

# REVIEWS

## Wakey wakey

John Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age*, Routledge, London and New York, 1995. x + 203 pp., £19.99 hb., 0 415 12475 1.

Why should the collapse of the Berlin Wall have come to stand as *the* symbol of the revolutions which swept away historical Communism at the close of the 1980s? Those searching for resonant images of the triumph of liberal capitalism over its principal antagonist were spoilt for choice. So why this one above all others? In large part because the fall of the Berlin Wall has come to symbolize *reunification* as such – of the nation, the continent, the globe. It stands not only for the *defeat* of historical Communism, but also for the world-historical *victory* of liberal capitalism. A world torn in two had been made whole again.

Despite his sometime allegiance to the New Right prospectus, and his consistent defence of capitalism (in a variety of guises) against socialism, John Gray had dropped in upon the triumphal celebrations of neo-liberalism's 'victory', only to declare – in his role as party-pooper-in-chief to the New Right – that the end of historical Communism heralded, not the final victory of liberal democracy, but the beginning of the end for the 'Western Idea'. It sounded the death knell, not the dinner gong, for those other progeny of Enlightenment: liberalism in general (at least as we have known it), and neo-liberal capitalism in particular. The shared 'Western' lineage of 'American liberalism' and 'Marxism' was precisely evinced, or so Gray claimed, by their Cold War struggle to the death: both fought for a world ('universalism') and promised the earth ('utopianism').

It would appear now that Gray's lamentations were a tad closer to the mark than Fukuyama's prognosis of an 'end of history', projecting the 'universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government'. 'History' (as 'slaughterhouse') has declined Fukuyama's offer of a spectral existence on the hinterlands of the post-historical world, and avenged itself in a recently 'liberated' Europe. Moreover, it was not only the former Soviet bloc and Yugoslavia that were soon being ravaged by ethnic conflict but also the (sometime) leader of the 'Free World': the USA, from the LA riots to the OJ trial. Things were not working out as well as had been hoped. Gray

concludes that the prospects for the post-Communist world are bleak: not the 'end of history', but its resumption 'on decidedly traditional lines'. Furthermore, Gray argues that the neo-liberal order itself was already in decline, even at the moment of 'triumph', as economic power shifted inexorably from the North Atlantic to the Pacific Rim. This development also refutes the Fukuyama thesis. Japan and the East Asian Tigers have embraced capitalism, but they have repudiated the possessive individualism – and, in many cases, the commitment to individual rights – characteristic of its (recently) less successful 'Western' incarnations. Capitalism may have been victorious in '89, then, but the Western idea was already in a terminal state.

Now, of course, there is nothing remarkable about Gray's announcement of Enlightenment's wake – or his insistence that the bonfire of the vanities would eventually consume 'American liberalism' as well – from the perspective of recent academic political theory. In the last decade or so the penning of obituaries to the long Ages of Reason has blossomed into a cottage industry, prominent exponents of the genre including Alasdair MacIntyre and Richard Rorty. But Gray's perception of academic philosophers is that they inhabit a realm utterly remote from historical experience and political reality. Those in search of bearings in the noumenal realm of the Red Bricks are here directed to Goodwin and Pettit's *Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*. This work omits all discussion of nationalism – on the grounds that it has no defence in 'principled thought' – and also of theism and fascism – on the grounds that their impact on the contemporary world has been a 'marginal one' (something that will come as news to Salman Rushdie, not to mention immigrant populations throughout Europe and beyond).

Nor do recent communitarian critics of Neo-Kantianism escape Gray's censure. For him the vision of an ideal community animating communitarianism is itself a child of the Enlightenment 'in one of its most primitive forms': '[i]n our world – the only one

we know – the shadow cast by community is enmity, and the boundaries of communities must often be settled by war.’ Having affirmed the universality of particularity, the communitarians repressed it by imaging away its inescapable, but darker, aspects.

In a more detailed engagement with the works of MacIntyre and Rorty, Gray condemns the former for fleeing the desolation of modernity for irretrievably lost premodern traditions; and the latter for embracing ‘American liberalism’, and failing to see that the twilight of Enlightenment demands revision of the liberal civil and political dispensation. In Enlightenment’s wake, Gray reaches for neither Nietzsche nor Aristotle, Trotsky nor St Benedict, but for *Leviathan*, and the works of those rare liberal thinkers who have resisted the enchantments of Neo-Kantian, and kindred, universalisms (notably, Isaiah Berlin and Joseph Raz).

Neither Moscow nor Washington, but – what? Liberal capitalism for those who like (or live) that sort of thing, and then in a reconstructed form which has burnt its bridges with the catastrophic neo-conservatism ‘that in its rationalistic utopianism and its hubristic doctrine of global convergence on a universal civilisation resembles nothing more closely than the most primitive forms of classical Marxism’. Nor is Gray a friend of global capitalism in its current incarnation; given his erstwhile political affiliations, his condemnation of it is bracing: ‘throughout the world the market institutions through which the natural world is exploited ... are ever more chaotic, and elude any form of accountability and control. The legacy of the Enlightenment project ... is a world ruled by calculation and wilfulness which is humanly unintelligible and destructively purposeless.’

Gray further argues that, although a form of liberal capitalism may be *our* destiny, it is not the world’s: it is only one of many possible forms of life which can accommodate human flourishing (and only one of many possible forms of capitalism). Diverse and incommensurable values, and their corresponding forms of life, are here to stay, and so, inevitably, are wars and rumours of war. Moreover, the rise of ‘multi-culturalism’ has imported these perennial sources of conflict into the national arena. American liberalism is thus not only denied the prospect of a world but is even losing the battle for the homogeneous (liberal) state.

Against the New Right, Gray maintains that the free market, far from being the universal panacea, is itself responsible for many of the world’s ills. In particular, he is concerned with the devastation of an

environment treated by the free trader *vulgaris* as a mere provider of exploitable resources. Unrestrained market capitalism has decimated rainforests, cities and communities alike. Gray’s conclusion is a radical one: not simply the restraint of free-market capitalism, but the abandonment of economic growth, thus disarming capitalism of one of its most deadly Cold War weapons: its ability indefinitely to deliver the ‘goods’. He also castigates the New Right for its abandonment of those discarded by a market no longer prepared to recognize them even as exploitable resources; and for a rampant populism which has elevated consumer preferences to the status of moral absolutes beyond which no appeal to independent values is permissible or possible.

Gray urges the abandonment of a liberal discourse of rights. He claims that there are no principles of justice around which all citizens can rally within the political sphere, regardless of whether or not they are committed to (comprehensive) liberal conceptions of the good without the political sphere. The best to be hoped for is a *modus vivendi* secured by an ‘agonistic’ version of liberalism, which has abandoned Neo-Kantianism and all of its (divisive) works for the security of a Hobbesian peace. The allegiance to individual rights (and *a fortiori* to minority rights), Gray argues, is not only unable to resolve, but actually exacerbates, potentially explosive social tensions. An absolutist commitment to transcultural rights tends to the obliteration of cultural diversity and precludes the possibility of processes of ‘bargaining’. This point is illustrated with particular reference to the abortion debate. So long as this issue is understood in terms of rights – the ‘right to choose’ *versus* ‘the right to live’ – it can admit of ‘no compromise solutions, only judgements which yield unconditional victory for one side and complete defeat for the other’. This, Gray maintains, helps to explain why the issue has been so divisive in the United States as compared with countries in which it has been addressed as a political – rather than a constitutional – issue.

There is much to be said for Gray’s diagnosis of post-Communist times. He corrects an error committed by all sides during the protracted debate over the Fukuyama thesis: the victory of capitalism is *not* equivalent to the victory of *liberal* capitalism. The myopic surrender to this equation is symptomatic of enchantment with the mythologies of the Berlin Wall (either historical Communism or ‘American liberalism’), and of its fall (not historical Communism, therefore ‘American liberalism’). There is every

reason to anticipate the defeat of the Western Idea at the hands of an 'eastern' one (i.e. the species of non-liberal capitalism to be found around the Pacific Rim).

However, Gray's own position is problematic. Certainly there are good pragmatic reasons for pursuing a *modus vivendi* so long as we are condemned to 'history': better to settle for an armed truce than to resume the quest for the Kingdom of Ends, or the commencement of 'truly human history', where such projects risk descent into a war of all against all. But such *pragmatic* justifications are consistent with a commitment to some version of the Enlightenment project. Gray's point, however, is not only that history will be with us for a long time, but that it is an inescapable – i.e. an untranscendable, if not irrepressible – aspect of our condition. The appeal here is to Isaiah Berlin, rather than Hobbes: our values are necessarily plural and non-compossible and there is therefore no such thing as *the* good society. To take an example close to Gray's heart, tradition-bound societies may provide a sense of security and community denied in liberal ones. Tradition and autonomy are both valuable things, or so Gray claims, and hence both liberal and non-liberal societies provide possible contexts for (different forms of) human flourishing. However, the goods of tradition and autonomy are non-compossible, and the choice between them is consequently a tragic one.

Two points occur here. First, *value-pluralism* excludes relativism *by definition* – it presupposes a distinction between the valuable and the valueless. Gray makes this distinction by appealing to a notion – or a family of notions – of 'human flourishing'. The problem is that we need to decide what counts as an instance of human flourishing, and what does not; and it is unclear how we might do this without appealing to the kind of philosophical anthropology that underpinned a number of versions of the 'Enlightenment project'.

Gray might accuse those who venture such criticisms of 'universalism' and 'utopianism'. However – and secondly – his attack on such 'hubris' is eased by a tendency to caricature the Enlightenment project. One can be committed to a form of universalism without either envisioning a cosmopolitan world order or denying value-pluralism. One simply can hold that some values have universal validity and provide a basis for a critique of existing cultural and social practices (as Gray clearly does). Similarly, someone can have a good idea

of what needs changing and why, without assuming that there is such a thing as *the* perfect society. Value-pluralism does not rule out 'utopianism', if this means either any vision of *a* good society or an account of the necessary characteristics of *any* good society.

Further difficulties emerge when we consider Gray's assault on the morality of right. He argues that rights discourse undermines any *modus vivendi* by precluding the possibility of bargaining and compromise. But compromise over incommensurables would appear to be a conceptual impossibility. Is it supposed that the decision to permit abortion up to, say, 28 weeks represents a compromise between those who would prohibit it after 14 weeks and those who would permit it up to 42 weeks? Or consider the Salman Rushdie affair. What compromise was possible here? Removing *half* of the offending passages? Or perhaps a bargain of the form 'we'll leave off Rushdie if you build us two mosques'? Furthermore, the relevant understandings of, and the commitment to, bargaining and compromise are themselves expressive of values specific to definite forms of life: in particular, liberal-capitalist ones.

There are also problems with Gray's critique of neo-liberal capitalism. Having declared that the global market is 'humanly unintelligible and destructively purposeless', he proceeds to claim that 'nothing advanced here is meant to cast doubt on the



centrality and indispensability of market institutions in economic life.' Market institutions are to be 'harnessed ... to serve human needs'. The trouble is that in our world – the only one we know – the shadow cast by market institutions is environmental devastation, congenital unresponsiveness to human needs, the destruction of communities, and so forth. Of course, Gray could reply that there is no alternative to market capitalism. Yet this is irrelevant to the question of whether his variation on an old theme – capitalism with a human face – is persuasive. In particular, Gray looks forward to capitalism without expansion: to smooth *non*-accumulation. This leaves him vulnerable to precisely the damaging charge he has levelled against market socialism: that it is an impossible chimera. One is reminded of the scene in *Modern Times* in which Chaplin has an automatic

feeding machine strapped to his head, which continues to gorge him – at an alarming rate, and with revolting food – until it finally short-circuits. Capitalism is rather like that.

While Gray's own position is flawed, and although his specific policy prescriptions are often neither congenial nor persuasive, there is much to be gained from reading this book. Gray's work is always engaged, exhibits great breadth and erudition, and contains highly entertaining polemic. It is worth noting that all this intellectual labour has apparently taken Gray – over a period of a decade or so – all the way from (qualified) support for Thatcherism to (qualified) support for Blairism. Given the scale of the problems he identifies, this puts me in mind of a herbal treatment for cancer that I once stumbled upon: an infusion of watercress, to be taken daily.

**Marcus Roberts**

## Questions and answers?

Michael Redclift and Ted Benton, eds, *Social Theory and the Global Environment*, Routledge, London and New York, 1994. vii + 271 pp., £40.00 hb., £12.99 pb., 0 415 11169 2 hb., 0 415 11170 6 pb.

Luke Martell, *Ecology and Society: An Introduction*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1994. vi + 232 pp., £39.50 hb., £11.95 pb., 0 7456 1022 6 hb., 0 7456 1023 4 pb.

Discussion of environmental change has tended to be dominated by the physical sciences. However, the science-driven approach has not adequately comprehended the anthropogenic *causes* of ecological harms, or the social contexts of their impact, or, indeed, the social factors involved in the very construction of environmental knowledge. There is therefore good reason to think that the environmental debate stands to benefit from social-scientific insights, while the social sciences themselves have much to learn from the attempt to meet this challenge. This is amply demonstrated in the volume edited by Michael Redclift and Ted Benton, first fruit of the ESRC's Global Environmental Change research programme. The volume is of interest both for demonstrating what is new and promising in a range of research areas, and also for providing a sense of how the baseline of traditional social science is having to shift to readmit those questions against which, in its formative phase, it defined itself.

Prevailing approaches in social and political theory have tended to emphasize the distinctiveness of humans in relation to the order of nature, and so there are some deep-seated assumptions to be overcome. A key question identified by the editors in their Intro-

duction is how to open up to investigation the relationship between humans and the rest of nature, without admitting biological determinism. Other questionable assumptions include those bound up with the commitment to whole societies and nation-states as the basic units of analysis. Ecological processes do not respect national boundaries, and, as Leslie Sklair and others show, they have to be understood in relation to global sociology. Social processes also have to be understood in relation to the global economy, and Michael Jacobs provides an illuminating discussion of how meeting the environmental challenge entails surmounting the limits of neoclassical economics. It is also useful to recognize those cultural resources for change to be found at subnational levels and elsewhere than in conventional political institutions. In this regard, Steven Yearley's investigation of the claims made on behalf of 'new social movements', and Cecile Jackson's use of gender analysis to assess the claims of ecofeminism, help broaden the picture. At a more fundamental level still, some argue, it is necessary to reconsider the very categories of space and time, which can no longer be seen as empty forms of appearance, but are constitutive of social and ecological processes. The spatial

dimension has for some time been a focus for environmentally sensitive geographers, and the question of plural temporalities is examined here by Barbara Adam.

A unifying theme of the volume is that discourses of the environment are social products, and must be understood as such. At the most obvious level, the dominant environmental discourses still reflect rich-world agendas and interests. 'Environmental crisis' is one construction of a wider set of global political, economic, moral and cultural crises. Inevitably, therefore, questions have to be asked about the sociology of environmental policy and the status of scientific knowledge itself. Studies in the sociology of science constitute an important strand of this volume. Where conventional scientists have a tendency to see all problems as amenable to solutions, if only public ignorance and irrationality can be overcome, sociological approaches tend to emphasize how scientific knowledge itself reflects social and cultural factors which render it parochial in important respects.

Brian Wynne's chapter takes this line of critique a stage further, to question the deeper epistemological commitments on which scientific knowledge is built, and to suggest that there is a 'deeper sense in which scientific knowledge tacitly reflects and reproduces normative models of social relations, cultural and moral identities, as if these are natural. However, his illustrations arguably do not demonstrate as much as he thinks. The fact, for instance, that scientific understanding of the after-effects of Chernobyl was defective because based on knowledge acquired in the context of different concerns (fall-out of nuclear weapons rather than from a power station), illustrates how scientific knowledge does not develop in a social vacuum. But it could still be construed as evidence of a contingent limitation on scientific knowledge, rather than of an essentially defective epistemology, or of 'contradictory knowledges' in any profound sense. At any rate, there is nothing very unconventional about the knowledge he invokes to explain the error. This point is worth making because of the risks involved in overstating the case for social constructionism.

Indeed, this is a theme picked up by Ted Benton. Well aware of how alternatives to constructionism are prone to naturalistic reductionism, and of how this afflicts a good deal of 'Green' thinking – including that of both neo-Malthusians and 'following-nature' utopians – he nevertheless argues that there is an important place for non-reductionist naturalism. He illustrates how the role of sociology is not limited to

'purely social' phenomena with an interesting critical discussion of Hirsch's claim to have identified social limits to growth more pressing than natural limits. Benton affirms with Hirsch that nature does not function as an absolute outer limit to growth, since any natural limit is socially mediated and will affect some (invariably poorer) people harder and sooner than others; but Benton's point is that these limits are precisely social *and* natural. It is the task of a contemporary social theory of the environment to theorize this, which is why, in Benton's view, a realist approach is called for. Only this, he believes, will allow social science both to reveal the constructedness of environmental discourses and to theorize the embeddedness of the social in the natural.

Not surprisingly, then, the status of the social sciences, and their relation to the natural sciences, remains a central preoccupation, and this is given a new impetus by ecological concerns. That is why there has to be a good deal of theoretical self-reflection when trying to deal with social and environmental concerns in tandem, and why a number of the contributions are written at a fairly high level of abstraction. So, while these chapters illustrate the complexity of the range of theoretical issues involved in comprehending global environmental – and social – change, readers still new to the literature may welcome help in seeing the wood for the trees. For this, Luke Martell's book is to be recommended.

Martell provides a fine introduction to Green ideas, which will be particularly useful to non-specialists and students of sociology and related disciplines. He covers a range of areas: Green critiques of industrialism; normative conceptions of the sustainable society; Green philosophy; new social movements, the implications of ecology for political theory; ways of conceptualizing relations between society and nature; and he concludes with some observations about the future of environmentalism. The basic thrust of his argument is that the radical claims for Green thinking deserve to be taken seriously, but that Greens need to recognize the problems attendant on them, and also to heed some of the resources for solutions that may yet be found within the sociological tradition. So, whilst sympathetic to radical Green claims, the book is salutary in applying sociological rigour to some of the more exorbitant ones.

Martell also takes a stand on certain central issues, developing a position based on four key arguments. One of these is a defence, with Benton, of a realist approach in sociology. Another argument concerns the basis for moral standing in normative theory;

Martell argues against both anthropocentric and eco-centric ethics that the criterion of moral considerability must be sentience. This would have significant implications regarding the status of animals, in particular, and could be in tension with concern for the environment more narrowly understood, because, as he says, it does not encompass all the environment as of intrinsic value. A third argument is that solutions to ecological problems are unlikely to come either from capitalism or from the decentralization advocated by many Greens. Fourth, he argues that traditional political theory is revolutionized, but cannot be supplanted, by Green political thought. The element of distinctiveness in the latter comes from two key ideas: that of natural limits and that of the intrinsic value of non-human beings.

How well these four arguments sit with one another is likely to be a matter of contention. Moreover, some might think Martell overstates the radical potential of Green thought and others that he under-

states it. Certainly, this book raises a number of questions. For instance, if all sentient beings are in some sense to become part of the polity, this would surely require a pretty dramatic redesigning of basic institutions. Moreover, if we are to place our faith in global state relations, what assurance is there that they will develop even modestly ecological policies? And then again, if there is, as Martell claims, something to be learned from the more radical Green ideas, how are these to filter up and take effect? Through existing institutions? Or are more innovative suggestions needed?

Clearly, there are many as yet unanswered questions – both theoretical and practical – to be dealt with by those occupied with the project of integrating social and ecological concerns. What is heartening, from the evidence of these books, is how that project is taking on the definition and vigour needed to come up with some answers.

**Tim Hayward**

## Low anxiety

Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*, Macmillan, London, 1995. viii + 578 pp., £20.00 hb., £10.00 pb., 0 333 64813 7 hb., 0 333 63952 9 pb.

The author of *The Western Canon* does not refer to the hero of *Ulysses* by his surname, as is the universal custom. Instead, he calls Joyce's character by an infrequent and conspicuously overaffectionate nickname, 'Poldy'. Harold Bloom's desperate avoidance of his own name indicates that he sees it as a potent force. Had he dared use it, he seems to hint, the reader's attention would have had no choice but to stray helplessly away from poor Leopold and be riveted (wrongly, wrongly) on Harold.

Aside from offering one of the few flashes of amusement in a long and rather tedious volume, this is a sign that Harold Bloom is thinking less about the books under discussion than about himself and his preoccupations. Which is a pity, as the books under discussion are all wonderful, and one would have wished that Bloom had some wonderful things to say about them. Most of the time, all he has to say about them is that they *are* wonderful, and that others do not acknowledge this sufficiently.

The first line of Bloom's chapter on Milton calls him 'the major poet at present most deeply resented by feminist literary critics'. In the chapter on Samuel Johnson, Bloom waits until the third line before

accusing contemporary critics of 'sinking our educational institutions'. Resentfully, Bloom sees himself as challenging 'the School of Resentment, who wish to overthrow the Canon in order to advance their supposed (and nonexistent) programs for social change'. British readers may be tempted to believe that there is some reality behind this scenario. In fact it is largely tilting at windmills. It is true that 'programs for social change' are not the true or central beneficiaries of the literary studies vogue for 'politics', a term that has become dangerously inflated. It is not true, however, that threats to the canon exist where Bloom's resentment spies them, which is to say everywhere. Do not believe him when he says he finds himself 'surrounded by professors of hip-hop'. He dismisses feminist criticism as 'quilt making' and as leading a 'crusade against male human beings'. Clearly Bloom doesn't read feminist criticism and doesn't feel he has to.

When Bloom does remember the texts themselves, his tone of hushed if polemical reverence ensures that nothing will be said that is meaningful enough to be worth disputing. For example: 'We all sense that Kafka's desperation is primarily spiritual.' The Wife

of Bath, we are told, has 'endless zest and vitality'. Aesthetic value, which Bloom wants to defend and which could indeed use some defending, will have to await another defender. For Bloom it is embodied in a string of thoughtless clichés that seem to scroll forth out of some computerized thesaurus. The greatest writers, he tells us, have 'strangeness', and sometimes 'scandalous originality'.



The inanity of all this is not unfamiliar. It demonstrates that for Bloom, as for many others, the aesthetic is first and foremost a substitute theology. It answers the desire for an object that can be revered absolutely and unconditionally. By definition, one cannot know such an object, and the true believer does not really *want* to know it. For knowledge would be profanation. Those who try to know fail, and in their failure they offer moral lessons against critical arrogance and in favour of proper self-abasement. Of canonical writers like Shakespeare and Cervantes, Bloom asserts that 'you cannot get ahead of them, because they are always there before you.' All that is indisputable here is how badly the believer wants to believe in *something* that would be 'always there before you'. Thus he demonstrates humility, but also a sort of arrogance-by-proxy. For he gets to pick the spots where others, too, must bow.

This 'umble tribute to the aesthetic is manifestly not intended for Bloom's fellow academics, who would surely have held him to a higher standard of difficulty. Despite his expressions of high anxiety, academic critics have never been as much interested in adding to or subtracting from the canon – let alone overthrowing it – as in reading it differently, and they have thus proved equally indifferent to Bloom's wildly skewed polemic and to his insipid readings. The book is written, rather, for a mass-market, non-academic audience. To judge from the mainstream reviews, the publicity, and (though less so) the sales, it has achieved one. In this context, of course, a fuzzy-

mind, unquestioning reverence for aesthetic masterpieces is likely to get a much warmer reception. Nothing could reach deeper into the viscera of American anti-intellectualism than the imperative to stop analysing and simply appreciate. The last thing a middle-brow public of cultural status-seekers will forgive is the critique of culture, for critique interferes directly with its desire for (in Guillory's words) culture as 'a means to individual self-improvement'. Such a public is the perfect target for Bloom's imitation of American Know-Nothingism. Hence the unctuous, unflappable confidence of his voice, so strangely lacking in legitimate anxiety.

In this and other respects *The Western Canon* is a very American book. A mind that chooses, among all the possible ways of discussing the greatest authors, to ask who is 'better' or 'stronger' than whom, and indeed makes the question of competition central to literature – that speaks of 'Whitman's victory over Tennyson', for example – is clearly the prisoner of a national mythology. Bloom himself brags that America is culturally superior because of its nihilism. 'We dominate the Age of Chaos because we have always been chaotic.'

Nietzschean nihilism is one theme that organizes a certain number of Bloom's wandering appreciations. Bloom prefers characters who are nihilists: Chaucer's Pardoner, Milton's Satan, Molière's Alceste, Shakespeare's Falstaff, Macbeth and Iago. 'The West's greatest writers are subversive of all values, both ours and their own.' Nietzsche is also enlisted in an argument against philosophy itself: 'We must remind ourselves that Shakespeare, who scarcely relies upon philosophy, is more central to Western culture than are Plato and Aristotle, Kant and Hegel, Heidegger and Wittgenstein.' Annoyed by philosophy's prestige in literary studies, Bloom fights it on its own ground, the ground of universality: 'These are matters available to every human consciousness in every age, regardless of gender, race, social class, ideology.'

Philosophers will perhaps be easier on this universalizing than literary critics. But they are less likely to tolerate Bloom's habit of blithe self-contradiction. On the one hand, Bloom asserts that poetry makes nothing happen. On the other, he tells us that 'Shakespeare and his few peers ... invented all of us.' Which is it: the aesthetic as pure because ineffectual? Or the aesthetic as that which effectually makes us what we are? One might have hoped that a book devoted to the Western canon would do a bit better with so basic a question.

**Bruce Robbins**



# A funny thing happened on the way to the good society

Steven Lukes, *The Curious Enlightenment of Professor Caritat: A Comedy of Ideas*, Verso, London and New York, 1995. 261 pp., £14.95 hb., 1 85984 948 2.

Lukes's *The Curious Enlightenment* is a satirical novel and a literary exploration of debates in contemporary political philosophy. It can hardly be called a mere *jeu d'esprit*, though it is certainly cleverly done. Lukes is thoroughly familiar with the main current philosophical visions of the good society, and he displays an accomplished wit in caricaturing their various pretensions. But Lukes also intends to write a cautionary tale. He wants us to recognize the limits of theory, and the real dangers of seeking to realize a single ideal of the polity. Again, the serious, if unoriginal, point is well made. The problem with this book is that it is not clear that its fictional form does really help us to be clearer about what is at stake in modern political philosophy. A fictional form can distract where it aspires to illumination.

The plot is simple enough. Professor Nicholas Caritat, a distinguished scholar of the Enlightenment resident in Militaria, is dispatched by the resistance movement, the Visible Hand, to visit and report on various other neighbouring societies with a view to recommending the best possible state. He duly visits Utilitaria, Communitaria and Libertaria. En route to the last he falls asleep and dreams of Proletaria (wherein Karl and Fred can be found spending their day hunting, fishing, rearing cattle and engaging in post-prandial criticism). At the close, he departs from the border town of Minerva, and, accompanied by an owl, seeks the mythical territory of Egalitaria.

It will be evident that Lukes's style has a very high 'geddit?' quotient, and there is sometimes an oppressive sense of an academic author exchanging knowing winks with his academic readership. (The winks sometimes give way to rather heavy-handed digs in the ribs.) It should also be obvious how Lukes's names signal his intended targets. Militaria is, yes, a military regime. Utilitaria, naturally, is a society governed solely according to the utilitarian prescription to maximize overall welfare. Communitaria is a society formed in accord with communitarian ideas. Libertaria is a libertarian society. And as for Egalitaria and Proletaria – do try to keep up!

Lukes artfully ducks the issue of whether Proletaria could exist (is what can be dreamed of possible or merely fantastic?), and whether Egalitaria

is yet to be constructed or lies beyond any and all frontiers. Concerning the rest, it is simple and undoubtedly also good fun, for instance, to ridicule the idea that all decisions of policy could turn on the calculation of harms and benefits. (Utilitaria is literally calculator-ruled.) But easy targets are not real targets. And regarded closer it is not even entirely clear what Lukes is aiming at. If his targets are societies formed in the image of particular moral and political theories, it is easy for the utilitarian or libertarian to say that, in so far as any crude caricature travesties more than it illuminates its subject, the target is missed. If his target is the view that the good society can be formed in the image of any one principle, such as the utilitarian maxim, to the exclusion of all others, a thousand political philosophers will chorus in reply, 'But of course. The problem, however, is to devise a plausible and defensible account of what precise plurality of principles should govern political life.' If his target is the optimistic rationalism of the theorist who seeks to make society in the image of any preferred set of ideals, he has nothing new to say that was not said by the authors Professor Caritat enthusiastically quotes. (The book's best dialogue, on the scope for human improvement, is borrowed and acknowledged to be borrowed from Condorcet and Joseph de Maistre.) If his target is any kind of political theory at all, then he does his own subject a disservice. He cannot, at the end of the day, intend us all only to tend our gardens.

There is a further problem. Facts serve Lukes's satire better than fiction. The publisher's press release tells us that the description of Militaria is based directly on Lukes's visit to Argentina. The description of the intolerance of Communitaria towards an opera, which it is claimed ridicules some of that society's religions, is a thinly veiled portrayal of the Rushdie affair. The idiocies of an unrestrained free market and of the privatization of all services, which Libertaria exemplifies, found all too obvious expression in Thatcher's Britain. It is not just that the facts speak louder than fiction. They do so with a richness, depth, subtlety and resonance that no fiction, however well constructed, can possess. Above all, they have a persuasiveness which the imaginative construction



lacks. If political theory is both to convince us and to move us to act, it must be rooted in what we can see to be the nature of the present world and ourselves.

Equally, Lukes's fiction does not always do justice to the facts. Feminism finds no place in his narrative of imagined societies, other than through one character in *Communitaria*. She is made both to articulate a narrow-minded feminist dogmatism, and to represent the worst excesses of a politically correct policing of behaviour. Such 'satire' is overdone and somewhat mean-spirited.

So what are we to conclude? We do not share Caritat's political naivety. His 'enlightenment' is a belated recognition of what any serious student of the political can already acknowledge. We are not the defenders of the 'ideal' polities Lukes lampoons. (Or, if we are, we will fail to recognize as much in consequence of the lampooning.) So in what direction does Lukes intend his reader to travel? Does he mean us to await the flight of the owl of Minerva? Or should *Egalitaria* be found (or rather founded) now? Or do we just dream at night of Karl and Fred in *Proletaria* to be disillusioned on the cold morn? Or is it back to the garden?

Lukes's work is, it must be repeated, charming and refreshing. It is good to be made to see political philosophy in a new light. And Lukes's ability to gloss the major ideas of our time, and to set them in comic relief, is an enviable one. Yet the ideas in question are important and endure. The essential task of measuring them against reality – existing and possible – remains. To that extent, a comedy of ideas in which the comedy trumps the ideas leaves us amused, but not necessarily any the wiser.

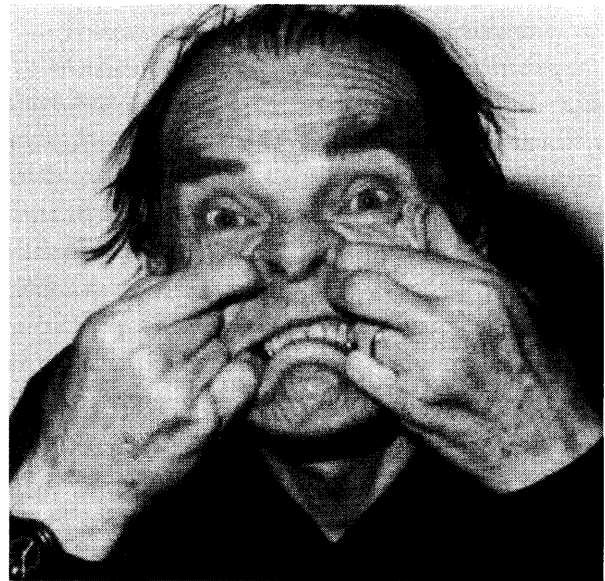
**David Archard**

## Anything goes

Paul Feyerabend, *Killing Time: The Autobiography of Paul Feyerabend*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1995. 192 pp., £18.25 hb., 0 226 24531 4.

Like so many supposedly typical products of the 1960s, Paul Feyerabend's *Against Method* did not actually appear until halfway through the next decade. Subtitled *Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge*, the book sought to show that the only defensible principle of scientific method is 'anything goes'. This message was regarded by the scientific establishment as considerably more shocking than a

glimpse of stocking, and Feyerabend soon found himself identified in *Nature* as 'currently the worst enemy of science'. The heart of his offence was a brilliant, meticulously researched depiction of Galileo as a scientific mountebank, deploying propaganda, sleights of hand, fictitious experiments and experiences, tricks, jokes and *non sequiturs* in the face of the superior theoretical and empirical resources of the orthodoxy of his time. The moral Feyerabend drew was that the progress of science precisely depends on ignoring all the rules of rational method preached by



barren and illiterate' logicians. It was a doctrine that blew the minds of a generation of students. It also blew Feyerabend into the ranks of those whom he called 'the Big Fakes of the World', the megastar traffickers in ideas, and kept him there until his death early last year.

There were, however, doubts about Feyerabend's 'anarchism' almost from the start. For one thing, being so boundlessly accommodating seemed to some to risk drying up the springs of action from which a genuine radicalism would need to draw. This is the sense most memorably formulated by John Krige, a former student of Feyerabend's, in the remark that 'anything goes' means in practice 'everything stays'. It is also true that, as the autobiography completed shortly before Feyerabend's death makes clear, his sympathies with actual radical movements of the 1960s were quite limited. As a faculty member at Berkeley he refused to cooperate with student strikes and, indeed, 'cut fewer lectures' during them 'than either before or since'. This was, ironically, a time when he was beginning to realize that 'with a little cutting at the edges I could be everywhere', and so was about to embark on an extraordinary career as a

professor holding tenure simultaneously at four universities in three continents. The autobiography deals graphically, and at breakneck speed, with the somewhat unlikely route by which he arrived at this situation.

The route leads from a Viennese lower-middle-class childhood and youth to a war service which yielded three bullet wounds and the Iron Cross, post-war studies in physics at the University of Vienna, a first academic appointment at Bristol, and thence to Berkeley and beyond. Feyerabend tells us that his war injuries left him impotent and crippled, though these circumstances seem to have done nothing to hinder the stream of love affairs which enlivens his narrative. It is further enlivened by shrewd and entertaining accounts of his encounters with many of the leading philosophers and scientists of the period, from Bohr and Carnap to Hayek, Lakatos and Popper. Beneath all this surface glitter a deeper pattern gradually emerges, one that gives an overall shape to the book.

It is the pattern of a *Bildungsroman*, a record of moral and spiritual development, the acquisition of wisdom through a series of seemingly random adventures. In one aspect the process is simply the construction of a *character*, a coherent and stable set of dispositions, in place of the extreme lightness of being that marked the earlier Feyerabend. In another it is the breaking down of the high protective walls that shut him off from other people, including his parents and first three wives. Although many factors contributed to this, what seems to have been decisive was the influence of a remarkable human being, Feyerabend's fourth wife, the physicist Grazia Borrini. It was through their relationship that he 'at long last' learned 'what it means to love somebody', and changed 'from an icy egotist into a friend, a companion, a husband'. The book concludes with the wish that what will survive of him is not any intellectual achievement, but just that late-flowering love. Though the thought is not new, its expression here is moving and appropriate, rooted as it is in the hard-won authority of all the preceding struggles and of the courage with which Feyerabend faced the end he by then knew to be imminent.

Respect for this final aspiration need not preclude returning to the question of whether the outcome of Paul Feyerabend's life and work really is that 'everything stays'. At least part of the answer lies in recalling that science is, among other things, a world of social practices and institutions. Whether or not the outward appearances stay, its inhabitants must now in some measure move in a different world, once it has

been irradiated by all that mocking intelligence and wit. It is surely not irrelevant to add that readers of this marvellous book can hardly fail to take from it some gravitational shift or permanent colouring of vision into their own reflections on experience.

**Joseph McCarney**

## Mandel as alternative

Ernest Mandel, *Long Waves of Capitalist Development: A Marxist Interpretation*, Verso, London and New York, 1980 revised 1995. viii + 174 pp., £14.95 pb., 1 85984 037 X pb.

Ernest Mandel, *Trotsky as Alternative*, translated by Gus Fagan, Verso, London and New York, 1995. vi + 186 pp., £39.95 hb., £13.95 pb., 1 85984 995 4 hb., 1 85984 085 X pb.

Ernest Mandel (1923–1995) died in July last year. In the view of many, he was the outstanding Marxist of his generation. His ability to combine an active political role with a stream of scholarly books was astonishing. Mandel was a man of unfailing courtesy, whose political opponents would have to confess that he was a scrupulously fair polemicist. He was an inspiring speaker – famous for his unfailing optimism.

Ernest Mandel was a teenager when the Nazis occupied Belgium; nonetheless he was arrested for his underground political work, and escaped, only to be arrested again. After the war he quickly became the dominant intellectual force in the leadership of the Fourth International. This brought him exclusion orders, not only from Eastern Europe, but from France, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Australia and the USA. Nonetheless, his outstanding erudition, his integrity, and his generous socialist vision earned him respectful obituaries in leading bourgeois papers across Europe.

In the battle of ideas the importance of original Marxist scholarship cannot be underestimated. In this respect Mandel's first big book, *Marxist Economic Theory*, and his subsequent works demonstrated that Marxism in general, and Trotskyism in particular, is a living tradition of thought, not merely an exegesis of sacred texts. *Marxist Economic Theory* was manifestly the product of a long study of historical and economic facts and an original presentation of the theory. Even more impressive was his *magnum opus*, *Late Capitalism* (1975). When a new translation of *Capital* was prepared for Penguin, there could have

been no doubt that Ernest Mandel was the best available presenter of it.

One of Mandel's distinctive contributions was his rediscovery of 'long waves' in capitalist development. This led to his being invited to give the Alfred Marshall Lectures for 1978 on the subject at the University of Cambridge. The first of the books under review is a revised and updated edition of those lectures. The theory starts from the empirical perception that between the long-term tendencies predicted by Marx (e.g., concentration and centralization of capital) and the ordinary business cycle (up to ten years long, say) there are observable waves of accelerated and retarded development, which seem to last about twenty-five years for each phase. Several features distinguish Mandel's views from those of long-cycle theorists such as Kondratieff and Schumpeter. Strikingly, while he believes the downturn in activity can be explained endogenously, he holds that the upturn must be accounted for exogenously – for example, by war. In this context he articulates waves of class struggle (themselves by no means mechanically determined) with those of the economy. With regard to the 'postwar boom', Mandel holds that this was consistent with a perspective of long-term decline because it was in large part fuelled by a growing mountain of debt. He finishes the book by asserting that there will be no 'soft landing' from the current depressed state, and that the ordinary business cycle will go along with higher unemployment and much lower rates of growth than those of the 'postwar boom'.

The other book, *Trotsky as Alternative*, is translated from the German (of 1992); it originated in a commission from the publishing house of the PDS. Here Mandel demonstrates his thorough knowledge of Trotsky's life and work (to which it would, indeed, make a fine introduction) in a series of twelve essays. Mandel combines a fierce loyalty to 'the most important strategist of the socialist movement' this century with a judicious marking of his weaknesses. The first chapter gives a convenient summary of Trotsky's contribution to Marxism. Amongst the later ones, there are very interesting studies of Trotsky's struggle against the Soviet bureaucracy; his alternative economic strategy for Soviet development; his changing views on class organization; his analysis of Fascism; and his sensitive responses to national problems.

One intriguing question arises from the title: alternative to *what*? The answer given by Mandel is that Trotsky's legacy is the only alternative to the 'bankruptcy of Stalinism and Social Democracy'. But

any consistent socialism counts as an alternative to present-day social democracy. Trotsky's *historical* importance lay rather in his relentless critique of the hegemonic Stalinist perversion of Marxism, and of the Soviet Thermidor. In Europe today virtually no one supports Stalinism any more; so it might be thought that Trotsky, in spite of losing his life in the struggle, has posthumously won. Stalinism is dead; yet, if that is so, is not its *alternative* also redundant in so far as it was structured around its oppositional role? The more so because in the end Trotskyism did not overthrow Stalinism; Stalinism imploded under the weight of its own contradictions. We are left with a vacuum.

Socialism today needs re-creating; but in a new context, with an updated agenda, to be sure. Nonetheless, we would be well advised to incorporate in it the best insights of previous thought and the lessons of past experience. To the inescapable legacy of Trotsky must be added the legacy of Ernest Mandel.

Chris Arthur

## Policing essentialism

Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed, eds, *The Essential Difference*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1994. xix + 196 pp., £27.50 hb., £11.99 pb., 0 253 35092 1 hb., 0 253 35093 X pb.

In their introduction, Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed characterize the 1980s as a decade in which feminism was policed by the 'shock troops of anti-essentialism' (p. vii). Their collection attempts to reassess the essentialism controversy in the light of such policing. As several of the contributors (Schor, Grosz, de Lauretis) point out, this debate straddles several interconnected issues. One is naturalism and its most common variant, biologism. Here the dispute is between those for whom the body is thought of as some kind of ground uniting women, and social constructionists who insist not only on the social construction of gender but also of sex. As Gayatri Spivak remarks, 'If one thinks of the body as such there is no possible outline of the body as such' (p. 177). On this count some form of social constructionism seems to have won the day.

Another strand is the debate between 'equality' and 'difference' feminists, often conducted with reference to the work of De Beauvoir and Irigaray. The dangers of assuming 'sameness' between women and men, and therefore reinforcing the hegemonic position of mas-

culinity, are contrasted with the perils of insisting on a 'difference' which can only reinforce a hierarchical opposition between them. This dispute is independent of whether the 'difference' is articulated by attention to the female body.

A third zone of contention is the supposed polarization between feminism and deconstruction. Feminism seems to lack political grounding if feminists cannot speak as 'women', a move which is seen as falling prey to the metaphysics of presence, assuming an extra-discursive grounding of the category. Without such an assumption 'woman' as a category has an anchoring only within a language, which both places it in an oppositional role to that of 'man' and, moreover, refuses it a set of defining characteristics, as its meaning is endlessly deferred.

Finally, there is the question of universalism. Critiques, for example by black feminists, of the universalizing tendencies of white feminist thought have drawn attention to the differences between women, and to the impossibility of articulating a homogeneous 'women's' experience as a basis for feminist solidarity.

Most of the contributors try to get beyond the essentialist/anti-essentialist opposition in whichever form they attend to it. So Naomi Schor claims that 'since othering and saming conspire in the oppression of women, the workings of both processes need to be exposed.' We need articulations of equality not based on the logic of the same, *and* an account of difference which is not 'attributed to othering' (p. 49; a point also made by Grosz). Spivak undermines the polarization between deconstruction and feminism by pointing out 'that the critique of essence à la deconstruction proceeds in terms of the unavoidable usefulness of something that is very dangerous' (p. 156). Teresa De Lauretis claims that the terms 'essentialism and anti-essentialism ... no longer serve ... to formulate our questions' (p. 11). For her the work of the Milan Women's Bookstore is articulating 'a genealogy of women ... that is at once discovered invented and constructed through feminist practices' (p. 13). This is a process of 'empowering and dynamic identification rather than static and divisive identity' (p. xiv) – a point reiterated in the piece by Luce Irigaray and by Grosz and Schor in their discussions of her. Here is an attention to difference which does not appear to invoke biologism or any other version of the metaphysics of presence.

A recurrent theme of the volume is that it is not possible to be for or against essentialism *per se*; it depends on the context in which essentializing claims are made. Several contributors (Schor and Weed,

Grosz, Rabine) make reference to the 'strategic essentialism' first mooted by Spivak. There are different ways in which this reference can be read. A strategic essentialism can suggest an essentialism adopted merely for the purposes of political expediency (running with a gene for homosexuality for legal purposes, to establish it as a natural category).

There are, however, underdeveloped remarks in some of these papers which suggest a different reading (Schor, pp. xviii and 45; Rooney, p. 174; Spivak, p. 175). This alternative is anchored in challenges mounted to universalism, on the basis of (alternative) identities, from specific subject-positions; and their force requires attention to just such specificity, rather than a collapse into 'endless multiplicity' (p. 175). To make the latter move is to miss both the political and intellectual force of the challenge. But the specificity to which attention is drawn varies with context. What I am foregrounding in asserting my subject-position as a woman varies, even for a single individual. Moreover, one context can endow that category with a content which simply dissolves in another. In opposing the universal 'human', we need the identification 'woman'. But when tempted into characterizing our common experiences 'as women', we need to confront the subject-position of 'black woman'. On this reading, strategic essentialism is a *contextual* essentialism required to mount our challenge, but in the use of which we must be vigilant.

The impact of this volume is not only to take the sting out of the tail of charges of essentialism; it also obliges us to recognize that we need an alternative terminology in which to articulate our debates.

**Kathleen Lennon**

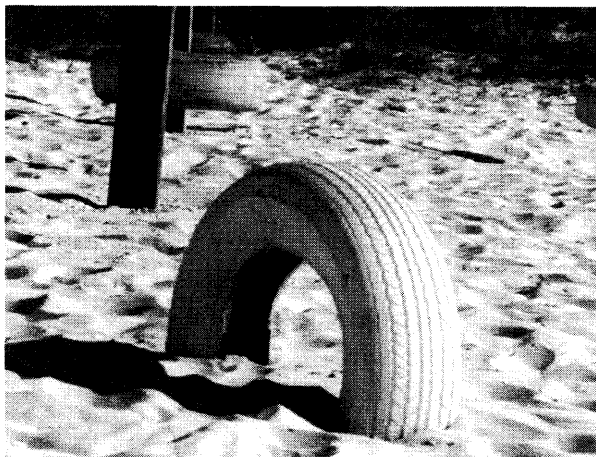
## Born free

Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, translated by Bridget McDonald, Foreword by Peter Fenves, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1993. xxxi + 210 pp., £25.00 hb., £9.95 pb., 0 8047 2175 0 hb., 0 8047 2190 4 pb.

Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, translated by Brian Holmes and others, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1993. x + 423 pp., £30.00 hb., £10.95 pb., 0 8047 2060 6 hb., 0 8047 2189 0 pb.

'Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains.' With this declaration, Rousseau articulates both the common demand for moral and political freedoms, and the traditional association of freedom with the essence of human being. Yet this philosophical idea

of a unitary 'freedom' – called for and promised by those plural freedoms – remains as unclear as ever, preserved only by its apparent self-evidence and the conviction that without it we would tolerate the intolerable. In *The Experience of Freedom*, however, Jean-Luc Nancy proposes abandoning it altogether, in order to escape the foundationalist ontology of subjectivity which treats freedom as the essence of the individual subject. He suggests we understand it instead as 'a condition or space in which alone something like a "subject" can eventually come to be born'.



Nancy's text is primarily an engagement with Heidegger. Employing the concept of 'singularity' to articulate the 'each time' of each birth to existence (which is both the time of birth and the birth of time), and calling on Heidegger's concepts of 'mineness' and 'being-in-common' to characterize singular existence as always already in relation, Nancy suggests that it is freedom that *gives* this relation by withdrawing being. The relation can only happen in 'the withdrawal of the continuity of the being of existence, without which there would be no singularity but only being's immanence to itself'. And what we share is this withdrawal of being which opens existence as existence.

The withdrawal of being is not an operation but a liberation: the liberation of existence for a world. This is 'thinking' – not a property of the existent, but the disclosive *structure* of existence *given* by freedom. Thinking is existence delivered to the generosity of the 'there is' of a world, and it is, therefore, '*the act of an in-actuality*' which cannot appear to itself, but which presents itself in experience *as* the experience of freedom. Starting from Kant's description of freedom as a *fact* exhibited in action, and therefore presented in experience (but not as an object of knowing), Nancy elaborates an idea of freedom as '*the transcendental of experience*, the transcendental that *is* experience'. This is not the experience of existence (as classical empiricism would have to

suggest), for the experience we have *is* existence. 'The experience of freedom is therefore the experience that freedom *is* experience.' And this experience is always the experience of thinking.

Philosophy cannot therefore produce, construct, guarantee or defend freedom; rather, it is the very 'folding, in discourse', of freedom. And from the point of view of 'action', thought is pushed to its limit by 'the unsparing material powerlessness of all discourse'. Nancy proposes an idea of 'a proper "positivity" of evil', in which evil is not the perversion of a particular entity – the deficiency or negation of an essential good – but a *positive possibility* of existence; freedom's incomprehensible self-hatred, inscribed in the existent '*as its innermost possibility of refusing existence*'. This displayed itself, at its extreme, in the Nazi concentration camps. But a decision for evil is made wherever existence is prevented from existing; wherever existence is reduced to identification with an Idea.

If thought is powerless against such evil, this is also where Nancy's proposal might offer hope, of a sort. For his anti-essentialism means that equality, for example, cannot consist in 'a commensurability of subjects', or justice involve 'a just mean'. Both assume a common measure of autonomous subjectivities, against which we could unceasingly challenge the validity of all such established or prevailing measures '*in the name of the incommensurable*', and understand 'autonomy' as existence's self-legislation of its own existence with the imperative 'Be free!', or 'be what you are, that is, freedom, and for this, free yourselves from an essence and/or concept of freedom.' However, Nancy distinguishes his programme from that of the 'revolutionary politics' this would imply, and therefore from the inevitable disillusionment which he believes accompanies holding freedom and justice as regulative ideals. For him, freedom is not the end but the beginning: 'No one begins *to be* free, but freedom *is* the beginning and endlessly remains the beginning.'

In his *The Birth to Presence* – a collection of essays and fragments, most of which explore the themes of *The Experience of Freedom*, and complement that text whilst, perhaps, demonstrating Nancy to be the rare thinker more adept and at his most powerful in longer works than in short pieces – he talks of thinking as a matter neither of 'genre' nor 'style', but simply of 'a question of knowing, in a voice, in a tone, in a writing, whether a thought is being born, or dying'. Nancy's is undoubtedly a thought being born. Now the question is where it is going.

**Jane Chamberlain**

**Ronald E. Santoni, *Bad Faith, Good Faith, and Authenticity in Sartre's Early Philosophy***

Temple University Press,  
Philadelphia, 1995. xxxix + 245 pp.,  
\$49.95 hb., \$22.95 pb., 1 56639  
319 1 hb., 1 56639 320 5 pb.

Having trained in the analytic tradition, Santoni understandably approaches Sartre with a certain suspicion. Sartre is not noted for his conceptual or terminological exactitude or consistency, and it would be difficult to reduce his phenomenology to a set of propositions. Although disentangling the syntax is surely part of the pleasure of reading Sartre, there are always moments when a little analytic rigour would be welcome.

Santoni succeeds in resolving a number of problems, notably the distinction between lying and being in bad faith – sometimes glossed as lying to oneself. The liar is in possession of the truth; the ontological unity of consciousness implies that bad faith cannot sustain the duality of deceiver and deceived. Yet whilst the introduction of a certain definitional clarity is helpful, Santoni's repeated observation that Sartre's theses are riddled with equivocal applications of an idiomatic – even eccentric – meaning of 'to be what one is' to the 'ordinary-language use of the term', tends to sound merely petulant in the face of the torrent of Sartre's words, particularly as 'ordinary language' is equated with US English (as defined by Webster's) with alarmingly unthinking ease. More alarming still is Santoni's failure to raise the problems posed by reading Sartre mainly in translation, even though it is well known that Sartre's various translators have done little to clarify his language.

The corpus examined by Santoni is clearly defined and stretches from the 1936 essay on the transcendence of the ego to the *Notebooks for an Ethics*, written in 1947–48 but not published until 1983 (1992 in translation). Sadly,

none of the plays or novels is taken into consideration here, even though *The Age of Reason*, for instance, contains some of Sartre's most penetrating analyses of bad faith. Bad faith is central to the works of this period. Every reader of *Being and Nothingness* vividly remembers its emblematic figures: the waiter who attempts to be a waiter in the same way that a chestnut tree is a chestnut tree; the homosexual; the frigid woman; and the coquette. Some readers (but not apparently Santoni) may even begin to wonder whether authenticity might not be defined as an attribute of male heterosexuals who do not work in cafés. And although Santoni concentrates on the moral aspects of Sartre, he does not bring out their political implications, as reflected in the experience of young Frenchmen who deserted because they could not say of the Algerian conflicts: 'This is my war and I assume its consequences.' This is a very academic Sartre.

*Bad Faith, Good Faith* obviously draws on a long period of serious engagement with Sartre, but it sometimes begins to sound more like a dialogue with other American interpreters than an encounter with Sartre himself. The book is in part the story of a conversion. His initial terminological doubts aside, Santoni argues the case for the continued relevance of Sartre, especially in the ethical realm. He concludes that good faith may be described as the human being's project of accepting its abandonment to freedom. The way out of the hell of being is to live with, and take responsibility for, our unjustifiable freedom. The ethics of freedom developed in the *Notebooks*, meanwhile, suggests a Kantian-existential moral imperative that provides guidance for free action in concrete situations. Few Sartreans would disagree, but most would doubt that a detour through ordinary-language debates is a necessary stage in reaching such a conclusion.

**David Macey**

**Hilary Putnam, *Pragmatism: An Open Question***

Blackwell, Oxford and Cambridge MA, 1995. 106 pp., £30.00 hb., £9.95 pb., 0 631 19342 1 hb., 0 631 19343 X pb.

This rather slender volume contains the text of three lectures delivered by Putnam in Rome in 1992 which have previously been available only in Italian. They are supplemented by some biographical notes, together with a bibliography of Putnam's writings to date, suggesting that the book is intended as much as an introduction to Putnam's work as to pragmatism itself.

In his introductory remarks Putnam observes that he is not concerned with pragmatism simply as a historical movement, but as a way of thinking which is of lasting importance. Indeed, the 'open question' of the title is whether a third way can be found between metaphysical realism, on the one hand, and modish forms of anti-realism (or postmodernism), on the other. Putnam presents the pragmatist approach as an alternative that can do justice to the 'interpenetration' of fact, value, theory and interpretation without falling into a corrosive epistemological and moral scepticism.

The first lecture is dedicated to redressing widespread misconceptions about the work of William James. Putnam contends that James's account of truth is misunderstood or distorted when interpreted, as it was by Russell, as the theory that 'a belief is true when the effects are good'. Putnam contends that James's theory is best seen as a way of overcoming the emptiness, or lack of criteriologically relevance, of the notion of truth as correspondence to reality. He points out that if such 'correspondence' is supposed to be wholly independent of the way in which we confirm the assertions

we make, then both this notion and our supposed grasp of it remain occult. In excavating the connection between truth and confirmation, James sought to develop an account of truth that is relevant to our actual practices of enquiry. Putnam shows that the pragmatist emphasis on fallibilism, on the fact that there are no metaphysical guarantees for even our most firmly held beliefs, is balanced by a profound anti-scepticism. It is only in confrontation with a common reality that we can test the corrigibility of our beliefs.

In his second lecture Putnam seeks to identify a pragmatist strain in the work of the later Wittgenstein, whilst challenging the notion that Wittgenstein should be understood as an 'end of philosophy' philosopher. This takes him in the surprising direction of Wittgenstein's relation to Kant and Kant's conception of the primacy of practical reason. Putnam continually emphasizes the moral, as well as the epistemological, importance of the pragmatist way of thinking, and in Wittgenstein's later writings he discovers a 'moral purpose' in his advocacy of a certain kind of empathetic understanding of other forms of life.

The final lecture addresses the contemporary debate over pragmatism. Throughout the book Putnam is concerned to show that the pragmatist way of thinking is not adequately represented by the thought of Richard Rorty. Putnam points out that James's emphasis on holism and the 'plasticity' of truth is matched by the insistence that we share and perceive a common world. The solution to the problem of the 'loss of the world' is to be found neither in scepticism nor in metaphysics, but in the pragmatist conception of enquiry as a democratic and cooperative human endeavour, in which doubt requires justification as much as belief.

**Jason Gaiger**

**Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak,  
*The Spivak Reader***

Edited by Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean, Routledge, London and New York, 1996. 320 pp., £40.00 hb., £14.99 pb., 0 415 91000 5 hb., 0 415 01001 3 pb.

This book provides a purchase on the range of Spivak's theoretical programme. Included are essays from *In Other Worlds*, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, *Imaginary Maps* (her collaborative work with Mahasweta Devi), two recent interviews, and a fairly comprehensive bibliography. Drawing on the work of figures as diverse as Derrida, Samir Amin and Ranajit Guha, Spivak mounts a sustained and powerful critique of the continued exploitation and erasure of the 'subaltern' woman under contemporary transnational capitalism. In an interview with the editors, Spivak clarifies her controversial claim – in an essay not included here – that the sexed subaltern subject cannot speak. Against the charge that she continues to silence the disenfranchised, Spivak asserts that 'every moment that is noticed as a case of [pure] subalternity is undermined'.

While this volume to some extent marks Spivak's recognition as a high theorist, her real strength lies in her ability to marshal the distinct theoretical methodologies of Marxism, feminism and deconstruction in a critique of global capitalism. It is this focus which *The Spivak Reader* lacks. While the editors celebrate Spivak's intel-

lectual achievement in terms of her political commitment and theoretical engagements, they fail to subject her complex positionality to closer scrutiny. The fact that Spivak's corpus has occasioned the publication of a Reader by the Western academy, for instance, exposes the extent to which she is a beneficiary of the very (neo-colonial) structures she criticizes. Whereas the crucial tension between speaking for/as 'the third world woman' continues to provide a productive site of contestation for Spivak, it is glossed over in the editors' introduction.

This refusal to engage *critically* with Spivak is further evinced by the selection of texts. Instead of presenting Spivak as a figure with a clear theoretical agenda – however heterogeneous – the impression is conveyed that her work finally refuses to cohere. While this is partly due to the complexity of her frame of reference, and the need to reflect this in the Anglo-American tradition of the Reader, attention could have been paid to Spivak's more sustained inquiries. Her concern with the relation between Marx and Derrida on the question of the international division of labour, for example, offers much critical mileage (particularly since the publication of *Specters of Marx*).

While this is a fine introductory anthology, offering an 'exemplary series of places to start reading Spivak', with the exception of two interviews and a critical introduction, it has little to offer post-colonial critics that is new.

**Stephen Morton**

**Scandinavian Journal of Development Alternatives  
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