant. And this problem presses when the understandable demand of groups for separate education is made. I suspect that these sorts of difficulty confront Phillips because at bottom she does not make clear what she understands the democratic ideal to be. She seems to view the end of democracy as the equalisation of power. But it is also surely the means to realise and protect certain individual values, such as freedom and autonomy. That is why democratic constitutionalism commands such support amongst liberal political theorists, and why liberal democracy is probably best distinguished from other forms by its commitment to protect civic liberties through some sort of overarching institutional structure.

Phillips is underwhelmed by the arguments for a Bill of Rights in Britain. To the extent that a narrow constitutionalism must ignore broader social and economic questions she is right to be unimpressed. But then she herself seeks to institute a democratic politics which compensates for inequalities of influence and power which have been generated outside the democratic arena. Anyway the point is that constitutional constraints invoking the

universal prescriptions of individual rights, impartiality and equality before the law can temper the undemocratic pressures exerted by groups, whether as majorities or minorities. Constitutionalism is thus the institutional expression of a democratic ideal which takes seriously the equality of individual persons. Phillips cites the judgements of Canada's Supreme Court on rape law as a reason for feminists to be suspicious of the merits of constitutionalism. But the answer is not to compound the problem by urging group representation on any highest court. It is rather to explain how the ideal of equality before the law can properly recognise the distinctive claims of women. This is what at least some working within North American feminist jurisprudence presently acknowledge.

Ross Harrison is most interested in the question of why democracy is the ideal form of government. He plunders intellectual history, from the Greeks via the American federalists to Marx, in order to extract the various ways in which democracy has been defended and understood. He then proceeds to evaluate these understandings and plumps for the view that democracy promotes equality of respect for all of us as rational and autonomous agents.

This is impeccably liberal and it is done in a commendably rigorous if somewhat abstract fashion. In this approach democracy is beset by Wollheim's paradox and Arrow's impossibility theorem, rather than, as in Phillips, undone by difference and plurality. Nevertheless, Harrison can with reason plead considerations of space, and urge the importance of understanding foundations before discussing how the building is to be topped out. At the very least Harrison makes it abundantly clear that the democratic ideal is in need of justification. He thus discusses and decisively rebuts the view, most famously articulated by Plato, that the good of society is best advanced by empowering those with expertise and knowledge of this good. This view needs to be faced up to, not least by those on the Left who might dismiss it as so elitist as to be beneath their consideration. This is because the idea that some normative political truths can be known, but not universally recognised, is congenial to many who defend progressive politics and has thus cast its anti-democratic shadow across a great deal of left-wing strategic thinking.

The idea that political truth is hazardous for democracy also crops up in *The Idea of Democracy*, where it is one of several ways in which the democratic ideal is explored. This is an excellent book which contains uniformly fine essays by a varied but equally distinguished group of authors. Key-note chapters are responded to in helpful and enlightening fashion so that the resultant mix is a rich and rewarding one.

There is a real range of views and topics on display. In the section on democracy and economics, for instance, John Roemer defends market socialism, whilst Bowles and Gintis set out the arguments for democratising enterprises. Elsewhere, John Rawls, Joshua Cohen and Jean Hampton debate the relationship between liberal democracy and moral pluralism. It is high quality stuff inspired by a shared belief that democracy needs to be and should be defended. Few texts can lay as strong a claim to being the definitive collection of current thinking about democracy as this one.

The book also exposes once more the fact that interesting work can be done when the specification of the ideal democracy is informed by an awareness of the democratic ideal – that is, when both democratic questions are brought into view and into relation with one another. Democracy is a good thing. The problem is to show how it can live up to its own implicit prescriptions. Only a realisation that there is more than one question of democracy to be answered forestalls the celebrated Churchillian cynicism which views democracy as the worst form of government save for all the rest.

David Archard

PRIVATE OBJECTS

A. Phillips Griffiths (ed.), *A. J. Ayer: Memorial Essays*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991. v + 239 pp., £12.95 pb., 0 521 42246 9.

Jonathan Dancy and Ernest Sosa (eds), *A Companion to Epistemology*, Oxford and Cambridge MA, Blackwell, 1992. xv + 541 pp., £65.00 hb., 0 631 17204 1.

Tim Crane (ed.), *The Contents of Experience: Essays on Perception*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992. xi + 275 pp., £30.00 hb, 0 521 41727 9.

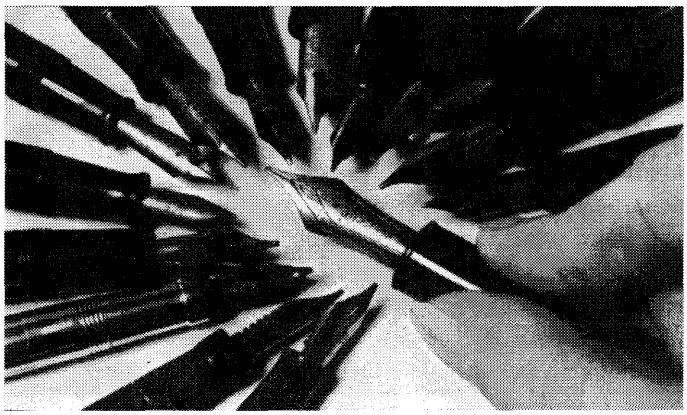
A. J. Ayer: Memorial Essays collects together thirteen essays based on lectures given to the Royal Institute of Philosophy in 1990-91, together with an essay by Ayer, originally presented to the World Congress of Philosophy held in Brighton in 1988, and an interview with him conducted by Ted Honderich, which was broadcast on BBC Radio 3 in 1989.

Ayer is remembered, above all, for *Language, Truth and Logic* (*LTL*). *LTL* was reputedly the British manifesto of the logical positivist philosophy of the Vienna Circle, to whose strongly empiricist, anti-metaphysical and anti-religious outlook Ayer had been an enthusiastic convert. The major doctrine of logical positivism, and of *LTL*, was the principle of verification: that the meaning of any statement that is not formally true is identical to the conditions of its confirmation. Since propositions such as 'God is good' are not formally true and could not be confirmed by any conceivable empirical circumstance, they are meaningless (a more damnable fault than merely being false).

Ayer was to reject or modify many of the doctrines of *LTL*, but in conversation with Honderich he is as confident as ever of the soundness of empiricist common sense: 'Sticking close to the facts, and close to observation, and not being carried away by German Romanticism, high falutin' talk, obscurity.' He also remained convinced that the work of those he called metaphysicians, including Bradley, Hegel, 'and the outpourings of such modern charlatans as Heidegger and Derrida' are 'literally nonsensical'.

Ayer's understanding of empiricism was that it is a tradition of common sense and good prose. Ayer's prose was good, but far from commonsensical. Bradley would have told him that since commonsensical beliefs are inherently contradictory, doggedly

to pursue a commonsensical belief will necessarily lead you a long way from common sense. In Ayer's case the rift with common sense followed a well-worn empiricist path. In common with Russell and most Anglo-American philosophers between the wars, Ayer believed that the objects of perception – what we experience – are items called 'sense data'. It could not be the case, as naive realists suppose, that we directly perceive material objects, since, as is well known, we sometimes perceive things that are not really there. If objects of perception can exist without material objects, the two cannot be identical.



Ayer's first response to this was to say that our everyday material object statements are logical constructions out of statements about sense experience. He subsequently rejected this view on the grounds that material object talk cannot be translated, without loss of meaning, into statements about sense experience, but he retained the idea that the immediate objects of perception are sense data (or, as he came to call them, 'qualia'), and that by a process of inference we go beyond sense data and 'posit' the existence of independently existing objects. The theory embedded in material object language, according to Ayer, is not to be taken as true or corresponding to how things really are, but can be adopted as one theoretical framework, among others (e.g. solipsism and idealism), for organising experience, which might be preferred on the grounds of its usefulness, but for no other reason.

The arguments that what we are immediately aware of in experience are qualia or sense data, rather than material objects, is criticised in this volume by Ted Honderichs ('Seeing Qualia and Positing the World'). Most of the other contributions take up Ayer's various philosophical interests, including the status of metaphysics, counterfactuals, the evidence of the senses, meta-ethics, epistemology, and logical positivism. Richard Wollheim recounts details of Ayer's career and approach to philosophy, mostly from the period in which he was head of department at University College London, and provides an engaging complement to the BBC interview. Anthony Quinton suggests that Ayer's distinctive contribution was not, in the first place, as an original thinker, but as a proselytiser for the empiricist tradition. The essay by Ayer himself, 'In Defence of Empiricism', provides a short and readable summary of the major preoccupations and problems of empiricist philosophy in this century.

The belief that knowledge of sense data is the basis of empirical knowledge has few philosophical supporters nowadays. The principal interest in sense perception for contemporary Anglo-American epistemologists is in the relationship between sensations and 'propositional attitudes' (beliefs, goals, values, etc.) as two categories of mental states or activities, centring on whether the processing of perceptions has a distinct non-conceptual and thus pre-cognitive stage. A useful summary of debates in this area of intersection between epistemology and philosophy of mind is given under 'sensation/cognition' (by Fred Dretske) in *A Companion to Epistemology*.

As the introduction spells out, this volume deals primarily with Anglo-American philosophy, while attempting to give some sense of other traditions, including those thinkers identified as falling within 'the Continental tradition' (here the volume reflects current fashion, with individual entries being given to Foucault and Derrida, while Lukács, Althusser and the Frankfurt School are confined to parentheses in a section on Marxism). There are 250 entries, thereby making this *Companion* much more of a dictionary or encyclopaedia than Peter Singer's *Companion to Ethics* (the first in the series), which had forty essays. All entries are cross-referenced and accompanied by bibliographies. A difficulty raised by Jonathan Dancy in the introduction concerns the problem of overlap with other planned volumes in the series. The editorial strategy adopted is to omit, or opt for shorter entries, where it was felt that a comprehensive account of a thinker or subject would be appropriate to another volume. Nevertheless, the omission of such philosophers of science as Kuhn, Feyerabend, Duhem and Mach, whose work has a clear epistemological dimension, is hard to justify. Such difficulties aside, and given its stated objectives and limitations, the volume will provide a useful library reference book for third-year students and upwards.

If sense data have become less of a concern within epistemology, they continue to be an important preoccupation within philosophy of mind. *The Contents of Experience* collects together several essays all dealing with the nature of perception. In a useful introduction Tim Crane sets out the key areas of debate on perception in contemporary analytic philosophy, and how the essays in the collection relate to them. He identifies the two main questions in the philosophy of perception as being 'what is the immediate object of perception?' and 'what is it like to have an experience?'. Answers to the second question have centred on whether the phenomenal character of experience is exhausted by its 'sensory channel' (touch, sight, sound, etc.) and its representational content (the position described by Crane as Pure Informational Theory); or whether experiences have essentially sensational contents (e.g. how bottle green looks, as distinct from the fact that an object is bottle green), which are distinct from how they represent the world. Functionalist theories of mind, according to which mental states are programmes or computations, favour the account of experience as purely representational. Anti-functionalists have claimed that conscious experience is characterised by 'qualia' (which does not have the same meaning as Ayer's usage of the term, referring instead to an immediate 'feel' or 'look' of sensations such as colours, smells and pains). According to one well-worn argument, when you see the sky and call it blue you might conceivably be experiencing what I call green, although neither of us will ever know this since you have always experienced blue objects in that way and learned to refer to them as 'blue'. As both of our experiences would represent the sky as 'blue', there must be something about experience that is left out by the functionalist account, and that something is qualia. In 'Visual Qualia and Visual Content' Michael Tye takes issue with

this and other anti-functionalist arguments, claiming that how blue looks is entirely accounted for by its representational/informational content: qualia, he concludes, do not exist.

Gerry Valberg's 'The Puzzle of Experience' is a response to Crane's first question. Valberg sets out an antinomy, which he finds himself unable to resolve, between, on the one hand, a line of reasoning that leads to the conclusion that what we are immediately aware of in experience are 'internal objects' (such as Ayer's sense data), and, on the other hand, the fact that if we are *open* to our experiences, 'all we find is the world'. Valberg considers a passage from Heidegger who suggests that in attempting to understand experience it is mistaken to focus on the scientific or causal story of what goes on in the brain. What we must do instead is to take a leap away from the scientific view 'onto the soil on which we really stand'. Valberg argues that, since experience is a product or upshot of what takes place in the brain, which *is* a causal process, Heidegger's attempt to exclude causation from the understanding of experience is unpersuasive.

Other essays in the collection discuss whether and in what way sense perception can be said to have non-conceptual contents, how different senses can be characterised with respect to each other, and the relation between action and perception. The volume, particularly Crane's introduction, provides a representative introduction to the main preoccupations in a difficult area of philosophy.

Kevin Magill

FEATS OF RECOVERY

Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*, New York and London, Routledge, 1993. xx + 300 pp., £35.00 hb., £12.99 pb., 0 415 90686 5 hb., 0 415 90687 3 pb.

Susan Purdie, *Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse*, New York and London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993. vi + 186 pp., £40.00 hb., £9.95 pb., 0 7450 0723 hb., 0 7450 0724 4 pb.

Veronique M. Foti, *Heidegger and the Poets: Poesis, Sophia, Techne*, Atlantic Highlands NJ and London, Humanities Press, 1992. xxii + 146 pp., £35.95 hb., 0 391 03720 X.

Michael Taussig's eccentric and thought-provoking new book does not so much provide a history of the senses as a commentary on a series of incidents in order to substantiate his claim that we all possess a 'mimetic faculty' (a desire and need to copy) without which no sense of personal identity could be formed or distinction made between self and other. Taussig's central concern is the colonial relationship between Europe and the Americas and he examines in particular Charles Darwin's voyage to Tierra del Fuego in 1832 and the recent history of Panama, with the uneasy relationship between Cuna Indians, white Americans and imported negro workers, to explore the 'two-way street' of such interactions.

The project risks both treading over the familiar ground of colonial history, plotting out the problems of assuming identities and obliterating aliens in order to do so, and being excessively quirky and modish, especially given its individual, occasionally irritating, style. However, in Taussig's hands the result is a fascinating – if not always elaborated – series of insights, and *Mimesis and Alterity* should be required reading for anyone engaged with a host of disciplines including literary criticism, philosophy and colonial history. Especially impressive are the two chapters dealing with the invention of the phonograph and the Occidental belief in the 'savage's' supposed obsession with the mimetic reproduction of sound. Taussig studies a variety of cultural artefacts from the quasi-anthropological film, *Nanook of the North* (1922), to contemporary Cuna copies of RCA Victor's famous 'Talking Dog', and concludes that taking the talking machine into the jungle serves as a means of consciously linking 'savage' and 'civilised' through their mutual dependence on the mechanical reproduction of sound, as it is an affirmation of imperial power designed to impress the natives. Such attempts to affirm a boundary only succeed in breaking it down: the self and the other become magically bound to each other.

Mimesis and Alterity is a difficult book to summarize, something which cannot be said for Susan Purdie's much more straightforward project. Purdie attempts to explain how humour works and her basic suggestion is that it functions as a linguistic exchange involving the transgression of symbolic laws serving to empower and unite teller and audience in their selection of a butt. I was reminded of an interview with the cockney comedian Jim Davidson: when asked why he made so many jokes about fat women and immigrants, he suggested that the point of such jokes was not to encourage the audience to hate these vulnerable groups, but to allow them to enjoy the thrill of doing something naughty by listening to what could not be said. It is a fine line to draw...

Writing books on comedy is a hard task; it is easy to end up sounding as though you should be in *Private Eye*'s 'Pseud's Corner'. Purdie does not always avoid this pitfall and some of her theoretical method, based on Lacanian psychoanalysis, reads like a very large sledgehammer trying to crack a small nut, and is not consistently integrated into the framework of the book. Nevertheless, *Comedy* is a useful and stimulating volume. It is consistently argued (theoretical tics aside) and has the merit of choosing material from bawdy jokes about Errol Flynn's penis (p. 38 for anyone reading in a bookshop), 'Hamlet' cigar advertisements, sit-coms, to Molière and Shakespeare. Purdie points out that humour is often assumed to be a masculine trait because joking serves to empower the subject; the attribution of a sense of humour marks the individual as a properly competent language-user and in a competitive, unequal society, non-dominant groups will be denied that status. Purdie, fond of jokes, especially nonsense puns, herself, suggests that humour should not be the preserve of any one section of society, and she is frustrated by the writings of certain French feminists whose arguments seem to imply that women are not naturally funny. Rather, she claims, all abjected groups should seek to appropriate humour in order to affirm a self-confident subjectivity.

The most specialised and probably least accessible of the three books reviewed here is Veronique Foti's erudite and highly jargonised study of Heidegger's philosophical use of poetry. Foti's dispassionate work shows how Heidegger may well have renounced his early enthusiasm for a political leader for his Hellenized version of the German people in favour of the seemingly less dangerous figure of the poet, but, in effect, his National

Socialist outlook remained. Heidegger's most serious failure was his refusal to analyse the poetry of Celan who was the most important post-war German poet to try to think through Heidegger's critique of metaphysics and the reality of the Holocaust (a task also performed by the French-Jewish philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas). Heidegger was guilty of the aestheticisation of politics, the vicious mistake which Walter Benjamin argued was the essential trait of fascism. Despite asserting that his philosophy dealt with the encounter between self and other, Heidegger was guilty of totalising the former and, in doing so, obliterating the latter. Foti shows that the great philosopher was actually a literal-minded and inflexibly poor reader of the poetry of Morike, Trakl, Rilke and Hölderlin. This may seem to be a minor fault, but given the central role that poetry played in Heidegger's thought, his lack of critical ability went hand-in-hand with his Nazi sympathies as he searched for what he saw as the soul of the most metaphysical of nations. Celan's refusal to totalise the value of art was not an attempt to banish it, but rather to rescue its ethical and political importance from the excesses of Heidegger's wilful blindness. In their different ways, Taussig's and Purdie's books are also attempting similar feats of recovery.

Andrew Hadfield

PLUS ÇA CHANGE ...

Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, translated by Catherine Porter, London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993. ix + 157 pp., £13.95 pb, 0 7450 0682 5 hb, 0 7450 1321 X pb.

If it is a condition of the existence of postmodernism that modernism should have preceded it, then Latour's strategy in this book, as announced by its title, should dispatch it handily. Not that postmodernism is his only, or even his main, target, but it is a convenient hook. For postmodernism is probably the vaguest position ever to claim any kind of name for itself, and it has irritated or enraged enough people for an exorcism like the one Latour seems to promise to attract plenty of readers.

That, as Latour himself has argued, is the name of the game: 'one of the main problems to solve is to interest someone enough to be read at all; compared to this problem, that of being believed is, so to speak, a minor task.' Latour's field is 'science studies', and the earlier *Science in Action* (1987), from which this quotation is taken, established him as an important contributor to it. That book makes a powerful argument for regarding science (or 'technoscience') as a complex of networks in which the nodal points are not just observations and propositions but also people, their beliefs, their modes of association and conflict, the powers they wield and the resources they have access to.

In *Science in Action* Latour represents scientists as Janus-faced, realists on the left, relativists on the right: 'We know why they talk two languages at once; the left mouth speaks about settled parts of science, whereas the right mouth talks about unsettled parts.' So *something* at least is stable and acquired; there is room for classical philosophy of science, the epistemology of cumulative empirical findings and the theories invoked to explain them. The action, however, is on the relativist right, and science studies concentrates its attention there.

By the time of *We Have Never Been Modern* technoscience has become socio-techno-politico-environmental-and-cultural science, and the target of the enquiry is not just science and its context, but metascience as well. Classical philosophy of science is now seen to be systematically inadequate: epistemology can preserve its privilege only by cutting itself off from the social sciences and the sciences of texts, but if all these are pursued separately they cannot deal adequately with the 'hybrids' or 'quasi-objects' that now surround us. These do not fall neatly into the categories of the natural on the one hand, or the social on the other.

Since this opposition is for Latour the very mark of the modern, confusion must result:

> frozen embryos, expert systems, digital machines, sensor-equipped robots, hybrid corn, data banks, psychotropic drugs, whales outfitted with radar sounding devices, gene synthesizers, audience analyzers, and so on ... our daily newspapers display all these monsters on page after page, [but] none of these chimera [*sic*] can be properly on the object side or on the subject side, or even in between.

The category of quasi-objects (which are also quasi-subjects) is borrowed from Michel Serres; it does not seem to me to be a helpful addition to the armamentarium of philosophy. It is surely a mark of naiveté to be so dazzled by the complexity of life that one throws up one's hands before the task of conceptualising it in terms as rigorous and as simple as the situation allows. Science has always proceeded by abstracting and schematising; some of its practitioners may sometimes have taken the schema for the world schematised, but this was a failing on their part, not a weakness in the discipline.

Latour's thesis is that the 'modern Constitution' – the 'separation between the scientific power charged with representing things and the political power charged with representing subjects' – never really worked: that hybrids proliferated between these domains through a 'work of translation' (an unsatisfactory expression, roughly equivalent to 'networking') even as scholars tried to ensure their separateness through a 'work of purification'). But did anyone ever take this modern position as seriously as Latour thinks? 'In their eyes hybrids present the horror that must be avoided at all costs by a ceaseless, almost maniacal purification.' To whom does this refer? What, after all, is so new about hybrids? What is to prevent an enlightened specialist from getting together with other enlightened specialists to deal with them, without sacrificing the knowledge acquired through specialisation?

Latour's attack on the compulsive historicism that led to the baptism of the postmodern is trenchant and welcome. The 'relative relativism' he advocates is however not an answer to historicism, but simply belongs to a different history:

> The universalists defined a single hierarchy. The absolute relativists made all hierarchies equal. The relative relativists, more modest but more empirical, point out what instruments and what chains serve to create asymmetries and inequalities, hierarchies and differences.

This Latour considers a 'non-modern' task, thus neatly avoiding the opposition between modernity and postmodernity. It transcends cultural difference, taking things (including hybrids) as they are,

allowing them to speak for themselves (the last section of the book is entitled 'The Parliament of Things').

For Latour this means finding 'new words' for discussion in a 'new assembly'. He does not tell us what these will be like – they show up on the last page. ('I have done my job. ... Others will be able to convene the Parliament of Things.') But his non-modern task sounds like what reflective thought, free of fashion, has always taken itself to be doing. My own suspicion is that many of the old words will have to be reinvented, many of the old analytic skills relearned; after the melodramatic shock of the new, the world will be seen to have changed less than we thought.

So in spite of the brilliance and vigour of much of this book (Latour is particularly good at disarming the complexities of the current intellectual scene), it does not achieve much in the way of new clarity. But it will keep the game of science studies going for another round, and by Latour's own account that may be enough.

Peter Caws

JUST CARING?

Mary Jeanne Larrabee (ed.), *An Ethic of Care: Feminist and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, New York and London, Routledge, 1993. ix + 310 pp., £12.99 pb, 0 415 90568 0.
Rita C. Manning, *Speaking from the Heart: A Feminist Perspective on Ethics*, Lanham MD, Rowman & Littlefield, 1992. xvi + 183 pp., $49.00 hb, $14.95 pb, 0 8476 7733 8 hb, 0 8476 7734 6 pb.

Both of these books contribute to the discussion generated by Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*. In this she argues that current psychological theory of moral development as represented by Kohlberg is gender-biased because it pays attention only to an ethic of justice, commonly associated with males, and ignores the ethic of care, commonly associated with females. For Kohlberg the crucial elements of morality are respect for rights, rules, and the sanctity of the individual. He sees the self as individual, separate and autonomous; and moral development as the passage through and beyond various stages of conformity and respect for society's rules, to the ability to apply universal ethical principles. For Gilligan, the crucial elements of morality are responsibility for the self and others, care, compassion and harmony. She portrays the self as attached to others, existing in a web of relationships; and moral development as moving through stages of selfishness, self-sacrifice and conformity to an attitude of non-violence where moral solutions are sought which harm no-one, including the self.

This is necessarily a sketchy account of a view of morality which has prompted responses from many disciplines. Larrabee's book gives a good indication of the range of them in the USA. Unfortunately, there is no indication of the background of the various contributors, so one has to infer which are psychologists, philosophers, statisticians, etc. Since the papers are all reprints from academic journals or anthologies which make few concessions to the lay reader, everyone will probably find something that they wish to skip on the grounds of unintelligibility. However, some patterns of response emerge.

Most of Gilligan's critics, and many of her supporters, argue that she does not succeed in distinguishing two moralities. Some compellingly argue that justice and care cannot be separated. Friedman, for example, describes the violation of justice that occurs in many intimate relationships where women are characteristically exploited in the care they give; and she draws attention to the way that care without justice in the public realm easily degenerates into nepotism. Oddly, none of the contributors considers attempts to institutionalise care in the public realm. All agree that there is something in Gilligan's thesis, but there is no consensus on what, except that it is not what she says.

Are the differences Gilligan indicates gender-related? Here, again, there is a broad measure of agreement that empirically they are not, but culturally they are. That is, the distinction that Gilligan draws reflects our stereotypes of how women and men should behave, but not the reality of what they in fact do. In her contribution to this volume Gilligan argues that she never intended an empirical thesis. Her work is interpretive. It offers a different concept of self and morality to the dominant one, and identifies this different voice by theme rather than gender.

This opens up another argument, variously made against both Kohlberg and Gilligan, that the moralities or gender stereotypes they describe are specific to the white, Western (and specifically North American) middle classes (e.g. with their strong sense of individual entitlement). These points are valid, and they suggest an even stronger argument which questions the viability of all theories of moral development by stages. Such theories presume an end to individual moral development which will reflect a *particular* morally ideal personality: in Kohlberg's case Kantian man, in Gilligan's a Franciscan with Gandhi's sense of self. But it is a mistake to assume either a unitary morality or moral personality. One does not need to be a relativist to acknowledge multiple ideals: to be unswervingly loyal to a cause, courageous and compassionate, is neither better nor worse than to be consistently fair and honest in the application of rules. Such theories of stages imply that being moral involves a single function which is somehow measurable. Clearly it doesn't: one can be strong in compassion and weak on fairness, and one's view of what is morally paramount shifts with age and situation. But theories of stages ignores the experience of the elderly, many of whom reflect on a continuous moral process of development, back-tracking, and re-appraisal rather than arrival at some plateau

or final stage.

Finally, many of the papers argue that to focus on an ethic of care is a political trap for women, holding them back in the private sphere to which advanced capitalism increasingly seeks to confine care (Puka goes so far as to describe it as a 'slave morality'). The more thoughtful argue that this means that we need to develop political and moral theories which make care the central concern. For liberal moral theory cannot account for one of our deepest moral experiences, that of an involuntary duty to nurture; and, as long as personhood is defined in terms of independence and individual rights, we face either an indifferent society or one whose caring must be done by second-class citizens.

Manning's book is a protracted attempt to develop such a theory, but is not very successful. This is partly because she rejects the distinction between theory and practice in a way which leads her into somewhat self-righteous discussions of her relationship with her pupils, horses and dogs. Somehow this is supposed to 'make our moral conceptions explicit', but all it did for me was to illustrate a particular life-style. Manning's discussion of homelessness should be read to show the worst pitfalls of this approach, which reduces to an argument that charity is not demeaning, and simply ignores all those arguments that have tried to demonstrate how needs create rights. Yet, despite Manning's shortcomings, there surely is a need to rethink our approach to moral and political philosophy in a way which does justice to the fact that many of our central experiences are of relationships, needs and involuntary duties, rather than of independence, self-sufficiency and contractual obligations. Her attempt to develop a theory based on a conception of humans as fundamentally caring rather than self-interested, and on the use of moral imagination rather than abstract principle for resolving moral problems, suggests areas worth exploring.

As Larrabee's book demonstrates, the debate has now moved beyond the simple antithesis of care and justice, male and female. Both books demonstrate that, as more women become philosophically articulate, we can expect new and exciting developments, making philosophy more answerable to our concerns. It remains for us, as Europeans, to temper the American voice that has so far dominated this particular debate, to meet the concerns of what is not (yet) an American culture.

Anne Seller

MORGANATIC MARRIAGE REVISITED

Kate Fullbrook and Edward Fullbrook, *Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre: The Remaking of a Twentieth-Century Legend*, New York and London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993. 214 pp., £17.50 hb, 0 7450 0686 8.

One of the most famous intellectual partnerships of this century was that between Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre. From time to time, in their youth, when Sartre was placed first in the philosophy 'agrégation' and de Beauvoir second, it is he who has been seen as the philosophical innovator and originator. De Beauvoir, by contrast, has been categorised as a novelist, critic, social and political commentator, and as the feminist author of *The Second Sex*, the massive work on the situation of women which has been seen as the 'founding text' of second-wave feminism.

This book offers a radical re-evaluation of that verdict. It is partly biographical, and some of its contents will be familiar to readers of other biographies. In addition, however, it draws on new primary sources, in the form of diaries and correspondence, which came to light only after de Beauvoir's death. From an analysis of this material, and from a detailed textual investigation of de Beauvoir's first published novel, *She Came to Stay*, the Fullbrooks argue that it was she, rather than Sartre, who was the originator of the central philosophical ideas in *Being and Nothingness*, the book which established his reputation as a major philosopher.

Sartre and de Beauvoir commonly read each other's work. And both of them, in the early stage of their careers, were single-mindedly determined to be published and to make a name for themselves. The Fullbrooks provide new evidence to show that Sartre had access to the text of *She Came to Stay* and read it in detail. At that time, his own literary career seemed to be in the doldrums; he was, the Fullbrooks show, experiencing a profound dearth of original philosophical ideas or any sense of direction for the major philosophical work he intended to write. Eventually, he published *Being and Nothingness*. But the Fullbrooks argue that the central ideas and insights of that work were already present in *She Came to Stay*. They provide detailed textual analysis of parts of the novel, alongside an account of the central philosophical themes of *Being and Nothingness*, and point to passages of a striking similarity in both.

She Came to Stay was, so the Fullbrooks argue, a godsend for Sartre. The question they pose, however, is why the debt he owed to de Beauvoir was concealed. In Sartre's case, the motivation is not hard to see. But why should de Beauvoir have colluded with this during her lifetime, whilst apparently making arrangements for the papers which revealed Sartre's debt to be easily found after her death? To understand this, the Fullbrooks argue that it is necessary to consider the situation of women in relation to philosophy. The canon of 'great' philosophers has consistently excluded women. To be a woman and a philosopher, or at least a philosopher who would be taken seriously, has sometimes seemed to be a contradiction in terms. De Beauvoir was as anxious as Sartre to be published and to acquire a reputation, and the Fullbrooks suggest that she, like many other women, suffered from the fact that it was difficult for a woman to do either. She judged that it would not serve the interests of establishing her 'name' as a writer to be seen as a philosopher. Throughout her life, she played down her philosophical interests and concerns.

The Fullbrooks provide impressive documentation and analysis to justify the main arguments of their book. The tantalising thing for the reader, however, is the number of questions that remain unexplored. To what extent, for example, did Sartre develop in *Being and Nothingness* the 'key' themes traced in *She Came to Stay*? Is the undoubted sexism and misogyny of the former something that was introduced by Sartre, or was it already

embryonically present in de Beauvoir's text? In addition, there are questions to ask about *The Second Sex*. It has been argued by Michele le Doeuff, for example (in *Hipparchia's Choice*, Blackwell, 1991), that de Beauvoir profoundly modified the existentialism of *Being and Nothingness* when she came to apply it to the situation of women. Le Doeuff looks, for instance, at the way Sartre, contrary to some of his fundamental premises, constructs himself in his analysis of 'bad faith' as 'the one who knows' the 'objective meaning' of the behaviour of subjects in bad faith. She compares Sartre's implicit positioning of himself with the very different way in which de Beauvoir positions herself in relation to her analysis of the situation of women. She notes how, in *The Second Sex*, space is made for a concept of 'oppression' which is absent from *Being and Nothingness*. In view of the Fullbrooks' thesis, questions such as these cry out for further discussion; they would involve a significant re-evaluation, not merely of the relation of Sartre to de Beauvoir, but of de Beauvoir's own work as well.

It would plainly be too much to expect a discussion of all of these issues in one book. However, in the end I felt some frustration. The evidence presented by the Fullbrooks is striking. Its implications for the study of de Beauvoir's work are profound. My frustration arose from the fact that, whilst the biographical material was interesting, not all of it seemed wholly relevant to the central thesis, and the book did not attempt to define the further questions which would arise if the authors' conclusions were accepted. In that sense, I found it slightly unbalanced. Nevertheless, it is an important intervention in the study and understanding of the lives and letters of Sartre and de Beauvoir.

Jean Grimshaw

LIFE AND LIFE ONLY

David Krell, *Daimon Life: Heidegger and Life-Philosophy*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1992. xvi + 350 pp., £37.50 hb., £14.99 pb., 0 253 33147 1 hb., 0 253 29739 8 pb.

John Sallis (ed)., *Reading Heidegger: Commemorations*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1993. xi + 418 pp., £37.50 hb., £14.99 pb., 0 253 35053 0 hb., 0 253 20712 6 pb.

Philosophers used to try to distance themselves from life. Socrates says to his friends in the last moments before his death that they should not weep for a philosopher because he is already dead even in life. Today, philosophers are tired with reason and want to get back to life: witness the current fashion for Heidegger's analysis of 'everyday life'. No one has done more to make this theme fashionable than the American philosopher Herbert Dreyfus and his students (a group of American Heideggerians diametrically opposed to the Heideggerians associated with these two books). The good thing about Dreyfus is that he makes Heidegger appear a rather sweet-tempered sociologist whose message is that thinking is just about 'coping with life'. Some lives are easier to cope with than others. The bad thing is that all the metaphysics, all the substantial claims in Heidegger, disappear. The easiest way to solve problems is not to recognise them.

Krell certainly has problems with Heidegger and they also have to do with life, but whatever he means by life is very different from what is meant by the slogan 'everyday life'. Everyone knows that the central distinction in Heidegger's work is that between Being, the appearing of what appears, and being, what appears. Krell shows that this fundamental distinction is dependent on another difference that Heidegger does not cope with. Taking as his starting point the lecture course *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik*, and then tracing it throughout Heidegger's work (especially *Being and Time*), he draws our attention to this *other* distinction – namely, that between the human being and the animal. Without it there would be no ontological difference, which is why Heidegger, although he consistently trips himself up as Krell shows, tries to make this difference absolute and prevent any possible contamination between the separate spheres.

Krell differs from Heidegger not because he believes in the unintelligible thesis that there is no difference at all between human beings and animals; rather he claims that the assertion that this difference must be absolute is merely the sign of a moral judgement against what is seen to be unworthy in human beings, which conceals itself as a judgement of reason. We declare everything that we do not value about ourselves as absolutely other so that we may excise it. What we do not value about ourselves is that we are living beings. We need the metaphysical representation of animal life in order to be able to divide ourselves from our own animal existence. Heidegger did not go far enough to break from this tradition (unlike Freud, for example) and so continues the separation of thought from life – though at a deeper and more profound level, which is typical of idealism.

It is true that Heidegger is a philosopher of life who in *Being and Time* shows us that our philosophical theories are a travesty of *human* existence. Perhaps this is how Heidegger wanted to be understood. However, this existence, no matter how concretely it is described, is still the life of consciousness. Krell's book forces us to take a look at what lurks beneath this existence, which Heidegger both saw and did not see, and which means that life is never easy for us to cope with or even to understand, because we are inescapably embodied and sexual beings.

Daimon Life, however, is really two books and I am less convinced of the value of the second. It seems that every Heideggerian now believes there is a categorical imperative to mention a word that did not pass their lips for years: politics. Krell goes through the sordid past of the great thinker, and reviews some books on this issue, but his passion seems to have vanished. Perhaps because countless other mouths have chewed this sawdust? Finally, to prevent the return of fascism, he wants a 'politics of life' which, despite the fine-sounding words, turn out to be the banal desires of an adolescent who has read too much Nietzsche. This kind of politics is already ably satirised by Robert Musil in *The Man without Qualities*. It is not that a politics cannot be got out of Nietzsche, but it will be just hot air if it is not connected to contemporary social relations, as it is by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*. As far as I remember, Krell does not once use the word 'capital'; a fault he shares with all those who currently find 'politics' fashionable.

Like all collections of essays, *Reading Heidegger* is not a true book, for it has no centre. And this is exaggerated when the origin

of a collection is a conference on a thinker without the focus of a specific topic (in this case the conference was merely to celebrate Heidegger's birth). None of these essays can be faulted for their scholarship: yet, with one notable exception, they lack philosophical ambition. The exception is not the essay by Derrida ('Philopolemology'), as one might expect (am I the only one to find recent Derrida tedious?), but the essay by David Wood. He is the only one who has the courage to risk a *dialogue* with Heidegger. That is, to think against Heidegger, and in this confrontation produce original philosophical ideas. For this is what it means to be a philosopher: to create and not piously to repeat.

No-one but a Heideggerian specialist – and then only the kind who is content with patiently 'reading' the words of the master – will be rewarded by reading this book. What worries me above all is that philosophy in the university is going the way of all knowledge in the increasing division of intellectual labour. Philosophy will die if it becomes a narrow discourse concerned only with itself and does not address, as Heidegger would say, the totality of being or indeed life. Then we are left with the 'specialists without spirit'.

William Large

TURN ON, TUNE IN AND PUT YOUR FEET UP FOR THE EVENING

Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil*, translated by James Benedict, London, Verso, 1993. 174 pp., £34.95 hb., £11.95 pb., 0 86091 387 2 hb., 0 86092 588 3 pb.

Jean Baudrillard, *Baudrillard Live*, edited by Mike Gane, London, Routledge, 1993. 221 pp., £11.99 pb., 0 415 07037 6.

Judgement on the future of Baudrillard studies is divided between those who dislike his work, and those for whom he is a post-Marxist anti-Christ. The supposed shift from a neo-Marxist analyst of consumption to postmodernist guru has disappointed some and confirmed the prejudices of others. Above all, the name Baudrillard acts as a cultural signified for those who suffer from PMT – Post-Marxist Trauma. Even steeped as we are in a post-authorial culture, reading Baudrillard's writings makes you wonder if it is a case of mistaken identities.

Mike Gane has recently provided a quite different composite picture in his books on Baudrillard. Gane detaches Baudrillard from the smothering embrace of postmodernism. This collection of interviews adds further weight to Gane's analyses. The problem is, in a post-Freudian and post-denial culture, Baudrillard's scorn for the concept of postmodernism can only be evidence of guilt: 'To want to disassociate oneself from it, to say that I am not a postmodernist, is still to say too much because it is a contradictory opinion and therefore defensive, and I don't want to go along that road either. ... So I have nothing to say about this because I say, and I know this from experience, even if I prove that I am not a postmodernist, it won't change anything.'

One person's paranoia is another person's truth. In a postmodern world of collapsing boundaries, thwarted intentionality and shifting oppositions, this could easily be misconstrued. Allowing for some textual 'instability', this is as close as one gets to a convincing alibi. But he believes it won't change anything. In fact he plays up to the sentiment behind the term 'postmodernism' when it is directed at him by Marxists. Nicholas Zurbrugg asks him about the infamous *Marxism Today* interview (also in *Baudrillard Live*) in which he says he would like to sacrifice, among others, a postmodern philosopher. Baudrillard responds by citing his work (in *The Transparency of Evil*) on the potential of sacrifice played out in the Rushdie affair. He admits a desire to be the Rushdie of the Left and write unacceptable things. Unfortunately for Baudrillard, *Libération* disobligingly published his article on the Rushdie affair.

Just as it is generally believed that Baudrillard is the pomo guru, it is also held that he is an avatar of TV culture and modern media. A recent review in the *Independent on Sunday* of *Baudrillard Live* suggests that his idea of revolution is watching TV. If, for Deleuze and Guattari, a schizophrenic out for a walk is a better model than a neurotic on the couch, then for Baudrillard, a couch potato is better than a militant with a Molotov cocktail. This is disappointingly false. Or at least it is only half-true. Baudrillard is a thinker who accepts the media and a certain fame as an inextricable part of his work. In *Cool Memories* he writes: 'Popular fame is what we should aspire to. Nothing will ever match the distracted gaze of the woman serving in the butcher's who has seen you on television.'

However, in an interview conducted on the cinema in 1982, the supposed Noel Edmonds of philosophy admits he only bought a TV a couple of years earlier (given the nature of French TV, this is understandable). More seriously, in Baudrillard's mis-anthropology, TV offers the *cool seduction* of a digital universe. It dissuades meaning rather than seducing it. Baudrillard's affirms the latter in the surrealism of Duchamp, and for a moment in time, the Situationists.

The Transparency of Evil is the conceptual destination of a theoretical journey that started with Baudrillard's interest in the concept of symbolic exchange. It is another marker in the confrontation between the symbolic and semiotic that Baudrillard has documented since *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, and pursued through *Seduction and Fatal Strategies*. Essays on Aids, Art, Heidegger and Rushdie are harnessed to a melancholic examination of the contemporary communicopia.

Baudrillard has never been slow to coin new concepts. If to some they appear vacuous, or the product of philosophical dilettantism, they are at the very least imaginative. In *The Transparency of Evil* the mutated form of the symbolic appears in the guise of the *Other*, and the second part of this work reads like spaced-out Levinas. Moreover, Baudrillard's *Other* is clearly smaller/bigger, more impoverished/luxurious, than anyone else's. If he isn't being ironic, then it is a regressive move into post-contemporary metaphysics. At best it is difficult to see where Baudrillard is going with this. At worst it is all too clear.

That said, for a walk on the wild side, Baudrillard is one of the few contemporary thinkers still able to provoke, excite, dismay and annoy in equal measure.

John O'Reilly

SCIENCE FRICTIONS

Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction*, Durham NC and London, Duke University Press, 1993. xii + 404 pp., £55.00 hb., £15.95 pb., 0 8223 1332 4 hb., 0 8223 1340 5 pb.

What is the connection between electronic technologies and cultural representation in the information age? What might such correspondences mean for human identity? Why is science fiction the only genre which has attempted to come to terms with the 'new subjectivity'? These are the key questions addressed by *Terminal Identity*. Scott Bukatman's thesis is that Western postmodern culture is in the midst of a representational crisis brought about by the advent of advanced electronic technologies and encompassing literary works, fine art, television, film, video, comics, graphics and computer games. A related theme is the attempt to construct a conception of the subject which embraces, rather than eschews, the contemporary culture of ambivalence and anxiety. Indeed, Bukatman's core argument is that the 'fourth discontinuity' – between man and machine – needs to be eradicated.

Terminal Identity is crucially concerned with charting the cultural appearance of what Bukatman calls the 'virtual subject': a subject which not only interfaces and interacts, but also inter*sects*, with the technologies of television, video and computer screens. Such interests obviously link Bukatman's work to that of Jameson and Baudrillard. However, in contrast to these writers, Bukatman views the present cultural crisis as essentially an ontological crisis. Hence his focus on questions of narration, intertextuality and the implications of technologically mediated humanity as exemplified by the 'electronic presence' of video or the 'liquid metal mutants' on show in recent movies like *Terminator 2*.

But Bukatman wants to go further. He argues that the dissolution of ontological certainties, and the concomitant expansion of feelings of cultural torment, as a result of the impact of technology on the individual are converging to produce a 'crisis of the body'. This crisis sees science-fictionalised postmodern bodies casting off corporeality and developing a sort of astral identity within electronic and technological systems. Bukatman further suggests that the imminent prospect of the complete technological penetration of the body has spawned a postmodern culture founded on a 'new utopia' of human resistance, particularly towards the figure of the cyborg.

To illustrate his arguments, Bukatman draws on the characters, plots and special technological effects of 1980s movies like *Blade Runner*, *Videodrome*, and *Tron* as well as on comics and the increasingly popular 'cyberpunk' novels of William Gibson and Bruce Sterling. Gibson's *Neuromancer* in particular is singled out for lengthy analysis. Much of the earlier part of the book is thus engaged in a detailed discussion of the ontological significance of electronic or 'cyberspace', cybernauts and virtual reality in postmodern science fiction. By contrast, the later chapters are devoted to a contemplation of technological bodies as manifest in the conflicting and contradictory image of the cyborg in films such as *Alien*, *The Fly* and *Robocop*.

Unlike Baudrillard, Bukatman wants to retain a conception of the active subject, although, as he readily admits, it is not altogether clear what it actually means to *be* human any longer. Ultimately, then, Bukatman views the appearance of the virtual subject in postmodern science fiction as a fundamentally *transitional* subject: one which defines, and is defined by, its cultural communications with electronic technologies. For instance, although Bukatman is willing to engage with Haraway's inspired feminist writings on cyborg politics, he also wants to comprise within his work Deleuze and Guattari's notion of a body without organs. In brief, Bukatman's final position ('Germinal Resistance/Cyborg Acceptance') is that, whilst the narrated virtual subject must eventually accommodate itself to the demands of electronic culture, it is not necessarily compelled to submit to its complete control.

Bukatman's analyses provide mesmerising insights into the kingdom of postmodern science fiction. However, *Terminal Identity* is perhaps best seen as an exploratory text, as well as a very useful contribution to the rapidly expanding literature on technology and culture. At the same time, Bukatman seems consistently to employ concepts such as 'postmodernism' and the 'information age' as if they were self-evident, rather than ideas which are part of a continuing controversy. A similar criticism could be made of the concepts that Bukatman himself has developed, such as image addiction and image virus. Certainly they sound attractive. But, having read the book over again, I'm still not sure exactly what they *mean*. Finally, one does have to ask just how significant science fiction, technological change and postmodern culture *are* to philosophical discussions centred on the characteristics of the being-in-itself. In the end, Bukatman's title works against him, since his real focus is not upon terminal identities but rather forms of existence which are as yet embryonic.

John Armitage

FOUCAULT BEFORE FOUCAULT

Michel Foucault and Ludwig Binswanger, *Dream and Existence*, edited by Keith Hoeller, Atlantic Highlands NJ, Humanities Press, 1993. 120 pp., £9.95 pb, 0 391 03783 8.

Dream and Existence is a curiously hybrid volume. It comprises a short essay by Binswanger which originally appeared in German in 1930 and a lengthy 'introduction' (almost twice as long as the text it purports to introduce) by Foucault. Foucault's introduction first appeared in 1954, and there is still some dispute as to whether this or *Mental Illness and Psychology* was his first published work. Both texts belong to a period in Foucault's career which is often overlooked, and which he himself consigned to oblivion by refusing to have his first writings republished. The Introduction, here translated as 'Dream, Imagination and Existence', has long been out of print in French and the English reader now has access to a document which, like *Mental Illness*, is unavailable to his or her French counterpart.

Binswanger (1881-1966) was one of the Swiss pioneers of a very Heideggerean *Daseinanalyse* which attempts to give an 'absolute privilege' to man (*sic*) as an object of thought, and his

essay is mainly an exploration of the phenomenology of dreams of falling. The dream-experience of falling is not a metaphor or symbol, nor is it a form of wish-fulfilment, as Freud would have it. A dream is an actual dimension or form of existence and its imaginative power can be seen as a form of knowledge. The dream is not an inner world of fantasy, but a manifestation of a fundamental aspect of human experience and, therefore, of human freedom. The clinical implications of Binswanger's theory are far from clear, and to that extent it appears to be of more interest to the student of theoretical phenomenology than the historian of psychotherapy or the practitioner. But it would no doubt be unfair to speculate about them on the basis of such a short text. In a sense, *Dream and Existence* suffers from being prefaced at such length, and a text which was already difficult to read in its own right when it first appeared with Foucault's preface now tends to disappear still more completely behind introductions (in themselves admirable) from both editor and translator.

Dream and Existence is now much more likely to be read for the light it sheds on Foucault's early development. Foucault's commissioned introduction makes no claim to being a 'presentation' of Binswanger's *Daseinanalyse*: it is, as he puts it, an exercise in 'writing in the margins' of another text. His marginalia in fact amount to a manifesto or an outline for a future 'concrete reflection' on man. The notion of a 'concrete' psychology, as opposed to an abstractly idealist theory of psychopathology or an academic philosophy of mind, had long been a favourite topic for French intellectuals operating on the marginal zone between psychiatry, psychology and philosophy. The theme of 'the concrete' appears to originate in early twentieth-century appropriations of Hegel, and strongly influences Politzer's critique of academic psychology in the 1930s, Sartre's existentialist psychoanalysis, and even the work of the young Lacan. To that extent, Foucault is, wittingly or otherwise, writing within a definite tradition.

Whilst Foucault broadly endorses Binswanger's theories, he makes it perfectly clear that his allegiance to phenomenology is provisional. The strategic value of phenomenology is that it can be used to further a critique of Freud and his alleged reification of the unconscious. Psychoanalysis, writes Foucault, has never been able to make dream images speak, and establishes only an artificial connection between their meaning and the form of their expression. Phenomenology, in contrast, does make it possible to recapture a meaning in the context of the expressive act which founds it. As the original edition of *Mental Illness* (the English translation is based on the heavily revised second edition) reveals, Foucault was simultaneously exploring a fairly crude Pavlovianism in his search for a concrete or anthropological psychology. The phenomenology of 'Dream, Imagination and Existence', which is heavily influenced by Gaston Bachelard's quasi-psychoanalytic psychology of the imagination, was only one possibility.

The promised further study never appeared. Foucault's next publication was *Histoire de la folie*, which turned away from phenomenology to a more historical-discursive approach to the sanity/madness duality and, arguably, to a much more literary vision of the experience of madness. *Histoire de la folie* signalled the start of a dazzling academic career, and the emergence of a figure more recognizable as the Foucault of the 1960s and after. It is, on the other hand, clear that his critical engagement with the *psy*-sciences, as they tend to be known in France, dates back to at least 1954, as does the insistence that the exercise (and critique) of reason necessarily involves an encounter with unreason.

Although Foucault was to reject most forms of phenomenology because of their concentration on the conscious subject, and although the projected concrete psychology came to nothing, elements of the later Foucault can be found in this early text. It obviously signals the beginnings of a notoriously difficult relationship with psychoanalysis, whilst the rejection of depth psychology and of in-depth interpretation looks forward to the endorsement of Nietzsche's paradox that only a surface can be truly profound.

David Macey

INNOVATIVE ORTHODOXY

Bertell Ollman, *Dialectical Investigations*, New York and London, Routledge, 1993. ix + 191 pp., £35.00 hb., £12.99 pb., 0 415 90679 2 hb., 0 415 90680 6 pb.

Dialectics has been distorted and dismissed within the Marxist tradition. Its many critics have rejected it as incoherent nonsense which smacks of mysticism or, in the words of Sorel, 'hocus pocus'. In its stead a dialectics-free Marxism has been presented, notably by such analytical thinkers as Roemer and Cohen.

In *Dialectical Investigations* Bertell Ollman continues the project he began over twenty years ago, in *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society*, of showing not only that dialectics is coherent and of value, but also that neither Marx nor the world can be understood without it. Furthermore, he does so with a clarity, rigour and detail that the most committed purist of the analytical school must admire. Far from being mystifying, Ollman writes with a transparency and down-to-earthness that threatens to lose dialectics its reputation of being opaque and impenetrable.

Ollman has structured his book to take us from basic dialectical theory, through advanced dialectics, to an application of the theory to actual events and issues. This last section is particularly welcome as an illustration of the theory and rare attempt to demonstrate theory in practice (where, for example, is Althusser's analysis of the world rather than of theory?). Ollman both investigates dialectics and dialectically investigates.

For Ollman the chief problem which dialectics addresses is how to think adequately about change. The world is in constant flux and we need a method for capturing this in thought. Other theoretical approaches acknowledge change but fail to integrate it into their methods. Dialectics takes change as the given and stability as only temporary or apparent. So where other approaches set out to explain why things change, dialectics focuses on how, when, and into what they change.

Underpinning dialectics is the philosophy of internal relations which asserts that the basic unit of reality is not a thing but a relation. This allows change to be thought of as part of the very nature of things, for things to be thought of in terms of process. Mainstream social science is based on the philosophy of external

relations according to which everything has its own distinct and separate identity and is related to other things only externally. Change is something that happens to things rather than being a part of them.

Ollman is aware of how controversial the philosophy of internal relations is and addresses various objections raised against it, such as that it reifies what lies between things and establishes boundaries in an arbitrary way. However, he does not directly deal with even more fundamental objections to internal relations philosophy such as its challenge to formal logic and standard accounts of causation. Without a full answer to these dialectics is seriously undermined.

The heart of the book is devoted to the process of abstraction (for Ollman the heart of the dialectical method). This process involves the selection of material, establishing of boundaries, and focussing on the relevant and important. Ollman carefully distinguishes Marx's method of abstraction from non-dialectical forms which don't incorporate change and which tend to be unconsciously used. He specifies three modes of abstraction used by Marx: extension in time and space, generality of focus, and vantage point. Marx, according to Ollmann, consciously manipulates these modes in tracing relations and highlighting different aspects of the same relation in order to gain a better understanding of his subject-matter. He can view the same thing from different vantage points or analyse it at different levels of generality, or with different extensions to reveal different aspects of it.

A great virtue of *Dialectical Investigations* is its clear and precise elaboration of various aspects of dialectics, most notably abstraction. Ollman is not just looking to provide a plausible theoretical account of dialectics, but endeavours to give a practical account. The book might be entitled 'how to *use* dialectics'. Throughout his applied dialectics section he signposts the aspect of dialectical theory he is using at a given time. It is also notable that Ollman has a clear commitment to Marxism, and sees himself as doing no more than drawing out and developing the essentials of Marx's thought. Despite being outside of mainstream interpretations of Marxism, Ollman is in many respects quite orthodox in his beliefs. His is an innovative orthodoxy, where orthodoxy is understood as Lukács understood it: a commitment to the dialectical method.

David Walker

Peter Fenves (ed.), *Raising the Tone of Philosophy: Late Essays by Immanuel Kant, Transformative Critique by Jacques Derrida*, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993. xii + 176 pp., £24.00 hb, 0 8018 4456 8.

You call the tone of the new prophets superior? Entirely right. Philosophizing in a superior way means thinking like a commoner.
(Schiller to Kant)

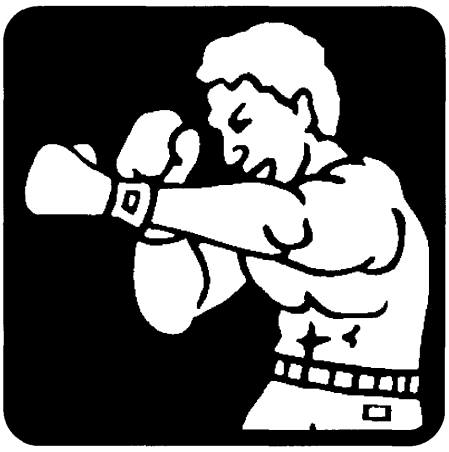
'Tone' and 'taste' are terms one associates more readily with literature than philosophy, but they impinge directly on the questions that lie at the heart of this fascinating volume: What is philosophy? What is the future of philosophy? How is philosophy to be taught? By whom? Both critical philosophy and deconstruction take issue with the apocalyptic tone which announces the end of philosophy. The specific context of Kant's anti-aristocratic and anti-clerical essay is the publication of a new annotated German translation of Plato's letters on the revolution in Syracuse by Johann Schlosser, Goethe's brother-in-law, but the reverberations are much greater. Kant is opposed to the antiquarianism, élitism and Christian sentimentalism of the 'Plato-enthusiasts' in general. Kant attacks those who prefer the inspiration of the oracle to intellectual work, and who, in a lofty rhetoric, offer 'the assurance that philosophy came to an end two thousand years ago', even as they venerate its founding figure; who want 'to ban all philosophy under the shop-sign of philosophy, and to act superior as the victor over philosophy'. Crucial to Kant's critique is the line he wants to draw between Plato the philosopher and academic, and Plato the letter-writer, susceptible to 'aristocratic esotericism'. This raises questions of discipline and genre. The argument, on one level, is about what texts constitute philosophy, and what tone is proper to philosophical discourse.

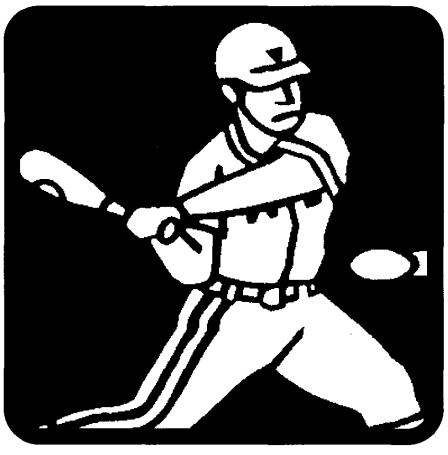
Kant sees in the exaltation of the Neo-Platonist 'the mystagogue', the messianic individual who 'flies above all labour'. Schlosser was a foe of 'the coarse *barbaric* language of critical philosophy', whereas for Kant it is 'a *belletristic* expression dragged into the philosophy of the elements of human knowledge that must be seen as barbaric'. For Kant, the back-to-the-classics conservatism of Schlosser was an affront to philosophy, because 'being well-read in Plato and the classics belongs only to the culture of taste and thus does not justify wanting to use such reading to act the philosopher'. Kant ridicules Schlosser's *bellestristic* approach to philosophy, and declares that 'the suggestion that we should now start to philosophize poetically would be just as welcome as the suggestion that a businessman should in the future no longer write his account books in prose but rather in verse'.

Kant draws a distinction between two kinds of superiority, social and rhetorical. On the one hand, there are those '*superior* persons' who philosophise, and 'deserve indulgence, since they condescend to put themselves in the same shoes of civil equality'; and then there are those 'would-be philosophers who act *superior*' but 'can in no way warrant any indulgence, since they lift themselves above their *comrades in the guild* and injure their inalienable right to freedom and equality in matters of reason alone'. Yet, despite the apparently irreconcilable differences between critical philosophy and Neo-Platonism, Kant proceeds to offer a peace deal, asking 'what is the good of all this conflict between two parties that at bottom share one and the same intention: to make people wise and virtuous?'. Schlosser, significantly, presented his counter-attack on Kant in the form of a letter to a student, and both figures shared a pedagogical imperative.

Derrida picks up on the acknowledged complicity of Kant and Schlosser, which centres on a reverence for what Kant calls 'the moral law, in its inviolable majesty', and draws an analogy between Kant's attack on the 'poetic perversion of philosophy' by the Neo-Platonists, and contemporary debates around literature and

philosophy, with its calls for clarity and accusations of obscurantism. According to Derrida, each of us is the mystifier and the clarifier of another. It is difficult to do justice here to the twists and turns of Derrida's elaborate essay, let alone the rhetorical force of Kant's brilliant lampoon, without some violent summarising. Briefly, for Derrida, while Kant's position is clearly that of a 'decided progressive' and 'an egalitarian democrat', there is a sense in which, by replacing God with the Law, he reproduces Schlosser's appeal to an oracle, an absolute authority. Thus Derrida aims to extend Kant's critique, the radicalism of which is short-circuited by the construction of a new transcendental signifier. Kant's critique of 'demagogic oligarchy', of the nobility whom he characterised as 'a class of persons who acquire their rank before they have merited it', becomes Derrida's critique of 'authentic rational democracy', of parliamentary representation. Tone, for both Kant and Derrida, is 'socially coded', but where Kant wants to neutralise the tone of philosophical language in the interests of universal truth, Derrida wishes to preserve the political specificity of discordant voices.





It should be clear by now that there are explicit political overtones to this complex philosophical debate. The question of class and of class struggle is central to the topic of tone. Derrida's own contribution, delivered in the wake of Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, invokes the film in the midst of a litany of apocalyptic ends, including 'the end of history, the end of the class struggle, the end of philosophy'. This epidemic 'endism', anathema to critical philosophy and deconstruction, is both the problem and the prospect of revolution and radical change. Every overturning is a return, a fresh dictatorship. One telling example of apocalyptic discourse mentioned by Derrida is Marxism. Derrida, in a classic deconstructive manoeuvre, sees both Marxism and its recent smug and teleological refutation as varieties of apocalyptic discourse. Derrida asks: 'Shall we thus continue in the best apocalyptic tradition to denounce false apocalypses?'

Willy Maley

Tony Fry (ed.), *RUATV?: Heidegger and the Televisual*, Sydney, Power Publications, 1993. 125 pp., A$14.95 pb, 0 909952 21 3.

Gotcha! Why were televised pictures of the Gulf War provided by 'Rocket Cams' attached to missiles more shockingly exultant than the subtitled stills of the sinking of the Belgrano? What was in that bite that made us watch endless repeats transfixed as if in a Games Arcade? This set of engaging and imaginative essays provides paths towards a Heideggerian explanation. Heidegger's dictum – 'the fact that the world becomes a picture is all is what distinguishes the modern age' – forms the starting point. It is impossible to dissociate what it is to be part of our nuclear age from what it is to picture a whole world from the perspective of the bomb speeding towards it. Hence, according to Heideggerian analysis, our solipsistic fascination with that picture.

The central theme of the essays by Tony Fry and Deborah Malor is that television is the epiphany of modern technology. It is uniquely suitable for a number of forms of imaginative creativity and for the promotion of awareness by diminishing the effects of distance. These features are generally beneficial. The more sinister 'enframing' power of technology is also heightened by the televisual. It makes possible what Heidegger feared most: that human reason should eventually be cast according to the uniform and totalising matrices characterizing artificial intelligence. Eamon D'Arcy draws out the paradoxical 'power for the good' and disguised menace of television by considering what this prosthetic extension of human perception makes possible. His discussion of televisual images as the moving sights/sites of knowledge and power complements Foucault's discussion of the (fixed) Panopticon. Alison Gill and Freida Riggs compare Heidegger with Walter Benjamin. Benjamin, they argue, would not have welcomed television unequivocally as a weapon of mass reproduction

The vision of these essays represents an authentically Heideggerian pessimism about the essence of the televisual age. One could well imagine Heidegger comparing the Soap Opera addict to Durer's drawing of Melancholia sitting disconsolately alone amidst a plethora of instruments which might have filled the hours with enterprise but in fact serve merely to remind her of her plight. But this cannot be the whole truth of the matter. Analysing television through the relationship of enframing and revelation does not catch all that can be said about it. The Rocket Cam fits Heidegger's account because the manipulative function of technology working through the environment-creating eye dominates the revelatory function. Television has framed our deepest awareness of what 'really happened' in the Gulf War. But a massacre in a Rio de Janeiro shanty town last summer, when survivors begged the cameras to stay as protection against the return of the killers, tells a different story. The camera itself creates an environment 'on the ground' which is different from the environment created by its eye and transmitted to distant viewers. Certainly its power on the ground is derived from its links with that screen far away, where it practises the magic of detachment and enframing. But on the ground it is not detached, it does not enframe, and consequently it has powers to disturb that environment and to reveal it to itself. The fly on the wall also bites (Gotcha!), even if most of the time it is itself that it feeds upon.

Max de Gaynesford