REVIEWS

Reconstructing Structural Marxism

Ted Benton, The Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism; Althusser and his Influence, Macmillan, London, 1984, 259pp £18.00 hc, £6.95 pb

Benton's book has many facets: it is an introductory text, a re-evaluation and reconstruction of Structural Marxism, an argument for theoretical progress lying through the synthesis of Structural Marxism with domains such as the ecological, biological and psychological. Of immediate political relevance is its claim that theorisation of socialist strategy requires a recognition by the Marxist tradition of non class-based emancipatory social movements. All these strands are brought together in the major objective of the book - a critical defence of Structural Marxism.

Rise and Fall is divided into three thematic parts. The first centres on questions of epistemology as they surface in Structural Marxism: the science-ideology distinction, the epistemological break, the concept of a problematic, Marxism and philosophy. It deals with problems in the Althusserian theorisation of structure, it also outlines the basic concepts of Marx and the specificity of his method. The concept of relative autonomy has a central organising role in the second part. Here the sociological complexity or anti-reductionism of the Structural Marxist method is elaborated, both as a means of understanding the social formation, and as a tool of socialist strategy in relation to the state, the Marxist party and alliances. The third part of the book answers criticisms of the Marxist tradition from sociologists, post-structuralists and Marxist-Humanists.

Although Althusser held the status of an official philosopher in the French Communist Party, his Marxism, Benton shows, was inspired by influences outside the canon of Marxist orthodoxy, for example, the formative structuralist influences of Lacan and Levi-Strauss, as well as Bachelard's writings on science. Nevertheless, the fact that the human subject has no theoretical role within Structural Marxism, and certain parallels with natural sciences, encouraged the charge of Stalinism against Althusser, both from Marxist-Humanist and post-structuralist quarters. (As with the natural sciences, objects of structuralist study are seen not as externalisations of individual subjectivity, but rather as being existentially autonomous from human agency, but this doesn't make structuralism a Stalinist 'Diamat'.) However, as Benton makes clear, the complex causality posited by Structural Marxism is a far cry from the monocausal and ineluctable laws of Stalinist 'dialectics'.

The charge of Stalinism, together with the current state of disarray amongst Althusserians, provides Benton with one of the two major reasons for writing Rise and Fall; namely to defend Structural Marxism against post-structuralist and other critics (the other reason being the need for an introductory text in the area). One way in which Benton accomplishes this defence is by laying bare Structural Marxism's sociological complexity. This completely appears as the obverse side of the process of displacement, as decentring, of human agency by the Althusserian paradigm. The stratagem of decentring, an anti-reificatory device, denies that the individual agent is ontologically prior to social structures, events and processes. This refutation of the 'social substantiality' of the individual subject is the basis of Althusser's anti-humanism.

Sociological complexity

The decentring of the subject and social totalities, Benton indicates, is fundamental to Althusser's theoretical project. In fact, the location of the human subject as the basic agency of historical change ('humanism') and other aspects of 'centredness' are taken as a critical focus not only by Structural Marxism but by the generation of Lacan and Levi-Strauss, and later, the post-structuralists.

There was a tendency towards centredness or reification in the pre-Althusserian versions of Historical Materialism, and it was in the direction of these targets that Althusser concentrated his critical armoury. Habits of Marxist thought included notions of self-present or self-conscious agency, a 'metaphysics' of essences and expressive totalities, a logocentric perception of the structure of reality, historical teleology, subjects and social relations seen as socially discrete. The Althusserian 'revolution' in Marxist thought introduced or explicated a range of concepts whose methodological premise was the decentredness of structures and individual subjects. The new conception of social reality included: totalities of structural relations ('structures-in-dominance') irreducible to their constituent elements; transformation of structures as a consequence of the 'ruptural unity' of diverse influences; decentred individual subjects through whom, and behind whose backs structures 'act'; the mediation of social relations within each other ('overdetermination'); the (anti-logocentric) distinction between the order of derivation of conceptual categories and the order of determination of their real objects.

This critical array was used to address certain Marxist theoretical tendencies, in particular, the Hegelian-Marxist position as found, for example, in Lukacs' History and Class Consciousness. This tendency, Benton notes, used a critique of capitalism central to which was the idea of commodity fetishism. This critical model was used as a panacea for explanatory difficulties: Marxists tended to see every problem as in essence an expression of capitalist production relations. Consequently, Benton argues, Hegelian Marxists tended to ignore the complexity of social relations, their irreducibility to monocausal tendencies.

Althusser rejected the idea of the social totality as an expressive totality, arguing instead for the view that constituent relations of causally unified structures are relatively autonomous. 'Relative autonomy' receives an early formulation in Althusser's work in terms of the concept of overdetermination. Thus aspects of the 'economic', the political, etc., never exist in the pure form but only as mediated by ambient structure, and are hence sociologically complex.

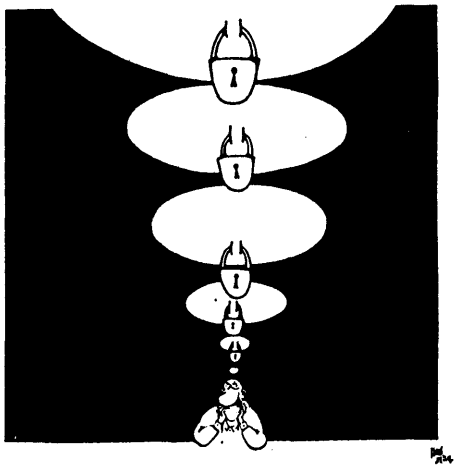
In Structural Marxism the character of social relations cannot be identified in a historicist (a priori) way, that is, as having a fixed nature. Whilst the conditions of their unity as systemic totalities are formally guaranteed by the modes of production through which they are constituted, the mechanisms which actually maintain this unity in existence can only be specified by investigation of the particularities which give a structural totality its uniqueness, that is, its precise form of overdetermination. One important consequence of this, Benton observes, is that each systemic totality (for example, types of intellectual or state-bureaucratic milieux, political, etc., 'instances' of a mode) has its own dynamic and rhythm of development. This enables Structural Marxism to develop its notion of contradiction through the idea of uneven development of social formations. This complexity had already been recognised in the work of Lenin and Mao. Following their insights, Structural Marxism theorised the process of transformation or breakdown of social formations as the condensation of diverse contradictions into a ruptural unity dispensing with the (teleological) idea of the centrality of revolutionary organisation - pace Lukacs or Gramsci. As a condensation, the contradictions act 'in resonance', so to speak, producing a more 'violent' effect than the sum of their individual effects, and cause a qualitative change in the social system. Following Althusser, Benton suggests that this kind of model of structural systems may be applicable to understanding structures and their breakdown in physics and biology, as well as in society.

Throughout the text of Rise and Fall, Benton illustrates the power and range of the Structural Marxist method in its application of complexity/relative autonomy to different aspects of social reality. The significance of relative autonomy as an explanatory tool is apparent from the following textual examples.

Conjunctures: the history of a social formation is not just that of the development of forces and relations of production; it can also be periodised in terms of ideological and political moments or conjunctures, that is to say, the configuration and balance of forces at a particular time. The nature of a conjuncture, according to Structural Marxism, is determined finally not by a sole, 'pure' capitalist mode, but by various articulated modes within whose articulation capitalism is dominant. The behaviour of minor social groups such as social categories or intermediate classes will ultimately be determined by the nature of relations of domination-subordination in any given articulation of modes. Hence conjunctures are not reducible to determination by capitalism or 'the economic'.

Political and ideological representation: traditionally, Marxists have tended to reduce political and ideological behaviour to economic class interests. Benton points out that the political and ideological means of representation (of economic class interests) are themselves capable of constituting and defining interests. Interests which might in an important way be constituted at this level, it is suggested, are, for example, those of women, ethnic minorities or homosexuals - whose struggles do not relate directly to class struggles. Class alliances would also be constituted at this level, transcending economic differences of interest, e.g. popular or anti-fascist 'fronts', socialist alliances. (See below).

State and class: the relationship between class and state power requires an appreciation of the differentiation of functions between state agencies and particular fractions of the capitalist class. There is no simple one-to-one relationship between the economic and political dimensions of class. The fraction of the ruling class in charge of the state apparatuses may be different from the politically hegemonic fraction, which may differ again from the economically dominant fraction. The work of Poulantzas, it is argued, shows that the function of the 'class in charge' is not reducible to representing the interests of the economically dominant class, but is the specifically political-ideological hegemonic task of unifying the social formation under the dominance of the 'power bloc' (dominant classes). This hegemony also demonstrates the autonomy and specificity of the 'superstructures' in the way that juridico-political structures have a detotalising effect on class allegiance by constituting class members as juridical individuals - citizens.



Social class membership: although in many cases - where to draw the line is a matter of debate - there is an obvious economic determinant of class membership, as with direct producers or owners of capital, there is also an expanding area where political and ideological factors may be decisive. For example, white collar workers in the public sector are 85% unionised, whilst for the private sector the figure is about 15%. Public spending cuts is a crucial differentiating factor. Benton notes the contribution of Erik Olin Wright in this area of Structural Marxism.

The family, patriarchy and the reproduction of labour power: the family represents an insuperable difficulty for those wishing to see the reproduction of labour power in purely economistic terms, as Benton suggests. The gendering of occupations, for example, has specific familial determinations, based on family structure, roles and distribution of power. Benton goes further than this, however, in arguing that the family's role in the reproduction of labour power presents a problem for Marx's theory of value. Whether, as Benton suggests, the family itself produces value separate from that expended in its reproduction (wages) is arguable,

but the consequence of arguing for that position is, in effect, to argue against the specificity of the family and to 'reduce' it to the economic instance of the Structural Marxist model. An alternative which would maintain its relative autonomy would be to see the family as mediating the production of value rather than being the productive agency itself. The problem here may stem from conflating the conceptual categories proper to two (or more) paradigms; an economic theory and sociological perspectives.

Benton argues, despite the consequences of his position above, that the role of the family in the constitution of gendered subjectivity cannot be dissolved economistically. On the other hand, he notes that some writers, Juliet Mitchell, for example, have gone so far as to give patriarchal theory (via oedipalism) a complete autonomy, insofar as the dominance of the father loses all historical specificity, and it becomes difficult to see how it can avoid the status of a universal condition. In discussing the historical specificity of forms of patriarchy, reference to urban planning and other demographic factors through which family structure is constituted might have been of use - the factors behind the development of nuclear, from extended, families, for instance.

Socialist strategy: in the chapter 'Class, State and Politics', Benton argues (following Althusser and Poulantzas) that a socialist strategy for power must involve the elaboration of a broad oppositional hegemony, and that this would entail the construction of an ideology/subjectivity whose symbolic resources took more corporate forms than class ideologies. Laclau's work in this area, it is noted, suggests that such corporate symbology tends to be generated in the cultural 'space' created by conflict between oppositional groups and the power bloc, rather than being inscribed within the sphere of class discourse. Benton envisages a socialist alliance as encompassing not only intermediate strata, but also groups/movements constituted at the political level. Hence it would involve the political binding of, for example, movements based on race, gender, ecology, nuclear disarmament, youth etc., as well as those of class.

The strategy for power is premised on the hegemonic encroachment of a Gramscian 'war of position' and Poulantzas's later view of state institutions as a 'condensate' of the existing balance of class forces. Unfortunately, the latter idea renders the 'method of complexity' problematic; the autonomy required by the state for the performance of crucial functions is lost (see State and class, above). Benton acknowledges this 'Leninist' criticism.

Nevertheless, what is radically new, and what socialists have ignored, claims Benton, is the constitution of new forms of potentially oppositional non-class subjectivity, such as those described above. The Structural Marxist perspective recognises the plurality of social movements as a characteristic of the current phase of capitalism (a pluralism which in its aesthetic tendencies has acquired the label 'post-modernism').

Problems with a theory of structure

The attention given to sociological complexity by Structural Marxism has attracted a charge of 'empiricism' or 'pluralism' (lack of an order of causal determination). Althusser attempts to deal with this by pointing out that, although there is no adequate theorisation of the structure of social totalities, the fundamental assumption must be that the linking of social relations is asymmetrical. For example, the economic, rather than the political or ideological instances, is determinant overall.

In attempting a theory of structure, according to Benton, Althusser moves from the pluralistic conception of causality, which gives cogency to the work just cited, to a Spinozist-inspired notion of causes being immanent in their effects, which seems to reintroduce the difficulties encountered in the commodity fetishism approach. The problem is to specify the autonomous, contingent character of the elements of a structure whilst at the same time establishing the nature of their unity. Benton argues that the theoretical sources of Althusser's Marxism deny him the possibility of constructing a theory of causal structure either because he rejects realism (which he conflates with empiricism)

or because his critique of Hegelian-Marxism suggests that to make an a priori specification of the conditions of unity of the social formation, as a theory of structure requires, would be a form of essentialism. This latter critique is debatable, for it seems that the project of doing just this is a non-essentialist way is, for instance, attempted by Lukacs in his later work (Ontology) where a realist transformation of the Hegelian-Marxist formulation is proposed. In the end, it seems, Althusser's stratagem of decentring structures crucially deprives him of a causal organising principle.

This difficulty is intensified by the fact that for Althusser, as for the post-structuralists, realism does not present itself as an alternative to centredness, but rather counts as an example of it. By contrast, Benton suggests that it is within a realist epistemology that structures can be elucidated as causal mechanisms.

Epistemology

In his theory of science, Althusser's decentred approach produces the unsatisfactory conclusion that sciences are historically determined and their truth historically relative. This conventionalist tendency is also evident in Althusser's extreme anti-empiricism which leads him to eschew also the empirical. The raw material of science, according to him, does not include the real object, but rather a parallel world of 'objects of knowledge'. This leads to a problem of correspondence between the two worlds, a type of problem he generally solves by a conventionalist stratagem.

It is important, however, cautions Benton, to view Althusser's tendency in this direction against the overall tenor of his theoretical practice; the drift of its central ideas. He goes on to suggest that a key role is played by concepts such as the science-ideology distinction, a notion of ideology as a 'web of error', the epistemological break, specificity of scientific discourse, the distinction (made to avoid logocentrism) between the order in which objects are produced in theory and their real mode of determination, and so on.

Benton concludes from this that, although Althusser claims to have abandoned meta-theoretical criteria of cognition, the main thrust of his work relies on the validity of just such epistemological standards.

Hence, it is argued, the cognitive privileging of scientific discourse receives implicit theoretical support in the work of Althusser. This, we are told, distinguishes the latter's work from the conventionalism of the post-structuralists. Here, the abandonment of epistemology is a decisive element of method. For example, in the work of Foucault on institutions, which are (somehow) constituted discursively, each discourse generates its own 'regime of truth'. For Hindess and Hirst, theory plays a pragmatic role - the explication and justification of pre-existing political objectives and practices.

Another indicator of epistemological anxiety within Althusser's writings is his 'objectivism'. There is an insistence, notes Benton, on fitting theoretical developments within all-embracing cognitive maps. Hence, the Newtonian revolution is seen as a qualitative break in the history of the sciences, whereas the advent of wave mechanics, for example, represents mere quantitative progress within the framework of classical mechanics. This objectivism, like so many aspects of Althusser's work, exists in tension with an alternative viewpoint. Benton observes that in a relatively submerged, later (anti-epistemological?) formulation, Althusser argues for the mutual autonomy of problematics in different subject matters; he assigns each has its own logic and methods of proof. This, we are told, is indicative of a shift towards theoretical relativism, incommensurability and conventionalism. A major problem with such a cognitive pluralism, Benton suggests, is that the internality of logics to problematics renders cross-disciplinary work impossible.

However, even if this were not the case, the very nature of the problematic, as a cognitive structure, would seem to present obstacles to commensuration of this sort. In fact the interdependent nature of the conceptual elements of the problematic means that it has the characteristic of determining that some problems can be posed and some cannot, that is, some issues do not get 'problematized'. Further, a specific problem can only be thought within the problematic: as Benton himself says, 'the concepts and problems which make up a theoretical structure are not identifiable independently of their location within the whole' (p. 25).

It may be that Benton's earlier remarks on the way that commensuration takes place could provide a way out of this epistemological thicket. In discussing the epistemological break in Marx, he notes that comparison takes place between a theoretical ideology and a new scientific formulation rather than between (say) two bona fide scientific theories. Comparison exposes the 'web of error' that constitutes the theoretical ideology. A similar account of commensuration in scientific practice is evident in the work of Lakatos, for whom new paradigms can emerge with the degeneration of a research programme, that is, when with respect to certain anomalies, its application has descended to the status of ad hoc explanation. A description of theoretical development in some ways parallel to this is given by Popper, who suggests that a problem, the source of new theoretical work, is the (rational) link between old and new theory.

The character of Althusser's problematic tends to suggest that theoretical development takes the form of a cognitive pluralism. The fact of one theory being historically 'displaced' by another would be a matter of convention rather that epistemological judgement. However, quite other implications are evident if we turn to his work on Marx's break with humanism. From this it seems to be theoretical, that is, scientific, ideologies that are displaced rather than sciences, and hence an epistemological distinction is being made. Consequently, within the Althusserian paradigm theory production could entail both cognitive pluralism and the assertion of epistemological standards, providing that theories refer to differing real objects, as appears to be the case in Part I of Reading Capital.

Benton, on the other hand, seems to have a qualified sympathy for the earlier, objectivist Althusser, with his universalising theoretical tendencies, and at times distances himself from the concept 'problematic', using the less structured notion 'paradigm' instead. He takes the view that 'a good deal' of new theory 'better characterises what is already known through alternative forms'. This suggests a more cumulative conception of scientific development, in which closer approximations to full knowledge are gained through widening theoretical frameworks. In line with this he believes that one of the tasks of Historical Materialism is to elaborate the conditions of possibility of an underlying unity of the sciences. An adequate body of Marxist theory would require the guiding perception that the constitution of individual subjects depends on biological and natural, as well as social structures.

Reply to critics of (Structural) Marxism

Benton offers a critical defence of Structural Marxism against the objections raised by post-structuralists, the Left historian, E. P. Thompson, and neo-Weberian sociology.

Now, whilst aspects of Althusser's work clearly have a functionalist orientation, Benton argues that this is not a necessary condition of theorising structures in terms of systemic properties. Such a systems teleology can be avoided if we separate the historical genesis of structures from the issue of what it is that currently produces and reproduces their stability. By this decentring stratagem we can substitute empirical investigation of the determinants of structural instability for quite justifiably criticised talk about the 'needs of capitalism' and the 'nature of the working class', which sees the present through a historicist reading of what has happened in previous epochs.

The Althusserian reification of the role of structures in terms of a response to 'systemic demands', however, is no adequate alternative. It makes it difficult to explain the existence of contradictory tendencies within structures. The ideological state apparatuses, for example, just function to reproduce the social formation.

Within the perspective of Structural Marxism, then, the exorcism of agency has resulted in its return at the systemic level. The exorcism produces a passive subjectivity constituted by structural imperatives and with only an illusory content which confers on individual subjects a sense of self-present or 'centred' agency. Such beliefs have real effects, but the beings who think them remain untheorised, or rather, displaced altogether from structural analysis.

Benton believes that the consequent lack of mediation between structure and agency can be remedied within the framework of Structural Marxism. A move in this direction would require that the traditional Marxist conception 'ideology-as-illusion' be (a) supplemented and (b) its role in the constitution of subjectivity questioned.

The view of ideology as false consciousness or illusion does not, Benton notes, allow for the real cognitive content of people's everyday beliefs and hence for the validity of their critical and oppositional activities. Here, he is in agreement with Thompson on the failure of Althusserianism to accommodate the correspondence between everyday ideologies and the 'practical requirements of struggle'. Ideology construed in this sense, he argues, would be consonant with the Althusserian paradigm that it fits the 'web of error' account of ideology that Althusser gives in his theory of science.

The view of ideologies as consisting of half-truths, truths, myth, sentimental attachments and loyal-

ties, woven into a whole fabric, bricolage-style, is a useful one, suggests Benton, if we are to understand workers' actions in struggle. The idea appears in Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony'. Here, cognitive and affective elements of people's beliefs are interrelated and consequently their values may be continuously re-affirmed (or rejected) through practical experience of their efficacy.

Benton counterposes this view of ideology to the neo-Weberians' separation of 'ultimate' values from the factual content of beliefs. For the latter, values may exist in a kind of platonic isolation, guiding action, but not being transformed by it. At the same time, they criticise the utilitarian concept of action found in Marxism as being an implausible imputation of ultimate values to members of the working class. Benton rejects the (utilitarian) means-ends dichotomy which predicates ultimate goals in the consciousness of workers, in favour of a Gramscian-like conception of what motivates class struggles: the day-to-day issues faced by the working class. Hence, there is no need, as Lockwood, Hindess and Hirst have objected, for Marxists to read off, in some metaphysical sense, the interests of the working class from their position in the production process (implying pure theoreticism or economistic reductionism) because these can also be detected in the discursive practices associated with the ideological and political activities workers involve themselves in.

Turning to the problem of what it is that limits workers' oppositional activities, Benton suggests that the role of ideology, in the traditional Marxist sense, has been much exaggerated. A clearer picture will emerge through the consideration of the processes through which individual subjects come to internalise aspects of social relations as part of their psychic structure. In this area useful insights are seen to be offered by, for example, Marcuse and Reich into the 'organisation of desire', and the way this assists the process of cognitive distortion produced by capitalism, by providing a 'moral and motivational dynamics of subordination'.

Benton considers that the idea of internalisation of structural properties, providing unconscious determinations of human activity, is generally useful for structuralist theory. That is to say that without resort to 'humanism' it goes some way to closing the gap between agency and structure, produced by the notion of ideological interpellation of the subject; the subject remains decentred insofar as he/she is constituted through internalised structural relations.

Notwithstanding some methodological reservations about the reception of Structural Marxism in Benton's Rise and Fall, its (reconstructed) Althusserian project appears substantially vindicated. Benton's book does not present a narrow, sectarian structuralism, but rather a structuralism in the classical synthesising tradition of social theory. This approach recognises the validity of theoretical domains outside previous definitions of the purlieu of Structural Marxism and the possibility of their incorporation within the latter.

The book lucidly covers a wide range of debates whose positions are meticulously rehearsed and scrupulously presented. The tightly interwoven presentation of the arguments this entails renders the process of breaking the text into separate themes difficult.

However, Benton's fundamental purpose throughout is to demonstrate how Althusser's elaboration of the structural (systemic) totality and its cognitive form, the problematic, provided the Left with a means of recognising and assailing the detotalised reductionist and empiricist forms of discourse which have enervated Marxist theory. The appearance of Rise and Fall is apposite in offering a critical defence of Althusser's project in a conjuncture where the view that it is possible to pursue the rational in the real is palpably under siege.

Howard Feather

Criticism and Crisis

John Fekete (ed.), The Structural Allegory: Reconstructive Encounters with the New French Thought, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984, 269pp, £29.50 hb, £9.95 pb

After construction, deconstruction; after deconstruction, reconstruction. In the wake of structuralism and poststructuralism, ostensibly movements with different objectives, comes a reconstructively-minded reassessment: what if they are both part of a longer-term process - the 'structural allegory'? Poststructuralism then becomes the second stage of the structural allegory, the differences and objectives of the two stages are played down, and the reconstructive critic can proceed to investigate their shared set of 'metatheoretical parameters' and 'common method of formalization'.

The editor of this collection sees it as being marked by 'a cautious transformist impulse and a strategic ecumenicism'. In case this suggests (as it does) an uncritical pluralism of the type that Anglo-Saxon students of literary studies are only too familiar with, he argues that it can have a radical quality: 'a multiparadigm, anti-foundationalist program can best redeem Saussure's call to study the "life of signs" as if to that study is attached a meliorist project to denaturalise, problematise, and revalue the signs of life with practical emancipatory intent.' Presumably this would constitute a third, and in some unexplained way more acceptable, stage of the structural allegory.

The collection that follows is an odd blend of criticism which is reconstructive and postmodernist (positions by no means as easily reconcilable as Fekete seems to believe), in which the most common feature would appear to be a strategic postmarxism: 'Although Marx's work and traditions are in the background of all these essays, their arguments invite not only a revision of received notions about the intellectual value of Marxism but a general reflection on models and their ramifications as well.' Dialectics is not much in favour in this text and is effectively consigned to an older tradition of paradigm bound explanatory systems. In our brave new, multiparadigm, postsemiotic world, this

looks rather quaint.

What this adds up to is a critique of semiotics in both its structuralist and poststructuralist manifestations. The position adopted by the contributors varies quite considerably. Castoriadis offers a theory of the 'radical imaginary' in which society (and its artefacts) is seen to be beyond systematisation: 'society is neither an ensemble, nor a system or hierarchy of ensembles (or structures); it is a magma and magma of magmas' ('magma' here representing an indeterminate totality). The thrust of the argument appears to be against any notion of teleology - 'social significations ... do not denote anything' - and in its commitment to existence as a state of becoming rather than being it comes close to a Derridean anti-logocentrism. Both Marxism and structuralism qualify as teleological under such a reading, and hence lay themselves open to attack by a critic concerned to explode 'the myth of being as determinacy'.

Baudrillard is similarly concerned to undermine structuralism and Marxism, but in a much more radical way. Here the approach is apocalyptic: 'the only strategy is catastropic ... things have to be pushed to the limit, where everything is naturally inverted and collapses.' Once we have turned Stalinism on its head in this manner (even radicals can find the notion of inevitability useful on occasion it seems), we reach 'the end of the bound sign' and move into the millenarian 'reign of the emancipated sign ... in which all classes eventually acquire the power to participate'. Yet again, as with Derrida and Castoriadis, we can note a certain rejection of the social in favour of a radical individualism, in which we are all producers and all free to adapt the market to our wildest consumerist desires, 'to a proliferation of signs according to demand'.

How this utopian-sounding procedure (if Adam Smith crossed with Derrida is your idea of utopia) would work in the real, non-radical-individualistic world of societies and politics, is anything but clear. As is so often the case in French postmodernist thought, when you look for these kind of specifics you are met with a gnomic utterance: 'there is no longer such a thing as ideology; there are only simulacra'; later we are informed that 'simulacra surpass history' (always a useful property). Trying to follow up this chain of reasoning is like chasing a phantom - it is always one step ahead of you, leaving a tantalisingly cryptic trace of its passing: 'the cool universe of digitality absorbs the worlds of metaphor and of metonymy, and the principle of simulation thus triumphs over both the reality principle and the pleasure principle'. Faced by a 'universe of indeterminacy' the radical-individualist critic can only take refuge in nihilism: 'all that is left is theoretical violence. Speculation to the death.' The poststructuralist project, which retains a certain sense of optimism in both Castoriadis and Derrida (if an optimism without any real foundation) turns sour in Baudrillard. 'Speculation to the death' is as pessimistic a view of the hermeneutical enterprise as can be imagined.

After these apocalyptic visions, the other contributions seem rather tame. They are certainly more obviously 'academic' (in the Anglo-Saxon sense of the term) although just as concerned to challenge structuralist and Marxist hegemonies. The policy seems to be not so much ecumenically-minded as cocktail-minded: Foucault and Parsons from Arthur Kroker; Wittgenstein, Levi-Strauss, and Gadamer from Gyorgy Markus; Derrida, Foucault and Descartes from Robert D'Amico; just about every French post-Enlightenment intellectual you are likely to think of from Andrew Wernick, whose work drives relentlessly towards the kind of magisterial overview the editor of this collection manifestly wants:

> In effect, in the Nietzschean finale of a disintegrating positivism, modern reconciliationism, whether Cartesian or Hegelian, has discovered not only that its credalist conception of faith was mirrored in the false ontology of an exteriorized Absolute, but that its very notion of a coherent consciousness had all along been profoundly undialectical. The way toward a higher reconciliationism lies in dropping the strained doctrinalist mode, Marxist or otherwise, so as to grasp this new, and in Nietzsche's sense Buddhized, dispositif of faith and reason, attitude and cognition, that French rationalism, through its structuralist dislocation, has now encountered.

Confronted by reconcilationists such as Wernick, the ideological implications of anti-foundationalism become particularly apparent. 'Buddhized dispositifs' announce a final severance with that messy world of political practice where theories never quite reach their objectives. The radical-individualist response to the problem is to question the whole notion of objective; to see it as authoritarian, syncretist, logocentrist, the product of a false consciousness that is too much of this world: too foundationalized. In a realm of 'higher reconciliationism' we bracket these mundane considerations and proclaim ourselves free: free to demand endlessly proliferating significations, in their own turn set free from authoritarian (signified) foundations; free to become radical, apolitical, a-responsible individuals.

At least one voice in this collection is willing to challenge such notions. In 'Derrida and the Cupidity of the Text', Charles Levin tries to map out a tradition for Derrida's anti-foundationalism in empiricism. Derrida becomes in effect the most radical of empiricists, whose concept of 'trace' is 'quite obviously a spiritual descendant of the positivist sense-impression' which

> resurrects the empiricist critique of language and naive realism in terms of a similar ambiguous conception of the given as a pure atomic state, a kind of abstracted immediacy working in tandem with a doctrinal deferment of the sensual whole. It was, in a sense, the empiricists who first argued that the play of similarity and contiguity was in principle perpetual in order to rule out referentiality. Only now, in Derrida, this associationism has been revised in differential terms, and the play takes place on paper.

Ultimately for Levin 'Derridean deconstructionism is another gambit in the old philosophical game of defer-

ring the danger of the world'.

It could be argued that this is the sin of most writers in this volume. Anti-foundationalism, whether nihilistic or chiliastic in tone, amounts to an abdication of critical responsibility. For 'denaturalize', 'problematize' and 'revalue' read 'mystify'. In the act of becoming a violent theoretician or Buddhized dispositif, the critic abandons the world, and all those within it who have failed to reach his level of 'higher reconciliationism'. Neatly barricaded in by a ferocious array of 'isms' and 'isations', of gnomic utterances that chase tails that are never quite there (or may never have existed in the first place) the critic sits detached, denaturalizing and problematizing to his solipsistic heart's content. Having identified a 'crisis of knowledge' he withdraws. Never mind changing the world: defer it; end of the problem.

But is there a 'crisis of knowledge' as we are so glibly assured? We have become so inured to catchphrases like this in postmodernist writings that we might be failing to appreciate their ideological significance. There is less a crisis of knowledge in the world than a crisis of relating theory to practice, and empiricism, radical or otherwise, offers no solutions here. It becomes necessary to reveal the unacceptable face of anti-foundationalism: its commitment to an individualism which ignores the world of action and militates against the possibility of social change. Beneath all the talk of freedom and anti-authoritarianism lurks an intellectual élitism of a very traditional, and very sinister, kind.

Perhaps this is what is being reconstructed in this volume? There is certainly nothing in Fekete's 'strategic ecumenicism' that would point the way forward to a more successful conjunction of theory and practice in the un-Buddhized, and probably un-Buddhizable, world out there that most of us still inhabit. For all their flaws, paradigm-bound systems of explanation have a lot to be said for them compared to the self-regarding posturing of their postmodernist and reconstructive critics. When, like Marxism, they also hold out the possibility of change, they can seem like pretty good advertisements for foundationalism too.

Stuart Sim

Matters of Life and Death

John Harris, The Value of Life, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985, 281pp, £15.95 hb, £7.95 pb

Several years ago students were taught that philosophy had no practical role, that its problems were pseudo-problems, and that philosophers offered descriptions of discourses or attended to abstruse logical puzzles. With the exception of a few Marxists who saw a political content in philosophy, this was the established view in Britain. Linguistic and analytic philosophy was rightly judged unimportant and the expression 'merely philosophical' denoted irrelevance. Today there is a resurgence of 'practical philosophy' which is endorsed by the profession's own establishment and, following the American lead, medical ethics is fast becoming an intrinsic aspect of philosophical intervention. In the next few years several universities will have courses in medical ethics and a generation of philosophy postgraduates will find their way into hospital wards. There is, however, a danger that in the guise of practical philosophy all the outworn dichotomies, distinctions, cliches, and irrelevant, trivial, and far-fetched examples will be targeted on health-care workers. If this were to happen then the medical profession's interest in philosophy would be short-lived. The alternatives are clear. Medical ethics can be presented as an abstract discipline which, despite a proliferation of medical examples, will be of little help in solving the real dilemmas of contemporary health care. On the other hand, philosophy can be truly integrated into medical research and practice by shedding some of its elitism and concern with purity. If the latter is to be accomplished, philosophers of medicine will have to engage in serious debate with physicians, which means not irritating them with science-fiction yarns of body-swops and brain transplants, and acknowledging that there has been some progress in the neuro-physiological sciences since Locke.

John Harris's book is addressed to the dilemmas of contemporary health-care workers. It sets out to challenge the basic assumptions which underpin arguments about euthanasia, in vitro fertilization, research on human embryos, surrogate motherhood, sexual morality, abortion, distribution of health resources, and criteria for diagnosing death. It is an enjoyable book to read. Avoiding the excesses of both medical and philosophical jargon, Harris develops, with relentless logic, some extremely controversial views about life and death issues. There is no sympathy here for that quaint belief that philosophy should be dispassionate and impartial. Medical ethics, he argues, cannot be limited to the understanding of problems; it must contribute to their solution.

Harris's approach to the problems of contemporary health care is through his concept of a person. This also provides him with criteria for the evaluation of human life. A person, he argues, is 'any being capable of valuing its own existence' (p. 18). Insofar as one has the capacity to do so, then whatever value one places on one's life must be fully respected. For Harris a valued life should neither be involuntarily terminated nor should a life that is not valued be prolonged. Says Harris:

> To frustrate the wish to die will on this view be as bad as frustrating the wish to live, for in each case we would be negating the value that the individuals themselves put on their lives.
> (p. 17)

Readers will have to judge for themselves whether

Harris is ultimately successful with his defence of euthanasia and whether satisfactory criteria can be formulated to indicate the certainty of a patient's self-evaluation. To what extent, for example, are the values we bestow on our own lives actually mediated by the values others bestow on it? There may be an answer to this question, but it should not have to be presented to over-worked nursing staff on a casualty ward. Yet these are the kind of problems that are to occur if morally-relevant criteria supplant clinical criteria in the determination of treatment options. If, for example, the scope of medical responsibility is limited to Harris's criteria for personhood, then the practical implications deserve to be clearly articulated. Quite obviously, embryos, fetuses and cadavers are incapable of valuing themselves: so, on Harris's terms, fetuses can be aborted and embryos and cadavers can be utilised for experimental purposes. The problem emerges with borderline cases where life is obviously present but the ability to value it is hard to detect. In this category are acute depressive states, advanced dementia, anencephalics, persistent vegetative states, and even Members of Parliament, Cabinet Ministers and academics who are unable to value anything. With the pressing need for health-service cutbacks to pay for defence-related priorities, this might be the wrong climate in which to provide (however unwittingly) criteria for the witholding of life-sustaining therapy.

Harris's position is a very radical one. It will be more readily accepted by philosophers than physicians. It places individual decision at the centre of arguments concerning health care, which is a very important counter to the excessive paternalism of medicine in the UK. But linking the boundaries of ethical responsibility to criteria for personal identity raises fundamental problems concerning the kind of contribution philosophy can make to medical practice. Harris argues that it is mistaken to think that a definition of death will solve problems relating to the management of patients in persistent vegetative states. The questions are solved, he says, by asking 'when does life cease to matter morally?' (p. 8). This is the point when the patient is no longer a person, having lost the capacity to value life. Now this point may be prior to the onset of death as recognised by either traditional cardiorespiratory criteria or by criteria for brainstem death. Thus, it was argued during the controversy over Karen Quinlan that the life that she did not value should not be prolonged. But this was a legal and ethical matter which was distinct from the factual question as to whether she was alive or dead. In a moral sense she may have been dead or 'as good as dead', but clinically she was alive: when her ventilator was switched off she continued to breathe spontaneously, grap, yawn, manifest sleep-wake cycles, pulsate, urinate, and show other vital signs for several years. According to criteria for personal identity she would have been as dead as a decapitated corpse and fit for burial. Despite centuries of philosophical scholarship the problem of personal identity and the value of life remains unsolved. This was why the President's Commission in 1981 (1) rejected criteria based on loss of personal identity and as yet no medical authority in the world has any intention of employing it. Decisions to withdraw treatment, remove ventilators, and authorise organ removal for transplantation or experiment, should be made on the basis of a concept of death which is philosophically well-grounded and from which objective criteria and clinically sound tests can be derived. Maybe one day it will be possible to employ objective tests for personal identity and self-evaluation, but for the present the opinion of one neurologist holds: 'it is easier to test pupils than sentience.'

Problems arising out of attempts to define death are raised in Harris's final chapter, 'Death is Abolished'. This title rebukes those who seek a definition of death (2). Harris correctly notes that all definitions require a condition of irreversibility, but then he goes on to cite a hypothetical example whereby at some point prior to death, patients could be frozen in a state of suspended animation to be revived in the future when, hopefully, medicine will have developed the techniques to restore them to full health. Says Harris: 'So long as freezing or other methods of suspending animation are a possibility no definition of death or even of loss of personality in terms of the permanence or irreversibility of such a condition will be adequate' (p. 255). In these circumstances the essential question is not whether the patient is alive or dead but whether he or she has a reservation for the freezer. Given the limitations on resources, the residual ethical problem would be related to the allocation of places. Of course, one can imagine the discovery of a far-off frozen planet and economical transport to ship everyone to it at some point before natural death. That is the attractiveness of philosophy; anything is possible as long as it is not self-contradictory. Now science-fiction examples are an excellent way of introducing philosophical problems; they stimulate the imagination. But they have a dubious value in the contemporary neurological debate on the end-points of human life. And meanwhile, back in the twentieth century, there is a combination of scientific, ethical, legal, and political reasons for a definition of death as an irreversible event. Scientific accuracy demands a distinction between the living and the non-living; there is an ethical imperative to know when a potential organ donor is no longer going to need his or her organs; lawyers need to know when to put the will into operation; law enforcement agencies need to know whether the victim has been killed or seriously injured, and politicians may need to know whether the patient can still register a vote.

When Harris rejects definitions of death and does not accept their relevance to decisions affecting the management of persistent vegetative states he implicitly excludes a number of pressing factual and ethical problems from consideration. If no important distinction exists between vegetative states and brainstem death

and a distraught relative strangles a patient in a persistent vegetative state, then is a charge of wilful murder to be made or should it be mismanagement of a corpse? These problems go back to the 1960s when the construct 'brain death' first appeared in neurological literature. At the time there was considerable terminological confusion. There were references to cerebral death, neocortical death, irreversible coma, and brain death, with little understanding of the underlying concepts of death. Nowadays the position is much clearer. Brainstem death has been clearly defined and, when adequately tested, the criteria have proved correct. There have been numerous studies of patients meeting criteria for brainstem death and then ventilated to asystole. There have been no reversals. At present the same degree of certainty is lacking in predictions of irreversibility in persistent vegetative states. But a recent claim that a fatal outcome can be predicted in 87% of patients in hypoxic-ischemic coma deserves serious attention from philosophers of science, neurologists, and ethicists (3). These factual investigations are becoming increasingly important in medical ethics. This is why I have criticised Harris's employment of science fiction in this context. If moral philosophers are not to become as irrelevant to medicine as the brain transplant and body swop brigade have been to psychiatry, then a greater appreciation of recent neuro-physiological data will be required. This is the challenge which is presented in Harris's powerful and stimulating book. Apart from my reservation with his discussion of death, the issues he raises are of crucial importance to everyone concerned with health care. By writing so provocatively Harris will have done a great service if he can stimulate further discussion on matters too often taken for granted.

David Lamb

NOTES

1 President's Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine and Biomedical and Behavioural Research, Defining Death, Washington, 1981.
2 See C. Passis, The ABC of Brainstem Death, London, BMJ, 1983; D. Lamb, Death, Brain Death and Ethics, London, Croom Helm, 1985.
3 See D. E. Levy, J. J. Caronna, B. H. Singer et al, 'Predicting the Outcome from Hyposix-ischemic Coma', Journal of the American Medical Association, 1985, 253, 1420-1426.

Beyond Liberal Pluralism

Almost thirty years ago, Dahl published A Preface to Democratic Theory. That book stood as an encapsulation of the pluralist political theory of the 1950s in which, despite an acknowledgement of the imperfections of capitalist democracy, the Western countries (and particularly the USA) were basically endorsed as a notable historic embodiment of the free and equal society. This book, by contrast, is critical of corporate capitalism and stands as an important (if implicit) self-criticism of the pluralist tradition.

This is because Dahl now sees the economic power of large private enterprises as a serious obstacle to the achievement of full political equality in the state at large. Moreover, if democracy is genuinely to be embraced in a society of free individuals, Dahl argues, economic enterprises themselves must become open democracies. Along with other pluralist writers, Dahl is thus much more aware than he was of structural inequality in capitalist society, and of the substantive rather than formal imperatives which the movement for democracy generates. This shift of emphasis, however expressed, would represent a major statement of contemporary political thought. All the more remarkable, then, that Dahl has effortlessly compressed a great deal of conceptual argument and empirical reference into a text of 160 elegant, engaged and readable pages.

Dahl begins by examining Tocqueville's fears that the inevitable growth of equality poses a threat to liberty, especially economic liberty. Further, there is the paradox that the majority in an egalitarian democracy can crush the interests of minorities and can choose indeed to extinguish democracy itself. Dahl argues against these fears on two fronts. Conceptually, primary political rights are part of the very fabric of democracy, and not (as Tocqueville and other liberals aver) something prior to it. Consequently, to infringe fundamental rights is antidemocratic, and to vote democratically to end democracy is not a paradox, it is simply to undercut the meaning of self-determination. The self-determination of members of any association whose collective decisions are binding: that in short is Dahl's working definition of democracy.

The other prong of his attack is to take Tocqueville's empirical vision head on. Historically, it is not the materialism and complacency of egalitarian democracies which have heralded authoritarian regimes. On the contrary, the latter have flourished where inequality is evident and democratic culture fragile. He knows, however, that the defensible ideal of democracy has been used to legitimate capitalist inequality. The assumption that equality has grown inexorably is as problematic as the idea that liberty and equality are necessarily at odds with each other. These considerations are especially important when we consider that Tocqueville's arguments took as their relevant domain of application a republic of small farmers. Since then the growth of giant corporations has transformed the meaning of economic liberty and rights to property. Dahl argues that there is little basis in Locke, Mill or even Nozick for the massive concentration of wealth in contemporary capitalism being seen as in some way an entitlement attendant on economic liberty.

Dahl thus moves from philosophical to sociological considerations with ease and to effect. Overall, he develops an analogy between democratic citizenship in the state and self-government in the economic enterprise, arguing that exactly parallel justifications for democratic self-determination can be given. Radical shifts in the actual patterns of ownership and control are therefore necessary in the interests of logical and moral consistency. There probably never could be complete equality of wealth or power, he thinks - he ack-

nowledges the imperfections of economic democracy - and there is necessarily some tension between market constraints and the social co-ordination of resources and standards, both of which are seen as important components of the total picture. Dahl holds that the democratic strengths of his proposal differentiate it from available alternatives in corporate capitalism and bureaucratic socialism. Over time, he also expects it to be at least as efficient, but the main gain is the gradual development of a vibrant and intelligent democratic culture. The exact type of ownership of the co-operative enterprises envisaged is certainly conceded to be a problem, and Dahl thinks that the right to resources and benefits by virtue of membership of the association is preferable to individual ownership of parts of the whole, or to state property which is parcelled out.

The book spans a number of debates. It is framed within the lineage of classical political theory, whilst clearly forming part of the progressive climate of philosophical opinion on the issues of rights, freedom, and equality. It represents an important critical turn in pluralist political analysis, whilst managing to connect with arguments about the role of the market in 'feasible socialism'. In fact, Dahl prefers ('cavalierly') to evade assigning his model to a place in the capitalism-or-socialism spectrum, but his references to co-operative experiments in Spain and Yugoslavia of necessity raise the issue. Since the book resonates with the possibility of a 'third way', and since this is clearly a popular theme these days, Dahl can be criticised for not pursuing the question, especially since he also falls silent on the exact arrangements for the production and control of 'social' goods.

Another point Marxists would probably make is that the interesting and sustained analogy between economic and political processes, whilst undoubtedly an advance on earlier brands of pluralism, is conducted in terms of domination and self-determination. This has the effect of skirting round the point that capitalist inequality is based on economic exploitation and not the absence of democracy as such.

As for the more philosophical discussions, some will want to retain the apparent paradoxes of democracy in spite of Dahl's claim that no dilemmas exist. This is because he offers as a definition the substantive moral argument that self-determination is an inalienable human good, and this is what democracy at root is about. We can agree with this, whilst seeing a role for a more procedural definition in which there are indeed some real tensions between personal freedom, social justice and democratic processes.

These points are not really criticisms of the book as such, since it is not a treatise but a compact preface. But they do emerge naturally out of the shape of Dahl's arguments and ought to be addressed by him somewhere. Yet there is no doubt that he has written a provocative and interesting book, operating in that increasingly open area of debate between critical pluralism and the 'decentralizing' socialist trend.

Gregor McLennan

Talking Dirty

Murray S. Davis, Smut: Erotic Reality/Obscene Ideology, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985, 313pp, £10.50 pb

'Those who go to bed together for sex shift from vertical to horizontal interaction, a form of interaction that occurs in very few other activities (sunbathing is perhaps the most common).'

The quotation from Murray S. Davis's book sums up much that is challenging and intriguing about this work. There is a characteristic play of wit (sometimes at the expense of strict truth), an interesting juxtaposition of examples drawn from everyday experience, an attention to the significance of mundane events, and uniting them all, a Goffmanesque interest in charting the shifting modes of consciousness, the layered nature of reality. But in place of the subtle distinctions of roles and mis en scene so characteristic of Goffman's muted dramas of everyday life, Davis attempts to anatomise the techniques we deploy in the move from everyday reality to erotic reality, and the effects of that second reality in organising our social life. He qualifies Goffman's assertion that the body is a peg on which we hang a person's self, and argues that in erotic reality, 'the body becomes an "icon" that gives life to the self as much as a "peg" that takes life from it.' The book, then, is simultaneously about the meaning we attribute to sex, and the meaning sex gives to our lives: 'Sex, in short, is a reality-generating activity.'

Davis's declared aim is to develop an analysis of the erotic which synthesises the phenomenology of Alfred Schutz and the existentialism of Sartre. To do this he breaks with the most characteristic form of sexual theorising this century, the cataloguing and classification of acts and responses to produce a 'scientific' discourse on erotic life. Davis offers instead what he calls a non-scientific - though he stresses not unscientific - tradition of sexual knowledge. He grounds his work on the diverse experiences of sex, as described in pornography, novels, poetry, philosophy, journalism, philosophy and the Bible, as well as by the high priests of the 'sexual tradition'. The results of this apparently haphazard rag bag of quotes and speculations are genuinely refreshing. The early chapters on the drift into 'erotic reality' are dazzling in their detail and ingenuity, clothing the dry bones of sociological theory with mind-grabbing examples. Similarly the descriptions of the 'Smut structures' that shape our sexual consciousness are fascinating and important. I like in particular his dissection of what he puts forward as the three major traditions of sexual moralism, the Jehovanist, the Gnostic and the Naturalist, which underline the complexity and dense interconnections of forms of moral regulation and ideologies: 'Unlike Jehovanists, both Gnostics and Naturalists like sex. But

Gnostics admire it because it is evil, because it undermines a morality they believe to be false, whereas Naturalists accept it because it is harmless.' It is a nice intellectual game to locate our sexual luminaries on this grid of interpretation. Davis places Sade, Huysmans, Wilde and Bataille on the Gnostic scale, Havelock Ellis, Kinsey and modern pornographers on the Naturalist. Jerry Falwell, Mary Whitehouse and Margaret Thatcher are Jehovanist clearly. But where would we find radical feminists, Foucault or ourselves? More importantly for this discussion, where should we place Davis himself?

His declared position is a plague on all their houses. In particular he finds them all wanting because they all want to close the gap between ordinary life and the erotic, to bring the sexual under the control of social norms. The Jehovanists identify sex with procreation, the Gnostics with power, and the Naturalists with pleasure. In each case, there is a search for 'pure' sex. But sex, Davis suggests, must be dirty to be challenging, must have an edge, a flavour, which makes transgression possible. He quotes the American pornographer Mario Vassi, who welcomed the rise of gay militancy in the early 1970s but lamented its challenge to the stigma of homosexuality: 'For myself, I still have a sweet tooth for certain kinds of depravity.'

So, it seems, does Davis. In the end he appears to argue that there is a subversive truth in sex; it is the wedge, he writes, 'that forces apart the components of the cosmos long enough for human inspection'. Davis, on inspection, turns out to be a closet Gnostic. This is not any sin in itself. Where would we be without our Genets or Deleuzes? The problem is that the book seems to promise something else. In its vehement rejection of what Davis regards (wrongly I think) as Freud's 'instinct theory', in his endorsement of social construction theorists such as Gagnon and Simon, in his quoting of Foucault, Davis appears to be working towards an interestingly different challenge to sexual essentialism. Yet, transparently, sexuality cannot simultaneously be a social construct, a historical invention and 'one of the few activities through which humanity can become conscious of the incompatibility of cosmic principles'. Sexuality re-emerges here as an autonomous domain, as a different reality from which we can tear apart the assumptions of the everyday reality which envelopes us. This, I believe, is fundamentally misguided. If there are many sexualities (as there are), then sexuality cannot in itself provide a platform for critique. Many critics of the sexual status quo have recognised this, and the debates within feminism, the gay and lesbian communities and parts of the left about appropriate and inappropriate forms of behaviour testify to the real ethical and political problems that inevitably result from a rejection of sexual essentialism. Davis critically undermines his project by failing even to recognise the problem. It follows that the book ultimately contributes little to an ultimate solution.

Jeffrey Weeks

Male Sexuality

Andy Metcalf and Martin Humphries, The Sexuality of Men, London: Pluto Press, 1985, 256pp, £4.50 pb

If there is a 'men's movement' in Britain today, which may be doubted, the authors and editors of this book have fair claim to represent it. At least seven of the nine have published with Achilles Heel, the anti-sexist men's magazine, or have served on its editorial collective. Several have been active in gay politics and at least four have children of their own. Individually they are artists, lecturers, social workers, and therapists; jointly they are writers and activists. All appear united through theoretical practice in a commitment to understand and reconstruct male sexuality in the 1980s, beginning with themselves.

Much of this can be learned from the contributors' page and from the table of contents, where each author's name is attached to his chapter. Thereafter a kind of collective responsibility seems to take over, for the names do not reappear and, with but a few exceptions, the text reads like a monograph. A firm editorial hand is no doubt to be thanked for this happy achievement. Each chapter is written personally and clearly, using minimal jargon. The prose is often moving, occasionally even beautiful, which suggests its origin in hard-won personal struggles. These virtues culminate in the final chapter, 'Fear and Intimacy', by Vic Seidler. Outside feminist literature I cannot recall reading a more authentic synthesis of scholarship, political analysis, and personal experience.

Unlike some anti-sexist men, however, the authors do not present themselves as feminists manquées. Hair-shirts are not worn and breast-beating does not take place on these pages. Penal attonement for phallic masculinity would be frankly exhibitionist, a contradiction in terms, and the authors recognize this implicitly in their arguments. Andy Moye, for instance, understands how pornography 'works' better than most women do. While affirming feminist critiques, he shows how 'phallic desire is a matter of alienated work' and suggests, by analyzing the soft-porn market, that poorer, lower-class men are sold phallic power as compensation for their lack of social status. (The converse occurs in male gerontocracies, where social status, economic success, and military strength compensate for the loss of phallic power.) Similarly, Jeff Hearn sees the sexual behaviour of male workers as 'both showing solidarity and alienation', even in 'the use of sexuality as a talking point'; Martin Humphries finds gay machismo both liberating in its subversion of heterosexism and dangerous - dangerous because of its vulnerability

to commercial forces that would promote it as the only permissible gay image. This emphasis on the complexity of male sexuality, on its multiple determinations, and on the need to understand and address it at many levels of social reality is present in all the essays. Some feminists will be impatient with the authors as dissemblers and hypocrites. But it needs to be recognized that a reflective and self-critical masculinity may have as much of importance to contribute to the analysis of subjects such as pornography and violence as a feminist consciousness does. And, although the editors do not say so, the book is addressed primarily to men.

One essay stands out not only for its originality but for the discussion it is likely to promote. In 'Desire and Pregnancy', Peter Bradbury confronts the ways men think and feel about pregnant women. Whether a man sees pregnancy as the final possession of a woman, or as her punishment for promiscuity, or, most commonly, as a pathological condition, he may cease to desire her. Pregnancy also may pose a threat to men because of its creativity and exclusivity. A woman creates within herself; a man cannot. She becomes more interesting to herself and to other women when pregnant; the private parts of her body that a man feels to be his own erotic domain (where 'our sperm is invested') now become a matter of public concern. Again the result may be loss of desire, and often a reaffirmation of the man's sexuality with another woman. Bradbury both cites and criticizes feminist interpreters of men's response to pregnancy. In the end he is forgiving: the materialist account of male sexuality based on the will to power must become sufficiently historical to take account of infantile rejection and its memory, reactivated by the pregnant partner. 'We withdraw from her in case we are once again rejected.' But the 'drama' of pregnancy also holds out the silent promise that men may 'create a role other than the one we have taken so far. We are capable ... of becoming caretakers to this drama, of helping it along.'

Whatever men and women may conclude about this analysis, and others equally perceptive in the book, there can be no impugning the authors' motives. Autobiography, as women have found, may be a medium of consciousness-raising. The Sexuality of Men contains the life-scripts of newly conscious men, reworked and reinterpreted as commentaries on the lives of their fellows in Thatcher's Britain. They deserve to be heard, for they speak to us of a future in which we can all share.

Jim Moore

Taking It All In

Martin Jay, Marxism and Totality: the Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas, Oxford: Polity Press, 576pp, £25 hb

Martin Jay staked out his relationship to 'Western Marxism' in 1973 with his well-received historical work The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research (1923-1950). Here he extends that relationship to encompass the whole of the intellectual terrain designated by that term. This is a large, complex, contradictory book that chronicles what Jay calls 'the adventures of a concept from Lukács to Habermas' (although there is in fact a post-structuralist epilogue). There is a tension in this book between the purely exegetical, at which Jay excels, and the theoretical explanation at which he is less happy. The notion of 'totality', the structuring principle of the work, is so often shifted in the process of explanation and description that the question of its manifestation in Western Marxism remains still open at the conclusion of the book.

Martin Jay points out in his first sentence that 'there are no easy ways to map the rugged and shifting terrain of the intellectual territory known as Western Marxism', and then points out that even the borders and extent of the territory are hotly disputed. Jay more or less suggests that it is the centrality of the notion of 'totality' that defines Western Marxism, 'it is to the concept of totality that we can look for a compass to help us traverse the vast and uncharted intellectual territory that is Western Marxism.' This argument is never more strongly put than this and indeed a certain conceptual vagueness about totality allows the disparate parts of the work to hold together. Jay explicitly says that the adventure(s) of the concept he describes 'will to a certain degree be one I have created' (p. 17), whatever that means in terms of scholarship. Rather, he argues, than being a simple Rekonstruktion his text will be more of a Nachkonstruktion in which the rhetorical re-enactment will be shaped by his own concerns and experiences. Where this is not merely banal it poses rather acute questions about his representations of thinkers and their historico-political role. Constantly calling on different theorists to sustain his points, Jay exhibits an unease with the enormity of his self-appointed task which is reinforced by the somewhat arbitrary transitions of the work's development.

Beginning with Lukács's History and Class Consciousness, as the key moment in the development of Western Marxism into an ossified orthodoxy, Jay chronicles a shifting history of attempts to create a totalising vision of Marxism that encompassed both the breakdown of revolutionary certainty and its causes, economic and political. To begin with Lukács, to whom the notion of totality was central and specific, is natural enough, but from Lukács to Merleau-Ponty and Sartre via Gramsci, Adorno and others is a rather complex route during which the compass seems to change almost as often as the direction. Although Jay begins with a chapter on the 'discourse of totality before Western Marxism', he gets no nearer a working definition of totality than a series of interlinked ideas from the many users of the concept and a recognition of the normative and descriptibve uses of the term. From Lukács's well-known expressive view of totality, with all of its conservative, romantic overtones, to the steely mechanism of Althusser's rejection of that humanism seems like a void which not even history can accommodate. Indeed Althusser argued in For Marx that there were only two competing holisms, Marx's and Hegel's. He then argued that 'All these totalities have in common is (1) a word; (2) a certain vague conception of the unity of things; (3) some theoretical enemies. On the other hand, in their essence they are almost unrelated.' Oddly enough, Jay quotes this passage himself without any sense of irony at all. For the nub of the book's problem is that the notion of totality always remains undeveloped. Instead mere notions of totalising thought, of a general tendency towards holism (which is in any case always present in Marxism), constitute the compass which leads us all over Europe and from problematic to problematic. The description of individual bodies of thought is always well done and the overarching sense of history, and of intellectual development, is stimulating, and occasionally provoca-

tive. But the tendency towards a history of ideas, of a teleological working out of the spirit of totality in variable permutations, is omnipresent. Reaching modernity, Jay is much more interesting and when he counterposes Habermas's Herculean attempts to reconcile a holistic Marxism with Foucault's seemingly irrationalist, microscopic analysis of power, the argument comes alive. Jay ends by attempting to outline the need for, and the possibility of, a rational enterprise of totalising thought in modernity, and stoically concludes that 'to give up the search is to resign ourselves to a destiny against which everything that makes us human should compel us to resist'.

Richard Osborne

A Question of Rights

R. G. Frey (ed.), Utility and Rights, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985, 245pp, £19.50 hb

There are many philosophical questions about rights that one might wish to raise. For example, quite apart from the question of whether there are any rights at all (we might call the belief that there are none 'rights scepticism'), we might inquire what the claim that there are rights come to. What analysis should we give to the phrase 'the (or 'a') right to x'? We should sharply distinguish between rights scepticism and rights reductionism. The former position denies that there are any rights; the latter admits that there are rights, but asserts that they are wholly explicable in terms of some other concepts and ideas, for example in terms of duties. A second example of a philosophical question about rights is this: even if there are some rights, how - amidst the babble of claim and counter-claim about having a right to this or that - are we to decide just which rights there are? The first sort of question about rights we might dub 'analytic'; the second 'epistemic'.

A third sort of question we might call 'explanatory'. It is the question that, amongst others, is addressed by a theory of rights. If we do have rights, what accounts for or explains the fact that we do have them? It is here that various theories typically make their appearance: natural rights theories, contract theories, and utilitarianism. The three sorts of questions I have distinguished are obviously linked. For instance, one's theory of rights is going to have obvious implications for the answer to the epistemic question. All the same, the three questions can be distinguished.

As its title indicates, the papers in Utility and Rights are preoccupied within the area carved out by the third sort of question. Indeed, most are concerned with the question of the adequacy of the utilitarian account of rights. There does, after all, seem to be a prima facie difficulty in the idea that rights can be explained by expediency: there seem to be so many instances in which it is or would be expedient to ignore or override rights. Frey's introductory essay, and the essays by Frey, J. L. Mackie, H. J. McCloskey, and Charles Fried all lend credence to the thought that rights and utilitarianism cannot cohabit (although it may still be an open question which of the two should be sent out of bed). R. M. Hare, around whose book Moral Thinking several of the above mentioned papers revolve, and James Griffin do their best to demonstrate that a suitably sophisticated form of utilitarianism and rights can make good partners.

Although utilitarianism comes in for the bulk of the discussion, other explanatory theories of rights are dealt with. The paper by L. W. Sumner argues against natural rights theories of rights (and in passim offers the best account of what makes a theory a natural rights theory that I am aware of). Jan Narveson offers a defence of the contractarian theory, a theory which, in spite of Narveson's desire to do so, I found difficult to distinguish from that of John Rawls. Joseph Raz's 'Right-Based Moralities' treats Mackie's suggestion that of the three moral notions, 'value', 'duty', and 'rights', the last is, or can be construed as being, fundamental, the former two being explicable in terms of it. Raz's paper unexpectedly combines the denial of this contention with the rejection of 'moral individualism'. Finally, the papers by Alan Ryan and Rolf Sartorius deal with issues about property rights and their basis, with questions about the role of utility never far in the background.

In spite of some very sophisticated recent attempts to square utilitarianism with rights (one of which is the book by Hare I mentioned above), the overwhelming impression of these papers, and of the philosophical literature more generally, is that the attempt is bound to fail. As Sumner makes clear for the case of natural rights theories, and as much of the literature on Rawls's contract theory of justice tends to show, we really do not possess any acceptable alternative explanatory account or theory of rights. Three reactions are possible, none of which has much to be said in its favour. First, we might simply say that we have not looked hard enough, or in the right places, for such a theory. It is, quite simply, yet to be found. Second, we might conclude that the possession of rights in general, and even perhaps specific rights possession, is simply a brute and inexplicable fact about us (and creatures like us?). Third, we might be driven to embrace some form of either rights scepticism or rights reductionism. I leave it to the reader to decide which reaction is the least implausible.

David-Hillel Ruben

George Steiner, Antigones, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, 316pp, £15.00 hb

'No century has been more attentive than ours to the theoretical and descriptive study of myths.' Thus George Steiner during his tour of civilization's myriad and most notable Antigones. As Steiner points out, the question of the persistence of myth and the 'restricted economy' of Western (neo-Hellenistic) myth 'underlie major aspects of the Marxist theory of history and of culture. It is explicit in Freudian psychoanalysis, in the Jungian argument on archetypes, in the structural anthropology of Lévi-Strauss'. The first aim of Steiner's treatment of the innumerable metamorphoses of the tragedy of Antigone might be simply stated. It is to increase the degree of our astonishment at this strange and central facet not only of our whole culture but especially of the intellectual and artistic course of the twentieth century: the amazing vitality and fecundity of a handful of myths and archetypes inherited from our Greek forebears.

The first part of this study is a detailed account of the impact of Sophocles's Antigone on the thought and writing of Hegel, Hölderlin, Goethe and Kierkegaard; the second surveys the permutations that the legend of Antigone has undergone from antiquity to the present. But it is the third chapter that addresses the core problem: the hermeneutical question of how it is that communication between the different ages of history is possible at all. In the course of his discussion Steiner shows how the elements of Sophocles's tragedy encapsulate, or at least suggest, the nerve centres, or 'deep structures' involved in historical struggles ever since.

Steiner has consistently denigrated political activism of all kinds. His own stance is of someone who has seen too much, and meditated upon too much, to allow himself the naivety of practical, political commitment. Understandably enough, he irks many on the Left. But in another, semantic rather than political, sense he has remained consistently radical: he addresses all of the most general and far-reaching questions current in intellectual debates; he penetrates to the root of complex and often obfuscated issues and he is unflinching in his treatment of the vast amounts of evidence he commands. Not everyone is going to find all of the arguments and analyses contained in this book compelling. Not everyone interested in his themes is going to be convinced by the way in which he has formulated the problems. But there are very few people working in the areas touched on by this book (from cultural history to the study of drama, from psychoanalysis to the evolution of Marxism, from politics to poetics) who will not profit enormously from engaging with it.

Lloyd Spencer

Bill Brugger (ed.), Chinese Marxism in Flux 1978-84: essays on epistemology, ideology and political economy, London: Croom Helm, 1985, 218pp, £17.95 hb

I found this book hard work to read. It is certainly not an accessible overview of recent theoretical developments in China for someone, like myself, whose non-specialist interest in Chinese Marxism rather waned with the passing of Mao but who now feels a need to get up to date. Instead, we have here a series of highly concentrated, specialist, thematic essays which make few concessions to the uninitiated. There is much good rigorous argument but also an element of wilful obscurity. The worst offender is the essay on epistemology by Dutton and Healy, with its self-indulgent, mainly Althusserian, jargon. 'Conjunctures', 'problematics' and other kindred monstrosities passed before my glazed eyes - China seemed a long way off in this slow boat.

The book as a whole addresses itself to the complexities of Maoism after Mao, which the contributors see as both a 'pragmatic' reaction against and a vulgar continuation of the work of the founder. The result, as Bill Brugger puts it in his introduction, is 'an official ideology which is more sterile than that which it superseded and just as, if not more, incoherent' (p. 1). In the drive to modernise, it flirts with the economic liberalism of the West but rejects those currents of Marxism which claim to be the spiritual heirs of political liberalism - a potentially disastrous combination. The hope, expressed in Brugger's chapter on underdeveloped socialism, is that, as Bloch would put it, the warm stream of critical and anticipatory Marxism will emerge more forcefully; that, in particular, a goal-oriented revolutionary project will overcome the myopic determinism that characterises much of contemporary Chinese Marxism. This involves the recognition, as Brugger points out, that 'any thinking about a telos does involve a degree of utopian thinking' (p. 118). I couldn't agree more.

Vincent Geoghegan

Terry Eagleton, The Function of Criticism: from the Spectator to post-structuralism, London: Verso, 1984, 133pp, £3.95 pb

In this short work Eagleton offers a Marxist account of the development of criticism from its inception in the early eighteenth century in the journals conducted by Addison and Steele to the present day. Central to his analysis is Habermas's concept of the 'bourgeois public sphere' which in Britain, he argues, first came into being in order to cement the cultural unity of the aristocratic/bourgeois ruling block. During the nineteenth century this sphere, threatened by rising class tensions, was reconstituted under the aegis of the Victorian 'sage' figure who sought to remove culture from the terrain of the 'political'. From the late nineteenth century onwards it has increasingly disintegrated under the twin pressures of the growing commodification of literature on the one hand and the growth of the Academy on the other.

Eagleton has little to say about matters internal to criticism (changes in canons of taste, for example) and is essentially more concerned with the organisation of public opinion than with criticism as such. In many respects, for all his gestures to a class analysis, he remains a Leavisite under the skin inasmuch as one of his central concerns relates to the steady disintegration of the intimate relationship between the critic and her audience from the early eighteenth century onwards. Thus, one is confronted with the odd paradox that the Golden Age of the bourgeois public sphere appears in a period prior to industrialisation and the emergence of the bourgeoisie as a major political and social force.

The best sections of the book are those that deal with the history of the 'public sphere' during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; there is also an interesting analysis of the attempts made by Leavis to resurrect the public sphere within the university context. These are relatively free from the passages of 'instant history' which mar his argument and which have somewhat ludicrous overtones, e.g. 'Buffeted between a late bourgeois system which exposed it as increasingly anachronistic, and the forces of political opposition, literary humanism could find less and less toe-hold between monopoly capitalism on the one hand and the student movement on the other.'

—» The later chapters dealing with contemporary events are generally much weaker. Clearly, Eagleton's experience of the student movement and of the new 'scientific' criticism of the 1960s and 1970s has alienated him from the liberal humanist tradition with its exclusive concentration on the literary text. At the same time, he recognises that the new scientific criticism (structuralism, deconstruction) is itself exclusively a product of the Academy and lacks the wider political significance which, he claims, all great criticism should possess. It is not surprising, especially given his own background, that Eagleton's way out of this impasse lies in an excessive and largely uncritical adulation of Raymond Williams. Thus, he offers a detailed comparison between the careers of Williams and Wordsworth which is embarrassing given the evident difference in intellectual stature between the two figures. To anyone not caught up in the pieties of the Cambridge left-Leavisite tradition the claims made for Williams as a major intellectual figure are far from evident.

For Eagleton, Williams's disregard for discipline boundaries seems to offer the possibility of the restoration of a version of the nineteenth-century 'sage' figure, concerned with the whole range of culture and its political implications, and the resurrection of a 'public sphere' reflecting working class rather than middle class cultural values. However, having been rightly critical of the similar attempt to restore a 'public sphere' made by Leavis, he never convincingly demonstrates that such a project is any longer viable.

Mike Hickox

Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, The Ego Ideal: a psychoanalytic essay on the malady of the ideal (translated by Paul Barrows; introduction by Christopher Lasch), London: Free Association Books, 1985, xiv + 271pp, £18.50 hb, £7.50 pb

The ego ideal is not the most stable concept in the Freudian corpus. It first appears in On Narcissism: an introduction)1914), where it is described as a projection of the lost narcissism of early childhood, a period during which the child is in effect its own ideal. It is of major importance in Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (1921) in which Freud analyses group structures in terms of identification with collective ideals and leader figures, but by 1923 it has become synonymous with the superego (The Ego and The Id). Chasseguet-Smirgel chronicles these shifting usages in a detailed appendix. A survey of psychoanalytic literature further demonstrates that, whilst Freud absorbs the ego ideal into the superego, it has never in fact disappeared from the analytic tradition and it has been used in a wide variety of ways by Freud's successors.

The Ego Ideal originated in a paper presented in 1973 and was originally published in French in 1975. In many ways it anticipates the later developments of Creativity and Perversion (London, 1985). The author proposes a distinction between the superego and the ego ideal, seeing the former as the heir to the Oedipus complex and the latter as a substitute for primary narcissism and its image of perfection. The gulf separating the ego from its ideal is then described as generating a nostalgia for a lost utopia, as giving rise to a 'malady of the ideal'. Variants on the way in which the individual seeks to abolish the rift between the lost ideal and the ego are sought in areas as diverse as perversion (idealisation of instincts or an incestuous wish for fusion with the mother), artistic creativity (a desire to recapture a lost unity), religion and the workings of political and social groups.

Despite the author's clinical and theoretical insights, it is in the latter area that her analysis is at its weakest. In a sense, this is simply a reflection of one of the more embarrassing aspects of the psychoanalytic tradition, namely the attempt to find an overlap between individual and social psychic structures without taking into account either politics or economics. Matters are made worse here by the adoption of a positively bizarre concept of ideology as promising a fusion of ego and ego ideal and as being in some way equivalent to perversion. It is surely not enough to move without transition or qualification from clinical remarks about analytic training groups to discussion of 'the sports meetings of young people in totalitarian countries'. References to the way in which homosexuals (sic) organise themselves and claim public approval in order to present their perversion (sic) as an alternative way of life and the caricatural reduction of feminism to the SCUM Manifesto betray an underlying tendency towards a prescriptive notion of developmental normality which does little to further one's confidence in psychoanalysis.

David Macey

Philip Green, Retrieving Democracy. In Search of Civic Equality, London: Methuen, 1985, 278pp, £18 hb

Green has a fairly conventional sense of the inadequacies of 'pseudodemocracy', the combination of liberal capitalist economic management and representative democratic institutions. The conception of social equality for which he argues is, however, purportedly different from previous notions of market socialism, democratic socialism, or economic democracy. This conception is built around three proposals: a 'modal income' for all, or minimum wage increasing with age and 'attuned to a fully-fledged rather than a minimalist notion of human need' (p. 8), a 'democratic division of labour' designed to fulfil human capacities rather than to maximise commodity production, and equal access to the means of production, or the limitation of ownership of productive industry as a means of preventing the concentration of economic power and unequal amounts of political power. Green's central concern here is with the democratisation of the division of labour, and he rightly criticises much previous socialist theory for failing to give this topic sufficient attention. Unequal ownership of wealth is not itself the issue; we are given a 'fair exchange' when we allow an actor or sports star to grow wealthy, but we do not expect them to be able to wield a disproportionate amount of political power.

The function of the division of labour in generating both better human beings and superior citizens is to mix both mental and manual labour in such a way as to prevent a deep cleavage arising between them. This would, for Green, entail a much more balanced mixture of work and education in order to extend the opportunity of alternate employments, as well as more rotation within the workplace, and the division of complex tasks between greater numbers of workers. 'Dirty work' could be fulfilled by a public service for all, as well as given to criminals in place of incarceration. Some kinds of industry might require nationalisation in order to effect public ownership, though Green's general preference is for municipalisation and co-operation in management. Political control would be broadened through an extension of participation and representation to presently 'non-political' spheres, and by rules for rotation and the limitation of tenure in office. Some short-term legislative proposals are included here, but the book is primarily a restatement of the central goals of the socialist tradition in a readable and undogmatic form, from the perspective of the broad American left and

under the particular influence of Paul Goodman.

Gregory Claeys

Ferdinand D. Schoeman (ed.), Philosophical Dimensions of Privacy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, 426pp, £25 hb, £8.50 pb

This anthology comprises seventeen essays by almost entirely American academics, judges, lawyers and university administrators. Some discussion of dimensions of the right to privacy in American law is present (and is not irrelevant to European discussions), but the focus is upon the moral significance of privacy. The editor's introduction offers some definitions of privacy in terms of rights, the degree of control an individual has over themself, and the state or condition of access to an individual. Robert Murphy's 'Social Distance and the Veil' analyses the privacy debate in light of a comparative, anthropological approach to social distance (whereby privacy is also construed as important to traditional, pre-individualist societies). This view is largely supported by Alan Westin's 'The Origin of Modern Claims to Privacy', which also broadly traces two competing tendencies towards greater surveillance and more privacy in the West. This is followed by three detailed analyses of the development and significance of legislation on aspects of privacy, where the relationship between respect for privacy and respect for individual dignity generally is stressed and American debates since the late 19th century traced. Charles Freid's 'Privacy' leads off the more strictly philosophical essays with a discussion of the relationship between the sense of self engendered by privacy and types of values in social relations. Stanley Benn's examination of the components of respect for others succeeds this, while two essays by Robert Gerstein emphasise those contexts where an individual's ability to come to terms with their own conscience is at issue, and discuss the necessary basis of intimacy in privacy. Judith Thompson's 'The Right to Privacy' denies that debates on privacy are reducible to one interest or value. James Rachel further emphasises the importance of privacy to human relationships generally, while Jeffrey Reiman focuses on the need for privacy to provide coherence for the individual self. Richard Wasserstrom treats the problem of refusing to reveal information as a question related to the propriety of deception issue. Richard Posner's 'An Economic Theory of Privacy' examines provocatively the interests covered in 'private interests' as well as the relation of the latter to economic efficiency. A useful summary of the issues by Schoeman closes the volume. This book builds upon the NOMOS collection on privacy, but is more usefully read complementarily with the essays in S. Benn and G. Gaus's recent Public and Private in Social Life, a more thorough, historical and political book which incorporates a wider range of critical perspectives. The present work barely acknowledges many of the socio-economic and political (the public) issues in this debate, such as the whole question of the relationship of citizenship to privacy. But the individual essays are nonetheless of a high quality; particularly stimulating are Westin's comparative analyses (see also his Privacy in Western History, 1967), Benn's insightful introduction to the subject, and Ruth Garison's survey of the legal dimensions.

Gregory Claeys

Radical Science Collective, Issues in Radical Science, Free Association Books, London, 1985, £5.50 pb

A continuing debate in social theory concerns those who perceive capitalism as the 'producer' of the modern world and those who see industrialism as the key factor. This collection of essays purports to provide a fairly thorough treatment of many areas of controversy: the ethical problem of the means-ends connexion for the individual scientist, the role of scientific research in a commodity system, and the ideological reflexion of emergent attitudes towards technology and technique. As an arena for provocative discussion, the collection is encouragingly attractive.

Several articles deal with the complex relationship between scientific inquiry and capitalist initiatives. Edward Yoxen's 'Licensing Reproductive Technologies?' suggests that state licensing of novel reproductive technologies tends to institutionalise the problems that they present. Bruno Vitale focuses on scientists themselves, portraying them as 'hustlers' for military funding who design innovations in response to military problems. On the international level, Vincent Mosco convincingly contends that Reagan's 'Star Wars' policies are less addressed to battles in outer space than about intensifying the requisite surveillance for waging earth wars. With more substantive support for their strictures, all three authors could have strengthened an intriguing critical theme.

L. J. Jordanova's discussion of the German silent film Metropolis, and David Dickson's 'Radical Science and the Modernist Dilemma', both highlight the ambivalence of people toward the power of machines. Linking the debate about the cultural role of modern technology with the broader context of current controversies over 'modernist' movements, it is suggested that a possible practical theme to tease out from these images of modernity is of technology as a 'source of fulfilment', embracing both aesthetic experience and collective social action.

Our understanding of science and technology will be considerably enhanced when we can read more of the codes which convey, in historically specific ways, something of the power and control that knowledge of nature offers. As Jonathan Rée says during his critique of Kolakowski's Main Currents of Marxism, one must be responsive to modernity as a process, rather than as a strange 'house which isn't guaranteed to stay up for ever'. Issues in Radical Science offers a welcome attempt, sometimes erratic but often adventurous, to get to grips with the dialectic of pursuits of knowledge and the practice of power. Here is a rich and rewarding site for future inquiries.

Graham McCann

J. R. Jennings, Georges Sorel: The Character and Development of His Thought, Basingstoke: Macmillan/St Antony's, 1985, 209pp, £25.00 hb

This introductory study is a useful addition to the growing quantity of recent literature on that fascinating figure Georges Sorel. Jennings captures the volatility of this exotic individual's intellectual and political life. Like a person trying on hats in a shop Sorel assesses the suitability of the various 'osophies', 'ologies' and 'isms' on offer at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, momentarily attracted to one well-fitting number only to discard it in favour of some new creation which has caught his eye. He had an omniverous appetite for the theories and movements of his day: sympathising at various times with both Marxism and syndicalism, though associating also with a number of recherché currents on the far right (these latter associations, as Jennings rightly says, have been the subject of much contro-

versy); he dipped freely into such contemporary philosophers of science as Bernard, Reuleaux, Poincaré and Bergson (he had himself a scientific training) and liberally larded his works with the latest developments in the philosophy of religion, economics, sociology, etc., etc. As Jennings points out, some things do stick, the picture is not one of total flux, but one has great sympathy with the remark he quotes of H. R. Kedward: 'Sorel ought to have been condemned to write his own biography: it is too much to ask of anyone else.'

In his explanation of why this should be so Jennings stresses Sorel's highly distinctive methodology which he called diremption. Diremption, according to Jennings, involved 'a process in which the investigator advanced by means of taking a partial, almost arbitrary view of the subject under consideration. One approached it from all sides, inventing mechanisms, ways of perceiving things, that would be able to break the subject-matter into various parts. ... Explanations would overlap, they would at times contradict each other and there would almost necessarily be lacunae.' This ingenious explanation has some merit though one feels that Jennings is giving the old so and so too much of the benefit of the doubt. Much more biographical information than the rather meagre amounts contained in the book would help to give a fuller account of this wayward thinker. Jennings also does not really explore the elements of irrationalism and anti-rationalism in this methodology, elements which might help explain the attraction Sorel held for some fascists.

Jennings does provide a good guide to Sorel's own investigations into those areas of human experience usually neglected and often rejected by the Marxist tradition - myth, utopia and religion. Although writing in the heyday of the Second International, Sorel escaped the crippling hyper 'realism' so characteristic of that period. He is sensitive to the creative and motivational roots of individual and group behaviour and the consequent survival of the miraculous, the magical and the fabulous in this age of 'science'. He is also aware that a political movement avoids these dimensions at its peril. In short - read Jennings but then read Sorel.

Vincent Geoghegan

Richard J. Bernstein (ed.), Habermas and Modernity, Oxford: Polity Press, 1985, 242pp, £19.50 hb, £6.95 pb

As Habermas himself remarks, in the concluding essay 'Questions and Counterquestions', in this book he is not only among his critics but also among friends. The contributors to this volume are distinguished academics, all of whom have contributed to the strong interest in Habermas's work among Anglo-American social theorists. They include Anthony Giddens, Martin Jay, Tom McCarthy, Richard Rorty, Albrecht Wellmer and Joel Whitebrook. All the essays appeared originally in the journal Praxis International and they fully warrant reissue in book form. There are three important contributions from Habermas himself and the critical essays isolate with great precision the vital problem areas within Habermas's encyclopaedic theoretical and research project. After Habermas's own works and McCarthy's authoritative study (also in paperback from Polity), this is the best place to begin an acquaintance with Habermas. Even for those thoroughly familiar with the area this is a useful and challenging collection.

Lloyd Spencer

William Ralph Shroeder, Sartre and his Predecessors: the self and the other, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984, 326p, £23.00 hb

Schroeder here attempts to relate Sartre's theory of interpersonal relations to the three Hs - Husserl, Hegel and Heidegger. Together they constitute the various European alternatives to the 'monadic view of the self' which is said to derive from the basic components of the Cartesian world-view. In this respect Schroeder seems to offer a useful perspective on Sartre; but, regrettably, he fails to situate his discussion within any historical or biographical context. The result is that Sartre's frame of thought is insufficiently explained.

As an example, in Schroeder's account of Hegel there is virtually no mention of the rebirth of Hegelianism in Paris during the '30s and '40s. Consequently, Schroeder's orthodox interpretation of Hegel tends to misfire. To his credit, Schroeder does provide a good critical commentary on Husserl's view of the constitution of Others, although this too suffers because it is not accompanied by an account of the popularity of phenomenology as a philosophical movement. As a critic of Sartre, Schroeder tends to reproduce fairly well-rehearsed arguments, drawn-out in a reduction of Sartre's thought into a series of just ten claims. There is nothing new in the interpretation and the prolonged and laborious discussion, it seems to me, tends to perpetuate the pervasive judgment of Sartre's work as outrageous and facile.

Noel Davison

Martha S. Vogeler, Frederic Harrison: the vocations of a positivist, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984, xviii + 493pp, £27.50 hb

As a young man, Frederic Harrison visited Comte in Paris; thereafter he worked with admirable persistence to keep Comte's calling alive in England and, in his own constantly active life, to represent publicly the rationalist individual. Attracting early attention with a review of the liberal Anglicans' Essays and Reviews (1860), from which he drew out non-Christian logical implications, he continued to prescribe as an independent mind and independent means permitted, into the 1920s, a living 'eminent Victorian' long outside his time. Martha Vogeler's biography is vastly detailed and thorough, exhibiting a gently wry enjoyment of a sensibility that others might find distinctively limited. Positivism, as philosophy, has a very small place in all of this, but this is a rich source for the late nineteenth-century culture of rationalist individualism.

Roger Smith