

# REVIEWS



## RULING PASSION STRONG IN DEATH

Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, London, Faber, 1993. 363pp, £9.99 pb, 0 571 16973 2.

David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, London, Hutchinson, 1993. 583pp, £20 hb, 0 09 175344 9.

James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, London, Harper Collins, 1993. 491pp, £18 hb, 0 00 255267 1.

'Alive,' claims Macey, 'Foucault would have rejected the advances of any biographer; in death he still struggled to escape them.' It is certainly true that Foucault did, on many occasions, profess what might be termed a 'will to anonymity'; and in a less directly autobiographical register, it is this same urge which prompts so much of his argument, or – perhaps more accurately – which figures as its utopian horizon.

Foucault denied the interest of his own life, and was sceptical about the relevance of his personal formation to the understanding of his work. The philosopher, he suggested, is not 'born' but 'exists'. Despite his many interviews, little is disclosed about himself, and even that is frequently masked by an impersonal mode of commentary, as if the experience in question were that of another. Moreover, in his disposition to live his 'many lives' in relative separation from each other, there is evidence that Foucault sought to elude the totalising gaze not only of the biographer, but even of those with whom he was most intimately involved.

In his philosophy, the 'will to anonymity' underlies the project to disperse the dialectic and its philosophical anthropology into the language which 'dispossesses' it. In his literary criticism, it is manifest in his fascination with the voice of all those speaking to, or spoken by, the 'absence of being' and the yearning for the 'dissolution of the ego'. It is an inspiration of his commentary on sexuality, and, it would seem, a compelling dimension of his own *jouissance*: that which is gratified in the utopia of 'bodies and pleasures', and that which finds him speaking of the reversal of the sexual and the individual – of individuals as the mere 'pseudopodic' vehicles of its trans-personal prolongation. It is also, one might add, a thematic of his politics, expressed most controversially, perhaps, in his enthusiasm in 1978 for the anonymity of the collective religious forces of the Islamic cause, and his dismissal of the prospect of a Khomeini regime on the grounds that the Ayatollah was no more than a 'focal point' of this transcendent populism.

So, yes, Macey is right. Foucault did, in both the life and the work, dismiss the relevance of the biographical understanding, and sought to elude its grasp. But as a celebrity who clearly enjoyed his fame, he did so only to encourage a certain scepticism

about his motives; and, it would seem, further to excite the interest in charting the life of one so professedly in quest of self-effacement. For in the short time since his death, he has inspired three biographical studies, the two most recent of which – those of Macey and Miller – are major works of scholarship. To say this is not to dismiss Eribon's pioneering effort. It is a sensitive and, in many ways, revealing portrait, and the most succinct guide of the three. But the works of Macey and Miller are of a different order. Macey's in virtue of the altogether more scholarly and comprehensive account it provides of Foucault's life and work; Miller's in virtue of the way it trespasses beyond all the previous limits of Foucault study.

Both these volumes are the work of authors with a profound empathy for Foucault, and a Foucaultian resistance to the adoption of any moralising stance. Both recognise that if Nietzsche was the major influence, he was certainly not the only one, and that Foucault owes as much to Beckett, Artaud, Bataille, Roussel, Blanchot, Klossowski and de Sade (the last especially, according to Miller) as to any more strictly philosophical writing. And both, through the extensive coverage they give to these lines of influence, aid a keener sense of where Foucault is, and where he is not, so original a thinker. By situating Foucault's work in the context of Surrealism, Modernism and the post-war avant-garde, these biographies provide the materials for a more adequate consideration of its contribution.

Yet their differences of style and approach are very striking, and are, in a summary way, reflected in the respective titles of these volumes: for Macey, Foucault is a man of 'many lives'; for Miller, he is driven by a singular passion with the extinction of life. Macey, we may say, has written in the spirit of Montaigne's advice that 'those who strive to account for a man's deeds are never more bewildered than when they try to knit them into one whole; while Miller has sought to see what discoveries may be yielded by deliberately flouting it. Thus, where Macey tends to emphasise the diversity of Foucault's life, Miller dwells on its unity of purpose; and where Macey invites us to think of Foucault as in some sense securing 'anonymity' through a deliberate compartmentalisation of his multiple roles, Miller interprets the life as a whole in terms of a more literal and openly acknowledging dicing with self-obliteration.

Precisely by virtue of this concern to show us the many facets of Foucault's life activity, Macey offers in some respects the fuller picture. It is more comprehensive in the data it provides about the events and chronology of Foucault's life and a richer source of the kind of anecdotal detail that can sometimes prove so illuminating. (It is here, for example, not in Miller, that we learn

of Foucault's obsession with Rorschach testing, of his misogynist displays, his dislike of sunsets and Simone de Beauvoir, his petulant responses to criticism, and so on.) Macey also traces the course of development of Foucault's academic career more closely, is more informative on his role as a kind of unofficial cultural ambassador, and tells us a great deal more about his political activities and their motivations. Indeed, in his coverage of Foucault's political involvement, Macey produces, almost as a kind of by-product, one of the best accounts in English to date of the events of May '68 and their immediate aftermath.

In Macey, too, there is much illuminating 'archaeology' of the reception of Foucault's writings, and of the differential readings to which they were subject as a result of changing political circumstances. For example, the hostile criticism directed at *Folie et Déraison* by the 'official' psychologists, once the book had become a bible of the 'anti-psychiatry' movement, appears in marked contrast to the reception they accorded it on publication, when it was perceived as a respectable academic treatise. Foucault, for his part, though not averse to this turn of events, had also to recognise the irony of the adoption of his book by a campaign primarily inspired by Sartrean existentialism, and this misconstruction of his purposes may well have helped to concentrate his mind upon the questions of power and repression so central to his later argument. In these and similar discussions, one is given real insight into the complexities of the relations between readership and author, and the role of the former in the development of the latter.

These, then, are some of the ways whereby, through the adoption of a more conventional approach, Macey offers the kind of historical and concrete exposition without the benefit of which one may find it harder to appreciate the force and coherence of Miller's work. Moreover, at a number of points, Macey offers commentary which illuminates the questions that Miller makes central to our understanding of Foucault's project. For example, is Foucault's early work driven by a romantic conception of madness as a Dionysian truth silenced by the discourse of reason? Is he, or is he not, seeking to uncover and free some primitive and fundamental pre-discursive experience in his zeal always to exceed all normatively constituted limits? Miller suggests yes, while recognising that the answer is by no means clear-cut. Macey, in his tracing of the analogies between Foucault's conception of madness as '*absence d'oeuvre*' and the writing of Artaud and Nerval, helps us to see why the answer might have to be no. For, as Foucault himself puts it in his *Naissance de la Clinique*, discovery here 'no longer means finally *reading* an essential coherence beneath a disorder, but pushing a little further the foam-line of language, making it cut into that region of sand that is still open to the clarity of perception, but already no longer open to familiar speech. In introducing language into that penumbra where the gaze has no more words.'

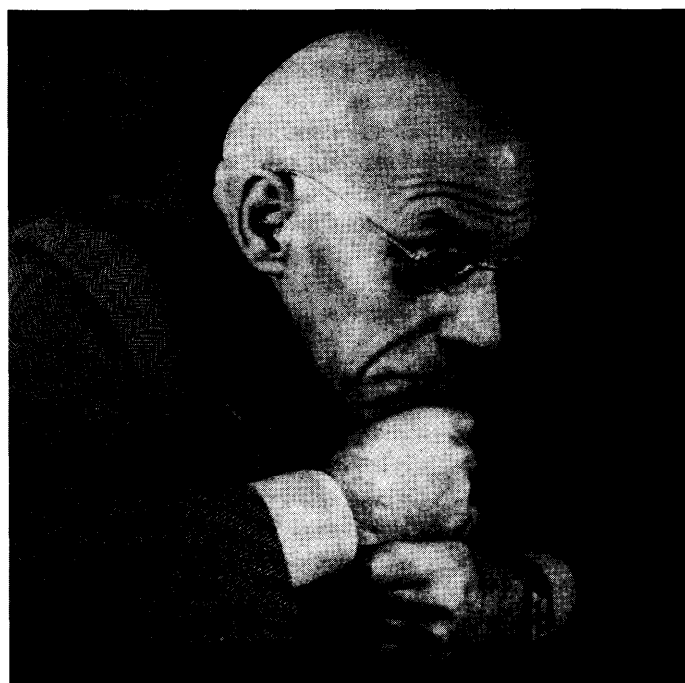
The question, in short, as to whether Foucault's primary concern is with a Dionysian experience, or with the ways in which exclusions from the 'human' community are normatively constituted and continuously revisable, is by no means clear-cut; and Macey and Miller usefully complement each other in allowing us to see how equivocal Foucault can be on the matter.

But Miller is less concerned with the reading to be given specific texts than with revealing where and how they fit into Foucault's Nietzschean quest to realise his own genius and become the 'one that he is'. What matters to Miller is the nature of Foucault's personal odyssey, a voyage of self-discovery which, he insists, can only be understood in terms of Foucault's love affair with death. Miller, indeed, begins with the death as the key

to the meaning of the life, and then traces the route – via suicide bids, the induced self-loss of drug-taking, the mini-deaths of intense pain and anonymous sexual orgy – whereby Foucault comes finally to embrace his death from AIDS as a kind of lyrical apotheosis of all that had gone before. Hence the central role which Miller accords to Foucault's sado-masochistic practices, since it is through these, he claims, that Foucault attained the most ultimate forms of self-obliteration short of death, and on account of these, essentially, that he finally passed beyond the limits of their 'limit experience' itself. Sado-masochism informs the life and work – not in the sense that we can read their ethos and philosophy as the consequence of an original sexual disposition, but insofar as it was always towards this corporeal transgression and experimentation with the self that everything in his thinking was tending.

It is, as Miller himself recognises, contentious whether this pursuit of Foucault's daimon may strictly count as biography, as opposed to an inspired and quasi-fictional post-mortem reconstruction of the life. But there is no doubt that it is Miller rather than Foucault's other biographers who has had the audacity to probe where Foucault himself invited us to probe when he remarked that the writer's 'major work is, in the end, himself', that sexual preference, private life and work are interrelated, and that the 'work includes the whole life as well as the text'. Nor is there any doubt that by venturing where others have feared to tread, Miller opens up new perspectives, not only on Foucault himself, but on the implications of a great deal of current, professedly emancipatory, thinking on the body and sexuality. In this dazzling and disturbing study, Miller has produced what, to my mind, is one of the most important commentaries on the Foucaultian legacy – a book that is deservedly controversial, but which must certainly be read before it is judged.

Part of the power of Miller's work lies in the fact that it is itself a driven book, propelled by a passionate concern to get to the bottom of the rumour that in 1983 Foucault frequented the bathhouses of California with a deliberate view to infecting others with AIDS. Miller's verdict is that he did not do this. What he did do was to engage in a potentially suicidal wager with consenting partners, 'most of them likely to be infected already'. The distinc-



tion is clearly a little too nice for comfort, and it is reflected in many other judicious discriminations which Miller draws, all of them tending in Foucault's favour, but explored with the kind of honesty that allows the reader to pursue their more contrary implications to the limit. No doubt some will react to Miller's empathetic investigation as a romanticisation of all the more morbidly adolescent, phallocratic and irrationalist dimensions of Foucault's project. But to do so would be to miss the dialectical character of Miller's study, and to abstract from one of its important, if not entirely intentional, effects – namely, that it brings so clearly into view the sinister side of the Foucaultian engagement with the 'limit experience': its potential to flip over into legitimisation of everything which Foucault himself professed to deplore.

Other commentators have noted the licence which Foucault's relentless assault upon the barriers imposed by conventional ethical thinking may give to fascism, torture and totalitarianism at the political level, or to solipsism or narcissism at the more personal. But they have generally done so as part of an academic engagement with the inconsistencies of the professor. What Miller does is rather different: he shows us a Foucault bent on exposing the equivocal nature of the very distinctions which are fundamental to the possibility of ethical judgement, a Foucault who would question any clear-cut discrimination between pleasure and pain, torment and bliss, life and death; and who, in a sense, advised, and revelled in, cruelty as a liberation from the governance of the humanistic obsession with happiness. Miller's preparedness to penetrate to the wilder reaches of Foucault's originality highlights the seriousness with which we ought to think about the acclaim he has received in our culture as an emancipatory thinker, about the nature and extent of his influence in the academy, and the reasons for it. Miller quotes Edmund White's remark on Foucault – that he was 'a man deeply attracted to power in its most totalitarian forms, politically and sexually. Throughout his life, he struggled against this attraction. That is what I most admired about him.' In his sympathetic investigation of the struggle, Miller's study may go to the heart of Foucault's particular genius, but only to leave us thinking more deeply about the admiring attention that has been paid to one so compelled by *that* attraction in the first place.

It also leaves us with a number of more specific questions about the coherence of the struggle. If sado-masochism is recommended as a creative exercise which releases us from the constraints of the sexualised body, why are all its techniques so focussed on the genitalia and 'standard' erotic zones? Is the importance attached to the self-loss experienced in pain finally consistent with the importance which must also be attached to individual consent to its infliction, if we are clearly to discrimination between S/M and torture? What exactly is so constraining and regressive about the sexual body, and a more individualised mode of pleasure? Why should we not regard the sutured 'masochist' body without organs and orifices as a product of Catholic puritanism rather than a release from its repressions? And finally, if what is at issue is the struggle against sexual power, what justifies the presentation of *any* set of sexual preferences as collectively preferable?

The questions raised by Foucault's struggle against political power are of a somewhat different order, since the accounts of both Macey and Miller make it clear that he was continuously revising his thinking on this in the course of his career – and had come, by the end of it, to embrace much of the liberal discourse and argument that his earlier *gauchisme* had found repelling (at least rhetorically: Foucault, it seems, was always less bravado in

deed than word). In his political struggles, then, he emerges as more cautious about going to extremes than in his sexual engagements, even if he appears more volatile in consequence. Macey and Miller together amply fill out the picture of the shifts and turns here, and note a number of naivities. But I missed any sustained discussion in either of Foucault's positions on the Cold War, his failure to perceive the ways in which the 'new philosophy' analysis might play into the hands of reactionaries on both sides of the Iron Curtain, his abstraction from military dimensions (a chauvinist disdain for the European peace movement admittedly shared by most of his left-wing compatriots at the time). Macey does not fall into Miller's error of presenting Foucault as if he were an uncomplicated ally of feminism, but there is little attempt by either study to engage with Foucault's androcentrism or to consider the nature of his contribution in the light of feminist critique. There is also, it seems to me, insufficient consideration of the more thoughtless aspects of his ultra-leftism in the light of the reputation he has acquired as a sophisticated political analyst of our times. In fact, one has to say that, loud as he may have been in his denunciations of totalitarianism in Eastern Europe, Foucault's activism reveals him as a little too quick with the complexities of democracy in the West.

Nor, more generally, do any of these biographies sufficiently discuss the central tensions of Foucault's arguments on power. If, as Habermas has suggested, Foucault's influence on the *Zeitgeist* has to do with the 'productive contradictions' of his thought, it is the productive rather than contradictory dimensions which receive the most attention here. Others have, of course, submitted Foucault's political argument to intensive critical scrutiny but, given the extent to which Foucault has been taken up on the left as the alternative guru to Marx, one could have wished for more recognition of the controversies he has generated, and more engagement with key criticisms (those of Habermas included).

But if the biographies are less exacting in these respects than one might have hoped, what they do offer is powerful documentation of the extent to which Foucault lived, if not exactly in contradiction with his theory, then in a rather disarming disregard for some of its solemnities. The same Foucault who would have us appreciate the manipulative application of the doctrine of human rights was a fairly energetic campaigner on their behalf, especially in his later years, and explicitly contests oppression in their name on several occasions. The same Foucault who invites us to question the truth of lived experience and the autonomy of the subject is also a Foucault who, according to Miller, cannot be understood except in terms of this experience, and certainly a man whose highly spontaneist political activity scarcely testifies to doubts about the authority of moral feeling or the efficacy of individual initiative. The same Foucault who is taught in the classroom as an anti-Enlightenment sceptic and theorist of the investment of the subject by power, is a Foucault who is everywhere in pursuit of progress and clearly trusts to the authenticity of his most immediate passions and erotic promptings. For someone, in fact, who is so reluctant to allow any humanist register in his writings, Foucault appears surprisingly impulsive in his personal and political responses; and, while he may have persuaded many a reader to re-think their identity and patterns of behaviour in the light of the power-knowledge nexus, there is little in these biographies to suggest that Foucault turned the same reflexive gaze upon Foucault, or not very systematically, at any rate. On the other hand, one could no doubt argue that it was only consistent of him to have lived his life in a certain resistance to the disciplinary codes of his own thinking.

Kate Soper

# FAIR ENOUGH?

John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993. 416pp, £19.95 hb, 0 231 05284 0.

As is now all too well known, the publication in 1971 of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* inaugurated a renaissance of normative political philosophy in Britain and America. It was also in itself a classic work which did much to establish the hegemony of liberal ideals and presumptions in Anglophone political theory. We inhabit a post-Rawlsian world and to that extent we are all now liberals of various shades and hues.

Since publication Rawls himself has not been silent. In various places he has defended, developed and modulated the claims of *A Theory*. *Political Liberalism* brings together the most important arguments of these pieces. It would be harsh to accuse Rawls of simply offering a rehash. The original articles have been considerably modified, and there is more than enough evidence of an underlying argument to warrant the publication of a single text. Nevertheless, *Political Liberalism* does show the signs of its origins and it is not always attractive. There is repetition. The list of primary goods, for instance, is defended in two separate places without apparent cross-referencing. Rawls says that his concern in *Political Liberalism* is not to clarify the meaning and application of the two principles of justice defended in *A Theory*. Yet in the last chapter of *Political Liberalism* he does just that by explicating the content and priority of the first principle which is concerned with the basic liberties.

The format of *Political Liberalism* does have one appealing feature. Rawls acknowledges its source in lectures, and this is the title he gives the various chapters. It is also their form and as a result we can recognise the eloquent, elegant voice of their author. *A Theory*, by contrast, had a somewhat disembodied quality. In *Political Liberalism* John Rawls speaks directly to his audience with a passionate concern to make his ideas perspicuous, to fill in gaps and clear up misunderstandings.

So what has Rawls been doing since 1971? Some critics take him to have been backtracking in an alarming manner. In his *Guardian* review of *Political Liberalism* Brian Barry accused Rawls of abandoning the defence of liberal principles. Other critics see him as rebuilding his theory by offering an entirely new account of his own fundamental ideas. Others, yet again, see Rawls as concerned with the *politics* of his political philosophy – either construed pejoratively as pragmatic compromise or, more ideally, seen as the public forms of democratic and fair-minded social co-operation. Rawls himself is explicit as to what he is doing in *Political Liberalism*. He is correcting a serious failing of *A Theory* and attempting to solve a problem which that work did not adequately recognise.

We need then to be clear what *A Theory* tried to do. It defended a recognisably liberal conception of 'justice as fairness'. This consisted of two principles guaranteeing equal liberty, but permitting socio-economic inequality so long as there was equality of opportunity and the position of the worst-off could not be bettered (the so-called 'difference principle'). To simplify greatly, Rawls offered three defences of this conception of justice. The most celebrated was the contractarian. The two principles would be chosen by us even if we were intent on pursuing our own advantage so long as we were constrained by an ignorance of where our advantage lay. Without being fair-minded we could, under the right conditions, be minded to choose fair terms of

social co-operation.

The second defence rested on foundational notions of the person, principally a Kantian one of the individual as autonomous. The third defence which appeared in Part III of *A Theory* appealed to the ideal of a 'well-ordered society'. This was a society whose members could live with and by the principles of justice regulating its basic structure. That is to say, each citizen of such a society could publicly acknowledge and accept these principles in the mutual assurance that others would do so also. Other principles – a utilitarian one of maximising average utility, say – would not do the job and could not conduce to good social order in this sense.

None of this now passes muster as far as Rawls is concerned. The elements of the contractarian argument – the Original Position, veil of ignorance and contracting parties – were, he says, no more than 'devices of representation'. They modelled considerations whose justification lay elsewhere. Just as well, in view of the standard criticisms of the argument. These were that the description of the contract was packed to show just what Rawls wanted it to show. Under another description it would signally fail to do this. And, anyway, a hypothetical contract has no force and certainly does not bind those who live outside its peculiar, artificial constraints. As for the second defence, Rawls denies that his theory of justice presupposes any metaphysical understanding of the self. There is, and only needs to be, a *political* conception of the individual.

However, it is the idea of a 'well-ordered society' which Rawls is most concerned to refashion. The citizens of the 'well-ordered society', as *A Theory* understood things, accepted the principles of justice only because they subscribed to a broader moral or philosophical doctrine, that which Rawls himself took to underpin 'justice as fairness'. But Rawls now thinks this is unsatisfactory. Why? Because – and political liberalism posts this as its starting-point – a modern democratic society is characterised by a pluralism of comprehensive doctrines which are all entertained for good reasons, but which need not be compatible with one another. A 'well-ordered society' cannot rest on an agreement which, as it were, goes all the way down; or even at least as far down as its citizens' basic moral and philosophical commitments.

All is not lost, however. Rawls thinks that an 'overlapping consensus' is possible. This, he is careful to elaborate, is not a compromise or *modus vivendi*. It is a *political* agreement to live by a set of principles even though all the parties to this agreement hold to these principles for different reasons, rooted in their various comprehensive doctrines. The problem of *A Theory* was to understand and explicate the character of the good – that is, just – society. For Rawls this is the fair society governed by his two principles. The problem of political liberalism is: 'How is it possible that there may exist over time a stable and just society of free and equal citizens profoundly divided by reasonable though incompatible religious, philosophical and moral doctrines?'

Rawls's answer is, in so far as a 'freestanding' conception of justice (that is, one which stands free of any doctrine beyond its own political terms) has the support of an overlapping consensus of various comprehensive doctrines in the society whose basic structure it regulates. Rawls still thinks that his principles best define the terms of fair co-operation. He now seeks to show that these terms would be acceptable to, and politically unite, a society

divided by its citizens' views on life as a whole. Put simply, *A Theory* argued that fair's fair; *Political Liberalism* argues that fair is fair enough.

Is it enough? A lot turns on how we are to understand 'reasonableness'. This has application in two areas. Rawls insists that political liberalism starts from the existence within any democratic society not just of any old plurality of world views, but a reasonable pluralism. The diversity of doctrines is not due to 'brute forces of the world but to the inevitable outcome of free human reason'. Rawls does not deny that there are unreasonable comprehensive doctrines. He does not so much discount their existence as imply that, were they to gain widespread currency, democratic society could be neither stable nor fair. A secure and just regime requires the support of a 'substantial majority of its politically active citizens'. We need not all be reasonable, but enough of us must be.

Reason is exercised, second, in the public conduct of society's political business. The one wholly original chapter of *Political Liberalism* is devoted to 'The Idea of Public Reason', the proper terms under which citizens make their political claims, politicians defend their principles, and, above all, a Supreme Court reviews policy. Public reason is rational inasmuch as it conforms to standard forms of reasoning and presumes uncontroversial, commonly accepted beliefs. It is public in so far as its content is limited by the agreed terms of the political conception of justice. In sum a society is well ordered when a majority of citizens affirm different views of life with good reason, yet also discourse politically with a shared reason.

There are two worries about all of this. The first is that it reveals a misplaced naivety. It is surely more plausible to see unreasonable doctrines and their conflict as presenting the problem for contemporary political philosophy. We need to know both why people subscribe to such doctrines and how a good society can be sustained in the face of such beliefs. Incidentally, the frequency with which it is referred to in reviews of *Political Liberalism* suggests that Islam has definitively supplanted totalitarian communism as the illiberal bogey for our times.

The second worry is that Rawls makes it too easy for himself. When he does give a model case of an overlapping consensus the liberal political conception is supported by a Lockean religious view, the moral liberalism of Mill or Kant, and a tolerant pluralism. With enemies like that who needs friends? The goal of a well-ordered society is easily reached when its disagreements are confined within a family of reasonable liberalisms. As unreasonable doctrines should trouble liberalism, so too should a reasonable non-liberal (not necessarily illiberal) politics. This worry is compounded by the fact that, as Jeremy Waldron has noted, Rawls uses the term 'reasonable', by contrast with rational, to characterise that disposition of individuals to maintain fair terms of social co-operation. It should be evident that it is all too simple for fair-minded people to play fair with others of a similarly fair mind. But not all 'reasonable' disagreement will be moderated in this automatic fashion. The general point is that a well-ordered society is unlikely on Rawls's own terms, but only theoretically plausible because it is constructed on his terms.

The disjunction between 'brute forces' and an exercise of 'free reason' offered by Rawls in explanation of ideological difference is itself rather brutish. It exposes a general difficulty with his approach right from *A Theory*. He seeks theoretical foundations free from the contingencies of any particular society and time, and yet also wishes to articulate the underlying ideals of modern Western liberal democracies. For this last phrase we can now read 'American constitutionalism', and this makes the witty definition

of Rawls's philosophy, coined before *Political Liberalism*, as 'Kantianism in one country' even more apposite. Rawls acknowledges that his own conception of justice 'starts from within a certain political tradition', and that the content of any political conception is expressed in terms of ideas 'implicit in the public culture of a democratic society'. Yet it can seem as if these conceptions spring new-born from the head of free reason.

He now stresses that his principles apply to 'closed societies'. This means that they are to be seen as self-contained and having no relations with other societies. More pertinently, we enter our societies at birth and leave them only by death. But the closer this abstraction comes to the real world, the more troubling the admission is. Why are there particular societies bounded in time and space? And why is it that each society has its own 'culture' and 'tradition'? We are born not only into our society but its cultural traditions. These, and our allegiance to them, are neither the product of brute forces nor the exercise of free reason. Yet it is surely from an understanding of these facts that a plausible political liberalism must start.

John Locke suggested in his *Second Treatise of Government* that America supplied a good example of what the state of nature looks like. It is tempting to think Rawls might suggest that, if you want to know what a free exercise of political reason is like, you should also look to America. Yet it is clear, as Bernard Williams has commented, that Rawls's deep commitment to the virtues of American constitutionalism betrays a lack of 'sociological imagination', an awareness of the peculiarities of its history, and the habits of its citizenry's heart. Rawls is troubled by the claim, most centrally defended by Michael Walzer, that political philosophy is the articulation of a society's shared understandings. Yet his response to this view in a tantalisingly brief few pages is unhelpful. Political philosophy, we are told, is turned to when our shared understandings break down and come into conflict. It does not withdraw from society and expound its own *a priori* truths. Yet the abstractions to which we as philosophers ascend in order to resolve these conflicts are somehow uncovered through fundamental ideas which are deep, but implicit, within our society's culture. If ever Rawls needed to be clear and fill in the gaps, it is here.

There is a related point. Rawls insists that his political philosophy of a well-ordered society does not presume a view of human nature and does not need to be analysed in terms of any non-normative theory of human beings. 'We strive for the best we can attain within the scope the world allows.' But political philosophy is not autonomous of brute facts, for 'we' and 'the world' are not independent of the way our society is structured and its history has been conducted. In Part III of *A Theory*, which Rawls now repudiates, there is a sketched account of moral education and the maintenance of a public culture to show how these may conduce to the good order of a fair society. It sought to indicate how we may become and remain the kind of citizens who acknowledge and accept the terms of our social co-operation as just. Rawls now has little to say about education, save that its function and content should be constrained by the agreed terms of the political conception. Nothing more comprehensive is warranted. But how and where are the diverse comprehensive doctrines acquired? How is a freestanding conception of justice to be taught when it is set apart from any broader philosophical views? How do we become the citizens of the well-ordered society?

Part of the problem is that, once again, a crucial disjunction is too crude. For Rawls the choice is between the facts of reasonable pluralism and the 'fact of oppression' – namely, that 'one comprehensive doctrine can be maintained only by the oppressive use of

state power'. In this he too literally sees political liberalism as the secular inheritor of post-Reformation tolerance of religious difference. His model is the Inquisition and the suppression of heresy in the name of the one true faith, or toleration. But a liberal like Raz has convincingly argued that there are non-coercive means of sustaining those values a society holds central. And these values may be sustained by less than a plurality of doctrines but more than a single one.

In *Political Liberalism* Rawls remains silent on certain matters and has little to say about others. Throughout he presupposes the conception of justice defended in *A Theory* and, on a number of occasions, repeats that he sees no reason to relinquish that works' understanding of fairness. It might seem as if his remarks in *Political Liberalism* are addressed not to critics of liberalism, but to other liberals, such as Dworkin and Raz, whom he calls 'moral liberals'. There is thus an unfortunate feeling of blithe disregard for the radical opponents of Rawlsianism. He deftly summarises Nozick's libertarianism (is it accidental that Nozick does not appear in the index?), but only to illustrate its failure to accord a central role to the basic structure. The more fundamental strictures of Nozick's case are simply not met. Rawls is obviously bemused by the communitarian challenge, and seems to believe that Sandel's critique simply, and badly, misses the point. He strives to make clear that a well-ordered society cannot – save by the coercive imposition of a single doctrine – be a community in the substantive manner communitarians demand. But, as I have suggested, he does not adequately deal with that strand of communitarian writing which emphasises the contingent particularities of our social and historical situation.

He does not answer Susan Moller Okin's sustained critique of *A Theory* for its failure to show how a just society can rest on unjust foundations – namely, a blindness to gender inequality and the oppression of women within the 'private' family. Indeed, his response is all too dismissive and brief. The family 'in some form' can be assumed to be just, and, though he cannot spell it out, problems of gender inequality can be overcome. This attitude is unfortunate.

Rawls shows an awareness of other 'traditions' of political philosophy. He shares with Oakeshott a view of democratic society as not being a purposive association, and alludes to Habermas's work on the notion of free rational agreement between reasonable persons. But in neither case is the import of these comparisons spelt out.

Finally, and most regrettably, Rawls does not meet the challenge of socialists and radical egalitarians. He does not appear to see any reason to examine afresh questions of social and economic justice. The difference principle is simply reaffirmed, as is Rawls's belief that social and economic inequality need not undermine an equality of basic liberties. Once again he insists that questions of whether there should be private property or social ownership of the means of production are subsidiary to, and independent of, more fundamental constitutional matters.

All of this is unfortunate not simply because it neglects the work done by socialists in the wake of Rawls's original *Theory*, but because in that text Rawls himself offered compelling, if deeply contested, arguments for redistributing the benefits accruing to persons from natural and social advantages. *A Theory* was a theory of *distributive* justice, and it is easy now to forget how radical some of its proposals and reasoning are.

Of course the title of that original work employed the indefinite article. It defended a conception of the good polity and Rawls has now complemented that defence with a theory of political good order. *Political Liberalism* thus allows us to see more clearly and afresh the powerful vision of a great liberal thinker. We can more easily separate the comprehensive doctrine of Rawls from the overlapping consensus in political philosophy which he has helped to create. *Political Liberalism* is not quite a retreat from original principle, but neither does it fully or satisfactorily explore the domain of the political. There are gaps which Rawlsianism cannot fill, and challenges which it has yet adequately to meet. Much needs to be done to convince us that a liberal-democratic society in Rawls's image solves the fundamental political problems of our time. Political liberalism may be fair enough. Whether it goes far enough is doubtful.

David Archard

## THE REMAINS OF DECONSTRUCTION

Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, edited by Derek Attridge, London and New York, Routledge, 1992. 456pp, £40 hb, £12.99 pb, 0 415 90056 5 hb, 0 415 90057 3 pb.

Jacques Derrida, *Cinders*, edited, translated and introduced by Ned Lukacher, Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press, 1992. 80pp, £18.95 hb, 0 8032 1689 0.

Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas, introduction by Michael B. Naas, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1992. 129pp, £13.50 hb, 0 253 31693 6.

There has long been a split between those who regard the work of Jacques Derrida as exclusively philosophical, and those who see his texts as narrowly literary. This is arguably a false opposition, which ignores the fact that deconstruction, as an approach to texts, has profound implications for all intellectual disciplines, and is of particular relevance to both philosophy and literature precisely because they are fields of inquiry that have always been broadly concerned with ways of reading, writing, and representing. Those

who see Derrida as having nothing to offer either philosophy or literature are perhaps assuming a more independent and clearly defined terrain for each sphere of study than the history of either subject would comfortably allow.

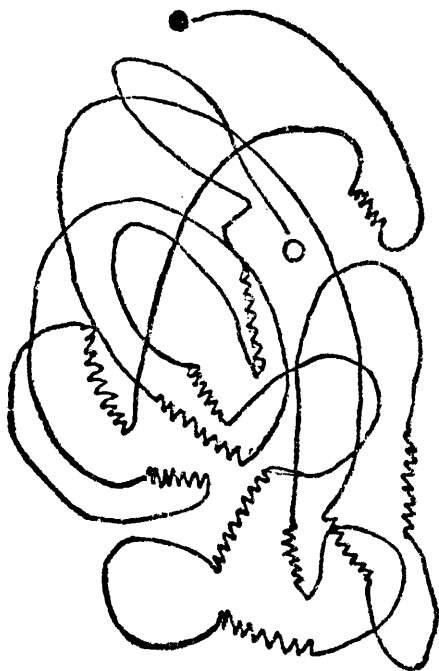
It could be argued that literature and philosophy are *interdisciplines*, which overlap each other and other disciplines. The interface between them certainly draws a more complex figure than is suggested by any simple juxtaposition or forced assimilation. It is perhaps the *interdisciplinarity* of deconstruction, its refusal to respect jealously guarded divisions of knowledge, which critics eager to mark out the boundaries of their own particular field find most disturbing. Derrida has often insisted that it is deconstruction's inclination to tamper with language, reason, genres and disciplines that renders it more radical, less easily assimilated, than, for example, Marxism.

Philosophical deconstructionists like Rodolphe Gasché have accused literary deconstructionists of simplifying Derrida's thought, and of overemphasising the notion of 'freeplay'. For Gasché and others deconstruction is an electrifyingly radical philosophy that is earthed immediately it passes into the all-too-



fertile soil of literary studies. For English Marxist literary critics, the attachment to 'freeplay', with its concomitant suppression of history and politics, and its tendency towards extreme conservatism, if not nihilism, is what characterises deconstruction American-style.

Predictably, it is within the relatively modern, highly resilient, and incorrigibly imperialistic academic discipline of English that deconstruction has encountered its most amenable host, as well as its greatest site of resistance. *Acts of Literature*, a collection of Derrida's writings on literary texts and themes, opens with an interview between Derrida and the volume's editor, Derek Attridge, in which Derrida lays out in remarkable detail his attitude to what he refers to as 'that strange institution called literature'. Derrida's earliest interest was in literature, or rather in 'a certain promise of "being able to say everything"', which he decided could be best explored institutionally from the standpoint of philosophy. Indeed, Derrida now claims that philosophy presented itself to him at the outset of his career as 'more political' than literature, and thus 'more capable of posing politically the question of literature with the political seriousness and consequentiality it requires'.



Critics of Derrida, those who see deconstruction as a subversive movement that would wish to abolish literature, melting it down in the crucible of philosophy, and dispensing with the canon, tradition, and the sanctity of literary criticism in the process, will be surprised to find its chief proponent saying: 'I would very much like to read and write in the space and heritage of Shakespeare, in relation to whom I have infinite admiration and gratitude; I would like to become (alas, it's pretty late) a "Shakespeare expert"; I know that everything is in Shakespeare: everything and the rest, so everything or nearly.' Followers of Derrida might be reassured by his subsequent qualification: 'But after all, everything is also in Celan, and in the same way, although differently, and in Plato or in Joyce, in the Bible, in Vico or in Kafka, not to mention those still living, everywhere, well almost everywhere...' Derrida proceeds to offer an authoritative and insightful reading of *Romeo and Juliet* which eschews historical context, showing why the drama remains relevant rather than placing the play in its period.

Derrida perceives 'that strange institution called literature', where there is 'in principle the power to say everything', as one based upon texts that are deemed to be 'literary' which offers a

way of interpreting those texts. It is doubtless both the philosophical grounds of literary criticism, and the origins of literature in diverse ways of writing, which make literary studies susceptible to deconstruction. Of course, none of this should surprise anyone who has read Derrida. After all, it was he who declared, back in 1979, that he would like to live for two hundred years so that he could read the Romantics. To say that Derrida is a lover of literature is nothing new. It is an old flame of his. Derrida's approach to the literary text corresponds to Attridge's own theory of literature as 'peculiar language'. Both are determined to retain an idea of literature as something that remains once all of the things that have attached themselves to it, of which it is composed, and which make it literary, have been removed. Neither argues for an 'essence of literature'. Rather, each maintains that recognising the composite nature of literature is not the same as saying that it does not exist. Literature is greater than the sum of its parts.

The relationship between philosophy and literature has always been central to deconstruction. Surrealism and existentialism had an impact on the early formation of Derrida's thought. He was deeply impressed from the very beginning by philosophers who wrote in a 'literary' style – Nietzsche, Sartre, Camus – and whose writings could not easily be classified or compartmentalised. Since embarking on a doctorate entitled 'The Ideality of the Literary Object', Derrida has written in the margins of philosophy, where the notion of a language peculiar to either discipline is most difficult to sustain.

One approach to contemporary literary theory would say that it was both a return to language and a return to history which exposed the common roots of literature and philosophy. The 'rise of English' theory would maintain that literature as a discipline grew directly out of philosophy, and literature as a category is only sustained by the existence of literary criticism, itself a kind of philosophy. As Terry Eagleton puts it, literature is what gets taught. The net result of this account of literary history is that the distinction between creative and critical writing, between fiction and non-fiction, between the literary and the literal, has been steadily eroded. In some ways this version of events squares with Derrida's idea of literature. Derrida is less interested in the philosophical pursuit of defining and fixing 'the literary' than he is in asking who decides what is and is not literature. But this is not to suggest that for Derrida literature is merely a privileged discourse that depends for its survival solely upon the university and its related critical apparatuses – publishers, journals, reviewers, and so on. There is a point at which Derrida's view of literature departs from the apocalyptic tone characteristic of much recent debate on the nature of literature and the place of literary studies. The 'end of English' is not something with which deconstruction is overly concerned. For Derrida, the difficulty in defining literature is part of its uniqueness, as is its ability to absorb a whole matrix of discourses and make them its own. Something survives in literature. Indeed, it exists according to this principle of survival. The graphic mode of literature, its physicality as material remains, its archival status, is, for Derrida, that which marks it out as 'the most interesting thing in the world, maybe more interesting than the world'.

One can readily see the temptation to project the theory which says that 'a text is a text is a text' onto deconstruction. After all, it was Derrida who recast the concept of text and produced a generalised theory of writing. It was Derrida who claimed that, although genres were 'not to be mixed', they invariably defied that injunction. It was Derrida who traced the deployment of metaphor in philosophical texts. And it was Derrida who, trained as a philosopher, adopted a philosophical approach to the ques-

tion: 'What is Literature?' Indeed, for Derrida, this can only ever be a philosophical question. It is tempting to conclude that Derrida is concerned with the deconstruction of the opposition between philosophy and literature. Tempting, but erroneous. For Derrida, this impulse to dissolve literature into philosophy, or vice versa, is both premature and naive.

For Derrida, saying that literature and philosophy share some of the same formal rhetorical features is not the same as collapsing them together. According to Attridge, Derrida's argument in 'White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy' is 'that metaphor is a thoroughly (if not simply) philosophical figure' and rhetoric belongs by and large 'within the domain of philosophy'. Derrida, Attridge claims, sees metaphor as a purely philosophical feature – the classic philosopheme, in fact – rather than something which denotes literariness. This is a reading of Derrida that complicates the notion of metaphor and rhetoric as 'literary' features of language which literature and philosophy hold in common. The fact that genres are always mixed problematises the concept of a literary text which can be comfortably designated a novel or short story, but it is precisely this mixing of genres which constitutes the literariness of texts, and indeed challenges the idea that literary and philosophical discourses constitute mutually exclusive genres. They are not homogeneous, but nor do they map directly onto one another. They can be radically interactive as well as conservatively incorporative entities.

*Cinders*, one of Derrida's most poetic texts – and again it is the literary pyrotechnics of Derrida's own language which has lent weight to the claim that deconstruction dissolves the distinction between philosophy and literature – is a moving disquisition on what endures in a culture beyond human life, its residue, its ashes. Sounding at times like a funeral oration, this brief work, written in 1982, and published in book-form like so many of his essays and lectures, traces Derrida's central thematic concerns over the preceding fifteen years.

*The Other Heading* is arguably the most 'political' of Derrida's works to date. It confronts questions of racism, imperialism, Eurocentrism, journalism, and public opinion in a direct and forceful manner. But, even as he is at his most engaged and committed, Derrida relentlessly problematises the politics of commitment and engagement, with its glib responses to complex issues.

If those opponents of deconstruction who have announced its downfall, in the wake of the furore surrounding the Paul De Man affair, were to arrive at these three new publications expecting to sift through the dying embers of a burnt-out intellectual process, then they might find that they are playing with fire. There is more than a spark of life left in the remains of deconstruction. At his peak, Derrida is still active.

Willy Maley

## FLUX AND SUPERFLUX

Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, Polity, 1992. 129pp, £29.50 hb, £9.95 pb, 0 7456 1047 1.

Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*, Cambridge, Polity, 1992. xx + 241pp, £35 hb, 0 7456 0734 9.

In social theory and philosophy, most conversations these days are about dissolution: the end of history, of modernity, the demise of metaphysics, the death of the subject, the disappearance of art and community. An inevitable depression in the face of the diffusion of knowledge, or an indication of social transformations affecting the world at large?

Much has recently been said about the modern and the postmodern. Today, at the turn of the twenty-first century, we are, many would argue, witnessing new and profound institutional transformations. Globalization, new communication and information technologies, the industrialization of war, universal consumerism: these are the core dimensions of modern institutions and affairs. Yet what are the connections between changes at the level of social institutions and those happening in everyday communication, the domains of cultural and aesthetic reflection? How do contemporary social processes affect political existence and the possibilities for democratic communication?

It is to Gianni Vattimo's credit that he focuses his attention upon the ontological consequences of contemporary global transformations. Drawing on the work of Heidegger and Nietzsche, Vattimo has for some time been examining the nature of rationality in a world in which there are no global, privileged points of interpretation. *The Transparent Society* joins *The End of Modernity* (1988) as a work of hermeneutic philosophy aimed at rejecting the quest for totality, and instead embracing the postmodern world of ambiguity and flux.

What exactly is the philosophical and cultural relevance of postmodernism? According to Vattimo, the birth of postmodern society – which he links to the diffusion of systems of communication – means a general explosion and proliferation of world views. The end of modernity, says Vattimo, means the end of unilinear history. In postmodernism, by contrast, history is decentred; there are only images of the past framed from different points of view. The multidimensional, chaotic world of the postmodern ushers in a plurality of local rationalities – ethnic, religious, sexual, cultural and aesthetic. For Vattimo, the distinguishing feature of this giddy proliferation of discourses is that it opens individuals and collectivities to 'Other' possibilities of existence. 'To live in this pluralistic world,' writes Vattimo, 'means to experience freedom as a continual oscillation between belonging and disorientation.' In short, the erosion of the 'reality principle' opens the way for a liberation of differences.

The emancipatory potential of the proliferation of local rationalities, however, is not for generalisable knowledge – such a position is simply too metaphysical for the likes of Vattimo. Rather, the emancipatory significance of the liberation of repressed differences and dialects lies in the general disorientation, contingency and ambivalence of world and community itself. Autonomy, here, consists in ambiguity and flux. Significantly, Vattimo identifies the experience of oscillation in the postmodern world as of capital importance for rethinking the nature of emancipation, though his remark that freedom as continual oscillation is 'problematic' is surely a masterpiece of intellectual understatement.

From this theoretical backdrop, Vattimo argues strongly for utopian social thinking, albeit in substantially revised form. The transformation from modernity to postmodernity, he says, has involved a recasting of aesthetic utopia as *heterotopia*, an expe-



rience of the beautiful in worlds and communities which explicitly constitute themselves as plural. Within this multiplicity of cultural forms we find an aesthetic process of referrals to other possible life-worlds; worlds that displace and dismantle the technological and scientific rationalization set by modernity. Echoing Herbert Marcuse, Vattimo argues that the world of the technical, with the development from mechanical technology to information technology, may herald a new realm of aesthetic and cultural experience. The multiplication of perspectives generated through the diffusion of systems of communication opens the experience of Being, and of belonging, to socio-political ambiguity and flux. Above all, this involves a pluralization of the ethics of communication itself; the age in which we live, says Vattimo, suggests possibilities for a 'democratic heterotopia'. For Vattimo, the postmodern condition presents itself as an overcoming of modernity's 'forgetfulness of being'. In this connection, we learn that, as political subjects, we are increasingly capable of ethical choice, that is, of morality.

*The Transparent Society* manages to combine all sorts of theoretical interests (ethical, political, aesthetic); and, from this angle, it is enjoyable to read and deeply provocative. From the tradition of hermeneutics, Vattimo reminds us that the postmodern world is a world of symbolic creation and constitution; a world forged by individuals whose experience is rooted in belonging. However, my main problem with Vattimo's argument is that, like many authors working within the hermeneutic tradition, he displaces attention from the destructive and pathological effects of the social-historical world as a realm of power and force. He seems to find it difficult to see that symbolic articulations and interpretations are often masks which function to sustain relations of oppression. Similarly, Vattimo shows little interest in the psychical or internal dimensions of subjectivity, and thus leaves unexamined how subjects might be able to move beyond the colonizing pressures of technological and scientific rationalization. This may seem an unfair criticism to make of a book which is, after all, only a short and quite speculative study. Yet, when reading it, it is difficult not to feel that the author cannot really think outside of a very specialized intellectual matrix.

The same cannot be said of Jürgen Habermas's recent collection of essays, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*. Developing arguments outlined in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Habermas continues his preoccupation with tracing the conditions of rational decision-making in the life-world and of specifying the intersubjective dimensions of subjectivity, meaning and truth. The essays demonstrate an attempt to come to grips with an extraordinary variety of standpoints and theorists, ranging from Kant, Humboldt and Kierkegaard to Rorty, Derrida and Beck. Throughout Habermas is concerned to appraise social analysis in the light of our inherited conceptions of reason and the rational subject.

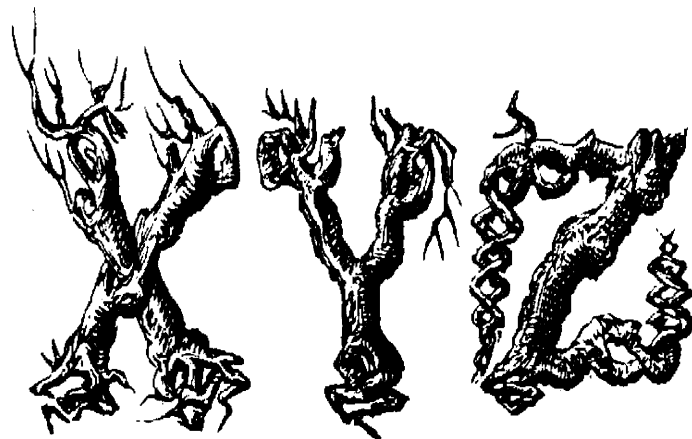
From a post-structuralist or postmodernist angle, of course, Habermas's work looks terribly out of date. To postmodern opponents, his project appears as a last-ditch attempt to maintain the scaffolding of Enlightenment reason. In the eyes of some critics, Habermas's universal pragmatics – the belief in the 'force of the better argument', truth-claims, critique of consensual values, and so on – is itself a discourse of mastery and power. To this end, it is argued, the (illusory) belief in a transcendental universal always wins out over and against the interests of the individual.

The essays that comprise *Postmetaphysical Thinking* should interest critics in this respect since they raise issues which Habermas has often been accused of unduly neglecting, espe-

cially the individual, otherness, and difference. Perhaps the most groundbreaking article here is 'Individuation through Socialization: On George Herbert Mead's Theory of Subjectivity'. The theory of the subject, Habermas argues, has always had as its main focus *reflection*: reflection upon the world of objects of which the subject is conscious. This is true from the mirror-model of self-consciousness to be found in German Idealism, through to the self-reflexively steered personality systems theorised by Beck in contemporary sociology. By contrast, the theory of intersubjective communication, as elaborated from Humboldt to Mead, captures the cognitive, expressive relations established between human subjects. Intersubjectivity, Habermas says, is what makes an instituted relation-to-self possible. Individuals draw from, and project into, intersubjective contexts, and thus establish a relation to the norms of a universal community.

But how should we understand the relation between the supposition of a universal community and the individual? Habermas argues that a universalisation of norms *presumes* individual differences in concrete forms of life. He writes: 'the transitory unity that is generated in the porous and refracted intersubjectivity of a linguistically mediated consensus not only supports but furthers and accelerates the pluralization of forms of life and the individualization of lifestyles. More discourses means more contradiction and difference. The more abstract the agreements become, the more diverse the disagreements with which we can *nonviolently* live.' Greater universalization thus underwrites the individual, otherness, and difference.

This line of thought will be familiar enough to readers who have followed the trajectory of Habermas's work over the past few years. His theory of universal pragmatics attempts to educe the projection of the unlimited communication community from the structure of language itself. I have sympathy with the core social-theoretical topics identified by Habermas: the intersec-



tions among communication, power relations and violence. But, whatever the relation between universalism and particularism in Habermas's theory, I remain unconvinced by his attempt to derive right from fact, the normative from the empirical. It leads him, I believe, to imagine a utopian foundation at the heart of linguistic mechanisms without giving due consideration to the psychical and social constitution and reproduction of communication – such as the location of dialogue in a certain *episteme* (in Foucault's sense), or the configuration of social imaginary significations which support language (in Castoriadis's sense). Yet, whatever these limitations, no one can doubt that *Postmetaphysical Thinking* represents a major contribution to social-theoretical debates on the nature of dialogue and debate in the world of late modernity.

Anthony Elliott

# THINK IT OUT

David Watson, *Hannah Arendt*, London, Fontana Modern Masters, 1992. 143pp., £5.99 pb., 0 00 686237 3.

Jeffrey Isaac, *Arendt, Camus and Modern Rebellion*, London, Yale University Press, 1993. 320pp., £17.95 hb., 0 300 05203 0.

Hannah Arendt was born into a relatively prosperous middle-class Jewish family in Hanover in 1906; fled from Germany when Hitler came to power in 1933; and finally arrived in the United States where she remained until her death in 1975. She probably remains best known for her two most controversial books: *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) and *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963). The publication of *The Origins* brought her a level of public recognition bordering upon fame, and earned her a central place amongst the Jewish intellectual community that had adopted her since her arrival in the United States in 1941. But her later reports on the trial of Adolf Eichmann – which appeared to some of her critics to qualify Nazi responsibility for the holocaust – provoked fierce public recriminations, particularly from Jewish intellectuals. Arendt's work also offended the sensibilities of many academic commentators. Her disregard for conventional standards of rigour, consistency and accuracy have forced even her admirers to concede that a sympathetic evaluation of her work depends upon the suspension of traditional categories and a sensitivity to her peculiar approach to the 'business of thinking'. Her critics have often simply disdained to take her work seriously.

As David Watson emphasises, the obstacles to reaching a balanced assessment of her highly idiosyncratic writing are partly due to its peculiar recalcitrance to received categories. The 'humbling task' of writing a brief introduction to Arendt's thought therefore poses a peculiar challenge: not only to do justice to what she said, but also to attempt to explain exactly what it was that she thought she was doing. Watson is therefore occupied with reprising the intellectual genealogy of her work. He stresses her enduring identification with the 'existential' pole of the Kantian legacy, arguing that she should be understood as having continued the philosophical project passed on to her by Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers, both of whom she had studied under at university. From them she had inherited the problem of coming to terms with 'the fact that man is not the creator of the world': that is, of confronting the existential dilemma inscribed in the Kantian severance of essence from existence, and of doing so without recourse to a Hegelian transcendence of the phenomenal world. She sought the basis for some kind of reconciliation of the 'thinking and reasonable being' with the nightmarish events of the twentieth century; but a basis for reconciliation that did not depend upon fleeing the slaughterhouse of contemporary history for a 'region beyond appearances'.

Arendt has typically been read as a political theorist, leading most recent commentators to concentrate upon her most accomplished works in this field: in particular, *The Human Condition* (1958) and *On Revolution* (1963). Watson challenges this reading of her work. He argues that she is more profitably approached as a 'philosopher', in view of her enduring preoccupation with the question of 'how to achieve philosophical detachment in the twentieth century, leading on to questions not only about how to assign responsibility for individual and group actions but also about how an individual qualifies himself or herself to judge these actions'. This approach leads him to concentrate, unfashionably,

upon her later works – especially the posthumously published and unfinished *The Life of the Mind* – and to approach her earlier and better known writings primarily 'in terms of the philosophical ground they cleared'.

*The Life of the Mind* deals with 'thoughtlessness'; with the human potential for rebellion; and with the cultivation of 'conscience'. Watson traces Arendt's engagement with these themes back through her writings on totalitarianism. Her encounter with Adolf Eichmann was particularly significant. Eichmann did not turn out to be the embodiment of some 'radical evil', but emerged rather as a pathetic clown who would have willingly accepted any bureaucratic task allotted to him. The perpetrator of unimaginable crimes turned out to be a 'family man', who 'for the sake of his pension, his life insurance, the security of his wife and children ... was to sacrifice his beliefs, his honour, and his human dignity'. Such a man was able to reason instrumentally and to make deductive inferences, but proved to be incapable of 'thinking' – which Arendt conceived as the conducting of a 'two-in-one dialogue between me and myself'. The individual deprived of this inner space – in which to appear, as it were, before himself or herself – became a mere 'sleepwalker': incapable of thought, detachment, refusal, rebellion or judgement, and therefore peculiarly susceptible to totalitarian ideologies. The quest for 'philosophical detachment' was not, then, a narrowly intellectual project, but the precondition for any kind of salvation from the moral, political and existential crises that confront us in the modern world. There was nothing inevitable about 'the crisis of our century', but resistance and subversion depended upon the rediscovery of that inner space that preserved the human capacity for rebellion against the given and therefore for the initiation of new beginnings in the world.

Watson's nuanced interpretation of Arendt's project and intellectual genealogy inform a highly readable and illuminating introduction to the work of this challenging thinker. But neither his classification of her as a 'philosopher' nor his approach to her political thought are entirely convincing. Watson acknowledges that Arendt was certainly not a 'philosopher' in the received sense. Her hostility to the Western philosophical tradition had a profound basis. Its displacement of the duality of 'thought' with the linearity of deductive inference evinced a curious affinity with the intellectual processes of 'mass man'. Arendt's discussion of 'thought' offers an insight into her own approach: its preconditions included detachment, the cultivation of imagination, and a sympathetic quality that she calls 'love' (rarely seen as an academic virtue). Watson's efforts to subsume her work under traditional categories sits somewhat uneasily with his painstaking investigation of the specificity of her approach. For example, he considers the legitimacy of her claims to serious consideration as a 'philosopher', 'historian', 'theologian', 'literary critic', 'political scientist', and 'political theorist'. But Arendt was none of these things in anything resembling the received senses, and explicitly reformulated these practices in the course of her writings.

Watson also appears to underestimate the relevance of Arendt's political thought to the problem of 'achieving philosophical detachment'. When he writes that 'the work strives towards and finally, in the last phase, becomes philosophy', he seems to have its thematic content in mind. But exploration of the fragile conditions under which the human capacity for thought, free

# PUBLIC LIFE

action and judgement are secured is also a central theme of her political writings. The 'thoughtlessness' of the family man arises under definite historical conditions. Arendt insisted that 'politics' was properly understood as an intrinsically rewarding engagement in public dialogue with one's 'peers and equals'. The ability to 'think' depended upon the capacity to view the world from different viewpoints, and this could only be acquired in the public realm. For Arendt the widespread inability to acquire 'philosophical detachment' was integrally connected with the corruption of the political sphere, which had become a mere guarantor of the private interests of isolated individuals, deprived of the public space for intersubjective communication in which the habit of detachment was acquired. The 'philosophical' problem had a social and political dimension; her political writings engaged this theme under a particular aspect, rather than simply clearing the ground for her later work.

Jeffery Isaac is preoccupied with Arendt's political theory, which he explores through a rewarding comparison with the works of Albert Camus. He argues that both these thinkers had struggled to come to terms with terrible and unprecedented experiences which have disturbingly been 'erased from the institutional memory of academic political theory'; both were engaged social critics responding to the crises of their times; both were sympathetic to the modern revolutionary experience and preoccupied with the nature and potentialities of modern rebellion; both sought an alternative to American-style capitalism and Soviet-style communism alike; and both were hostile to parliamentary politics and sought to reassert an agonistic and dialogical conception of political interaction. Direct participation within a properly constituted public sphere would encourage solidarity with, and recognition of, other participants, while protecting each against the monological intellectualisations characteristic of 'mass man'. The revitalisation of public life was a precarious business, offering no escape from the ambiguities and uncertainties that haunted modern consciousness. But it was precisely the preservation of these tensions that guarded against the possibility that human beings might sleepwalk back into the nightmarish deformation of the human condition that had been epitomised by totalitarianism, and was secreted in the foundational assumptions of modern liberalism.

Isaac writes with considerable insight into the political thought of these two writers. He argues convincingly that their work merits more serious attention than it is often granted, and shows that it is a profound relevance for contemporary political, ethical and theoretical discourses. While recognising that there are serious flaws in the work of both writers – in particular, a refusal to engage with any form of critical social theory – he argues that they initiated a project with considerable potential for further development. In their rejection of Enlightenment faith in reason and science, and their eschewal of all forms of essentialism, they anticipated many of the concerns of postmodernism, while managing to avoid the relativist impasse. While refusing to appeal to any conception of human nature they both insisted that there was a common human condition from which a normative political theory could be derived. This condition was not immutable, and the human predicament was perhaps 'absurd', but it still had to be engaged and endured. Indeed, they argued that it was imperative to preserve a sense of the 'absurdity' and mutability of the human predicament, as well as of the severe limitations upon our powers to transform the world, in order to guard against the monstrous deformations of the human condition which their generation had witnessed.

**Marcus Roberts**

Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of her Political Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992. 281pp., £35.00 hb, 0 521 41911 5.

John Hartley, *The Politics of Pictures: the Creation of the Public in the Age of Popular Media*, London, Routledge, 1992. 223pp., £11.95 pb., 0 415 01542 1.

Margaret Canovan has produced an excellent reinterpretation of Arendt's work. Primarily through a reconsideration of Arendt's writing on totalitarianism and an analysis of her unpublished lectures, Canovan's timely revision of a previous book offers an investigation into theoretical conceptions of the public and the private. For Arendt the public realm constituted a common world where plural human beings could 'enlarge their mentalities' in open communicative discussion. It was human beings' common capacity to build public institutions in the space that lay between them that so impressed Arendt. Here the public provides a critical realm where citizens could develop new and original webs of thinking, out of their capacity to act as plural beings. Where others, like the early Frankfurt school, found little to be optimistic about amidst the barbarism of the twentieth century, Arendt resisted their pessimism. The source of hope for Arendt lay in attempts to act publicly without guarantees of success, interrupting predictable chains of events, in a responsible and humane fashion. Such creative forms of agency, as Arendt saw it, avoided the pitfalls of totalitarianism. Political ideologies that reduced humanity to a common biological condition or to helpless actors swept along by the tide of history unwittingly sacrificed all that was worthy about human conduct. However, the values of personal goodness could not be counted on to protect democratic forms of engagement from its enemies. Indeed attempts to bring the private into the public were threatening for Arendt, in that obligations towards friends are radically distinct from those to the political. While private citizens would do well to heed the words of Jesus and Socrates their tenderness would provide little defence against Hitler and Stalin.

There is much here for scholars of Arendt's work, but those expecting an exploration of Arendt's contemporary relevance are likely to be disappointed. Canovan does little to bring Arendt's writing into dialogue with contemporary feminism or modern institutional processes. She could have offered the reader much more on Arendt's resistance to feminist attempts to deconstruct the opposition between the public and the private. It is surely an obvious point to make that Jesus's advice that we should love our enemy makes little sense to 'private' victims of male violence. Further, it is not altogether clear how the republican values of public participation are to be maximised in a depoliticised and globalising culture. Again, Canovan could have written more critically on Arendt's failure to engage with the 'social question', given the obvious limits it places upon political expression.

If Arendt feared that democratic forms of politics faced their biggest threat in totalitarianism, according to John Hartley she need not have worried. The distinction, according to Hartley, between the public and the private is as redundant as the plan of the Roman Forum which appears at the start of the book. Democratic forms of politics are now controlled by large bureaucracies leaving the masses plenty of free time to gape at the wonders of popular culture. Hartley does not celebrate human plurality through the people's capacity to act publicly, but, somewhat bizarrely, presents them through a series of photographs smiling in their

living rooms. The public sphere has disintegrated under the ideological constructions of a domestic popular press. Tabloid newspapers reveal a fundamental truth (not a word Hartley is very keen on) about late capitalism. The editor of the *Sun* and sophisticated cultural critics both recognise that the 'real' is discursively constructed, making redundant distinctions between illusion and reality. For Hartley the recent moves towards a privacy bill and a right to accurate information would not be so much wrong as irrelevant. From country picnics with Charles and Di to the pleasures of synchronised swimming we are asked to give up on the masculine preoccupations of democratising the public, and sit back, relax, and enjoy our happy smiling culture. The superficial ramblings of this book not only fail to address the social and political reasons for the attractiveness of the tabloid press, but also completely ignore the maintenance of a rational public through informed journalism.

While Hartley has virtually nothing of critical interest to say on the subject of privatised culture, he does pose questions for those who would seek to defend Arendt's version of republican politics. For example, the decline in traditional forms of political participation can perhaps be connected to the removal of economic and political levers from national and local control. In this context, it would seem perfectly rational to spend one's leisure time reading horoscopes rather than warnings on global warming. While there remains much that is rich and suggestive about Arendt's republicanism, it needs to be reconstituted along global and economic lines. Perhaps the alternative is the private blissful world of John Hartley coupled with the realisation of the worst nightmares of Hannah Arendt.

Nick Stevenson

## SELECTIVE AFFINITIES

George J. Stack, *Nietzsche and Emerson: An Elective Affinity*, Athens, Ohio University Press, 1992. 379pp, £37.95 hb, 0 8214 1037 7.

It is well known that Nietzsche showed enduring partiality for Emerson long after other of his intellectual passions had faded. It is surprising, therefore, that a detailed study of the correspondence of ideas between these two literary philosophers has only just recently emerged. But, while *Nietzsche and Emerson: An Elective Affinity* offers an illuminating portrait of Emerson, it offers the Nietzsche scholar little more than Stack's overstated and 'overdetermined' (his claim and my counterclaim) thesis that Nietzsche's 'intellectual and spiritual relationship [with Emerson] is so profound and pervasive that the word *influence* doesn't do justice to it.'

The selective affinities teased (and at times forced) out by Stack fall under the following heads: nature; history and existence; power in nature; fate and existence; the paradox of good and evil; aristocratic radicalism; and the image of the *Übermensch*. Among these, the two chapters which focus on philosophical paradox are, from a critical perspective at least, the most interesting. In 'Fate and Existence', Stack describes Emerson's (and, by implication, Nietzsche's) commitment to both fate and freedom as 'realistic idealism', an oxymoronic designation which captures the impracticabilities intrinsic to a paradoxical marriage of free will and determinism, of the exigencies of nature and the impera-

tives of nurture; while in 'The Paradox of Good and Evil', the antinomianism inherent in Emerson's naturalistic theodicy – a theodicy which, like Nietzsche's, is based on a metaphysical 'will to power' and the 'sublimation' of 'evil' into good – is highlighted and the 'immoralist' tendency in the 'benign' Emerson's thought thereby disclosed.

Stack's principal aim, however, is to reveal a 'new', radical, Emerson, with which to counter the popular image of Emerson the 'genteel' optimist (and, by implication, of Nietzsche the radical thinker). To this end, Emerson's transcendentalism is overshadowed by a darker philosophy of immanence – a shift of 'metaphysical emphasis' which considerably eases the passage of transmission from Emerson to Nietzsche – and Nietzsche's brilliance is all but eclipsed by the systematic reduction of his ideas to 'mere' variations on Emersonian themes. We are thus surprised to learn that what have hitherto been regarded as distinctively Nietzschean ideas and images are 'in fact' no more than synthetic elaborations on scattered insights 'culled' by Nietzsche from his 'heavily underlined' German copy of Emerson's *Essays*. For example, 'an embryonic version' of Nietzsche's hypothetical 'eternal recurrence' is to be found in the motto to 'Illusions', his ontological 'will to power' can be seen as a 'carefully developed version' of Emerson's 'bio-spiritual' interpretation of man and nature; the notorious 'blond beasts' are 'obviously *derived*' from Emerson's writings; and the heroic image of the *Übermensch* is merely 'an appropriation' of Emerson's aesthetic vision of man perfected.

What Stack offers his reader is not so much a comparative study of Nietzsche and Emerson as a reductive one. In the light of the 'perspectivist' tendencies of the two thinkers under review, the dogmatism of his approach is, to say the very least, somewhat inappropriate. The assimilation of ideas is a complex and irreducible process and any claim to originality must be relative. What does it mean, therefore, to say that Nietzsche speaks 'in an Emersonian voice' or that certain of Nietzsche's words, phrases and ideas 'are Emerson's'? It is true, of course, that Nietzsche speaks in many voices, but all of them in some sense belong to Nietzsche. Nor is Stack's methodological approach at all consistent in so far as he fails to apply the same genealogical tools to Emerson as he does to Nietzsche. In the case of Nietzsche, for example, every tonal nuance and stylistic flourish deemed to be 'in the manner of' Emerson, every idea that so much as suggests a whiff of an idea even implied by Emerson, is meticulously recorded; whereas, in an astonishing instance of double standards, Stack remarks of one of Emerson's assertions that 'Whether Emerson is citing Mme de Staël or paraphrasing Hegel here is not particularly relevant'. Had Stack paid more attention to Nietzsche's description of inspiration in *Ecce Homo* – 'like lightning, a thought flashes up, with necessity, without hesitation regarding its form – I never had any choice' – he might have withdrawn from many of Nietzsche's ideas his emphatic and relentless charges of, at best, 'refinement' and 'embellishment', 'exaggeration' and 'amplification', 'modification' and 'adaptation'; and, at worst, 'assimilation' and 'incorporation'; 'recapitulation' and 'paraphrase'; 'derivation' and 'emulation'.

On the subject of synonyms, Stack's partiality for these is everywhere in evidence. Indeed, the book as a whole is marred by unnecessary repetition which arises out of a totally redundant introductory chapter, the contents of which are subsequently incorporated into the book's remaining chapters, and by incessant paraphrase which serves solely to accompany and accommodate the maximum number of citations. Without this verbiage, Stack's prolix work could easily have been halved.

From an Emersonian perspective, Stack's book is to be welcomed for its fresh, radical, and insightful reading of the American poet and essayist. From a Nietzschean perspective, however, although this book (over-)fills a lacuna in Nietzsche scholarship, it is to be read with circumspection. For, by failing 'to employ a *variety* of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge' (*Genealogy of Morals*), Stack reduces Nietzsche to a mere 'disciple' of Emerson and thereby violates that 'perspectivism' which is central to the thought of both thinkers.

Francesca Cauchi

## CLASS SOCIETY OR RISK SOCIETY?

Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, translated by Mark Ritter, London, Sage Publications, 1992. 260pp, £35 pb, £12.95 pb, 0 8039 8345 X hb, 0 8039 8346 8 pb.

Beck's *Risk Society* is another contribution to the postmodernist opus, with the interesting twist that he sees 'industrial society' as only semi-modern. The new 'risk society' which is displacing it results from the extension of modernisation to its own products, exposing and eventually overcoming the 'feudal' elements of industrial society through the process of 'reflexive modernisation'. 'We are eye-witnesses to a social transformation within modernity, in the course of which people will be *set free* from the social forms of industrial society – class, stratification, family, gender status of men and women' – and from faith in science, now so differentiated and complex that its results are invariably contentious. Beck concludes with surprising optimism, describing the 'unbinding' of science and politics through reflexive modernisation, which both robs politics of any control over the forces that really structure society ('so what's new?' mutter those whom Beck calls 'neo-Marxists'), and simultaneously permits new forms of democracy, alliances and social movements. Only this new pluralism, Beck believes, can challenge the 'sub-politics' of the techno-economic system and subject research to public scrutiny *before* the event.

This is a patchy book: sometimes brilliant, always engaged; sometimes engaging, sometimes turgid; and, I shall argue, undermined by two philosophical flaws characteristic of postmodernism.

Beck argues that technology and social welfare measures have overcome scarcity, bringing about a 'change from the logic of wealth distribution in a society of scarcity to the logic of risk distribution in late modernity'. The production of risks through modernisation has become more socially significant than the production of wealth, spawning new markets: 'a *cosmetics* of risk, packaging, reducing the symptoms of pollutants, installing filters while retaining the source of filth'. While the problem for class society was to make inequality socially acceptable, for the 'risk society' it is to legitimise the production and distribution of hazards. Assisted by the bland term 'industrial society', Beck insists that 'risk society' is the successor of capitalism rather than its apogee. He admits that in some respects inequality of risk follows class lines; poverty attracts risks, and wealth can buy some measure of escape. But 'poverty is hierarchic, smog is democratic', and even on a world scale the greatest risks – of nuclear disaster, poisoning of air, food and water – affect all classes and create a new potential solidarity of fear. The trouble is that Beck cannot seem to decide whether he is talking about

Germany or the world, or simply taking Germany as the direction in which the rest of the world is heading. In Germany, those exposed to hazards are 'often prosperous; they live in a society of mass consumption and affluence... they are mostly well educated and informed but they are afraid'. With good reason, for they have seen their children fighting for breath with the 'pseudo-croup' associated with air pollution. Here the claim that we now face a new, classless form of 'immiseration' has some plausibility. But when we consider the world as a whole, the coincidence of risk and class inequality is striking. Beck recognises that the Third World faces *both* sorts of immiseration, that 'the devil of hunger is fought with the Beelzebub of multiplying risks'. Certainly, this process is 'contagious for the wealthy', but that does not justify Beck's assertion that 'risk positions are not class positions', or his counterposition of the production of wealth and the production of risks, as distinct and comparable categories. For the production of wealth is the motor of risk production, and Beck nowhere offers any alternative mechanism. This point is politically crucial, for unless 'risk society' is as pluralist as Beck claims, his proposed solutions are mere voluntarist dreams. Unfortunately for us, perhaps, I think he is wrong, and his argument derives its plausibility from a confusion of epistemology and ontology.

Beck is in no doubt about the reality of ecological hazards. Yet he writes: 'They induce systematic and often irreversible harm, generally remain invisible, are based on *causal interpretations*, and thus initially only exist in terms of the (scientific or anti-scientific) knowledge about them... Bluntly, one might say: in class and stratification positions being determines consciousness, while in risk positions *consciousness determines being*.' Is he merely asserting that social perceptions of risk have their own social effects, or is he refusing to distinguish between risks in the world and our perceptions of them? The latter, it would appear, for again and again he confuses the effects of the accumulated toxicity (for instance) of industrial emissions with the effects of *beliefs* about that toxicity. This, I think, must be why Beck so cavalierly underestimates the overlap of class and risk positions. Educated people know more, they perceive themselves to be at greater risk, so they *are* at greater risk: 'because risks are risks in *knowledge*, perceptions of risks and risks are not different things, but one and the same.' Only this flirtation with post-structuralism can allow the dubious thesis of a historical rupture between class and risk society.

Despite his intermittent idealism, Beck reluctantly insists on the 'paradox' that the critique of science and its role in the production of ecological threat must itself use (counter-) science. This is a conceptual mistake, since the 'paradox' depends on confusing current *institutions* of science (the social position of scientists, the modes of organisation of their research, etc., which certainly have crucial effects on scientific methodology) with the general project of empirical, systematic, rigorous and self-critical study of the world. Sociologist though he be, this confusion stops Beck offering any structural reasons for scientists' collusion in the construction of so-called 'objective constraints', which appear to require endless and profitable applications of Band-Aid rather than a removal of the industrial causes of risks. In turn this lack of sociology allows Beck simply to appeal to reason, hoping that reflexive modernisation allows scientists to alter the self-conception of science as infallible, and publicly to parade their doubts so that we 'choose developmental variants that do not close off the future'. I have no quarrel with this intention, but its realisation demands a more accurate demarcation of friends and enemies than Beck's philosophy allows.

Caroline New

# ETHICS AND INSTITUTIONS

Elizabeth Wolgast, *Ethics of an Artificial Person: Lost Responsibility in Professions and Organizations*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1992. x + 161pp, \$29.50 hb, \$10.95 pb, 0 8047 2034 7 hb, 0 8047 2103 3 pb.

Institutions, their functionaries and agents, who speak and act in the name of others and so constitute, in Hobbes's phrase, 'artificial persons', are held to be subject to moral praise and blame. The theme of this book is that their artificiality prevents them from being properly responsive to such criticism. Wolgast argues that the attempt to make corporations, the military, and the legal profession morally responsible, by imposing codes of conduct and sanctions for their transgression, is a vain attempt to solve the problem of institutionalisation by a further process of institutionalisation. Retrofitting with codes cannot compensate for the loss of personal reactivity and the social vulnerability which supports ordinary moral life. There is thus a 'deep and intractable dissonance' between organisations and moral theory. One central function of organisational hierarchies, in addition to the manufacture of their product – whether goods and services or legitimated violence – and the reproduction of their own structure, is the dissipation of moral responsibility either by its arbitrary assignment or by its diffusion throughout the organisation.

Wolgast shows how the role-theory and moral pluralism introduced by sociologists following Durkheim straddled the descriptive and the normative. The notion that professionals are required, in some general sense, to be morally reflective and susceptible to moral criticism in their private lives, but can otherwise rely on the operating codes of the profession, which define what it is to be a good lawyer, executive, or military commander, she finds a pernicious extension of role-theory. That the notion of the 'person' has both legal and theatrical aspects, and that they are supposed to be unified through the notion of a coherently planned and executed action, was an insight of Amelie Rorty's, noted by the author. But roles, although they help to constitute a person's identity, by their nature encourage bad faith; the *persona* is, by definition, not the person, and the performance of a role – whether that of waiter, grocer, teacher, or doctor – requires acting and dissembling in ways which undermine responsibility. 'Comparing a professional to an actor in a role encourages the exclusion of certain actions from moral criticism.' On the other hand, the *persona* is in danger of becoming the person, leaving her without any perspective from which to criticise her behaviour in the role.

Recently, philosophers such as Peter French have tried to argue that bureaucracies are morally accountable insofar as they possess a derivative kind of personhood. Wolgast rejects these attempts. She insists that, in the paradigm case of moral action, one reflects on it, chooses it, and effects it through one's own agency. The phenomenology of responsibility, with its guilts and satisfactions, is lacking in corporate action, given its failure to integrate decision, execution and consequences. For example, the marketing branch of a pharmaceutical company may decide to release a dubious drug. The repercussions of so doing are experienced by the firm's legal department. The firm as a whole may be said to want to avoid fines or to preserve its reputation and clientele. But there is no person who is concerned not to do something wrong or who might feel ashamed by it. As a result, the

firm can only care about *appearing* good, not about *being* good – and this can be accomplished by skilful public relations. Certainly, professionals experience scruples and inhibitions. And it is necessary, Wolgast points out, to distinguish between the non-morally relevant revulsion one might feel at being asked to perform a particular task in the line of one's professional duty (enbalming a corpse, amputating a limb), and the morally relevant revulsion which might be experienced by a soldier asked to carry out the performance for which he has been trained. But neither role-theory, nor 'professional ethics' as normally understood, can help to clarify this distinction.

Some readers will find Wolgast too uncritical towards a Kantian paradigm of moral action. One might argue that individual persons are more fragmented – more corporate – than the Kantian picture suggests, in that their planning, executive, and reactive behaviour is frequently disconnected, especially in morally difficult situations. Wolgast does not consider recent and radical criticisms of the notion of the subject which stress its artificiality. But her arguments are not vitiated by this. It is not clear that concerns about institutional irresponsibility can be expressed other than with the help of such an idealised notion of autonomy.

It may be thought that Wolgast looks for morality at the wrong level and so naturally fails to find it. The US legal system, which she criticises as amoral, is in fact designed so that lawyers are specifically required not to evaluate the moral desert of their clients and to try to bring it about that they receive their just deserts. The lawyer is required only to evaluate the degree of fit between how the client's case can be made to appear, under the circumstances – including the existence of an opposing legal counsel – and the law as written. The assumption is that moral desert will in fact be tracked by this system better than by any rival system over the long run. As one quoted apologist (Susan Wolf) argues, 'If lawyers were to model their professional selves according to an ideal that consistently made the promotion of truth and justice the direct overriding aim, it would make no sense for persons to contract the services of a lawyer.' One would, however, be hard-pressed to apply this hidden-hand argument to military or corporate systems which, unlike the protocols of the law, can be seen to have arisen from human aggrandising tendencies and can make no serious pretence of tracking morality.

'The ability to speak for others that makes artificial persons both useful and attractive also frustrates the conditions of responsibility,' Wolgast concludes: 'This fact casts a moral shadow on all such practices and institutions.' Wolgast's positive proposals for enhancing the accountability of institutions do not balance her critique and should have been either omitted, or developed more thoroughly. Indeed some of these proposals, such as random representation, merit serious attention. As Wolgast argues, it only seems paradoxical that one may make institutions more like moral agents by emphasising their artificial character, not by trying to make them into persons. In the end, Wolgast is less concerned with the question of amelioration than with exposure of the illusion of the personhood of institutions and the equivalence of codes of conduct and moral imperatives. This is a worthwhile book, rich in concrete examples, which combines Wolgast's moral conservatism with social radicalism.

Catherine Wilson



**Michael Lessnoff, *Social Contract Theory*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1990. 233pp., £35.00 hb., £10.45 pb., 0 631 16313 1 hb., 0 631 16314 X pb.**

This anthology brings together selections from some of the most original and important thinkers in the tradition now called social contract theory. Michael Lessnoff's helpful introduction combines a sketch of the basic outlines of contractarian thought with a brief survey of the history of this idea. Countering current amnesia concerning the pre-modern beginnings of contract theory, he traces the elemental concepts from the late eleventh century Alsatian monk, Manegold, to contemporary refinements growing out of the work of John Rawls.

Besides Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Kant, whose contributions to social contract theory are by now so widely recognised that they hardly need anthologising, Lessnoff has included excerpts from Johannes Althusius and Samuel Pufendorf. Five of the eleven excerpts are fairly new. Selections include excerpts from Rawls, James Buchanan, James Coleman, David Gauthier, and B. J. Diggs. Without doubt the most worthwhile feature of this anthology is the singularly handy juxtaposition of the historical with the contemporary, the 'brand names' with the 'off-brands', and the familiar with the unfamiliar. In one short edition one can find a fascinating variety of angles on a closely linked set of ideas. Lessnoff's ably assembled anthology fills a need for those of us who are searching for a convenient compendium of selections from representative works in social contract theory.

**Scott Davidson**

**Willie Thompson, *The Good Old Cause: British Communism, 1920–1991*, London, Pluto Press, 1992. 266pp., £12.95 pb. 0 7453 0579 2.**

Thompson's book makes an attempt to put into focus the 'complete' history of the Communist Party of Great Britain from the cradle to the grave. Thompson's narrative method is a familiar one. History becomes a selective enumeration of events where the 'facts speak for themselves'. Although the book is supposed to be an account of the CPGB's historical development and subsequent disappearance from the political map, what is missing is any attempt at a theoretical analysis.

So far, our knowledge of the CPGB's life is restricted to a handful of published works that do not go beyond its early or mid-life days. For this period Thompson self-confessedly relies heavily on existing literature. What is really needed, and what

historians, political scientists and any other interested parties long for, is a full story of the Communist Party's post-war history covering such events as the CPGB's 1951 *British Road to Socialism*, making a break with the pre-war policies advocated in *For a Soviet Britain* (1935), and especially the 1977 *British Road to Socialism*, which heralds the rise of the Eurocommunist era.

Thompson's book says surprisingly little about 1970–1991 – a period which really marked the beginning of the end of the Communist Party, and in which Thompson himself was active. Consequently, Thompson's narrative becomes an endless list of cabals, factional publications, bannings and expulsions. No real attempt is made to understand why things happened, to what extent – if any – they reflected changes in society, and which forces were successful in articulating them politically. Instead, what we are left with is an enthusiastic appraisal of Martin Jacques's *Marxism Today* and the CPGB's post-Marxist and post-fordist stand in *Facing Up To The Future* (1988) and *Manifesto For New Times, A Communist Party Strategy For the 1990s* (1989).

Stuart Hall's neo-Gramscian analysis of Thatcherism as 'authoritarian populism' is endorsed together with Eric Hobsbawm's conclusions on the diminishing role of the working class in 'The Forward March of Labour Halted?'. In short, the message of Thompson's book is that the working class is dead; communism is dead; internationalism is dead; but Martin Jacques lives OK!

**Filio Diamanti**

**Richard H. King, *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992. 269pp., £27.50 hb., 0 19 506507 7 hb.**

*Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom* is a study of the influence of the Western concept of freedom on the Civil Rights movement. It proceeds through a discussion of the relation of 'positive' and 'negative' freedoms. 'Virtue' (duty, enforceable by the state) is contrasted with the negative freedom from coercion (guaranteed by the state). To this is added the distinction between autonomy and freedom proposed by Dworkin; here freedom to do what one wants is opposed to freedom to act upon reflection, though this latter clearly carries a trace of the concept of virtue mentioned above. Two other forms of freedom, the collective derivations of 'virtue' and negative freedom, have special pertinence to the Civil Rights movement and are discussed next. 'Participatory freedom' is a collective duty to maintain the public institutions of freedom and to extend them as

necessary: 'collective deliverance' is a kind of negative freedom operating on a collective level, for example the deliverance from racial discrimination.

Self-interest and self-respect are contrasted in their differing influences on political life. A sense of identity or personal worth is seen as providing a key motivation for active political involvement in dangerous conditions. King appeals to Hannah Arendt's explanations of connections between self-respect and collective political action on public institutions.

Two kinds of participatory politics are suggested by contrasting the approach of Martin Luther King with that of the Students' Non-violent Co-ordinating Committee (SNCC); leadership and marches as opposed to federalism and self-help. Both, however, evoked non-violent direct action as a means to a sense of self as worthy.

The final chapter traces the passage from civil rights to black power and notes the role played by the ideas of Franz Fanon, and describes the movement away from non-violent direct action towards the legitimisation of violence. In what is described as an American tragedy, the history of the SNCC is charted, from a loose, mixed, 'help you to help yourselves' group, motivated from the bottom up, and committed to 'enablement', to its later form as a separatist organisation complete with a cult of leadership. From integration and equality the path had been taken to black nationalism and terror. The causes for this reversal are given as individual burnout, disappointment, and, last, but by no means least, the intractability of the white establishment.

This book refuses to provide a prescriptive theory of politics as resistance, but its description of the Civil Rights movement provokes questions about means and ends, reminding us that different types of action produce different types of people. 'Self-respect is not just a state of mind; it implies some form of action which transforms self-respect from a subjective or private certainty into a public one.'

**Peter Nesteruk**

**Mary Warnock, *The Uses of Philosophy*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1992. 243pp., £35 hb., £11.95 pb., 0 631 18038 9 hb., 0 631 1853 6 pb.**

This book comprises fifteen lectures to 'non-philosophical audiences'. The hope is that they will show how a 'peculiarly philosophical' way of thinking can illuminate 'issues which also engage moralists and journalists, doctors, lawyers, and politicians'. Some of the chapters work well, issues are clearly presented in well-focused discussions with numerous exam-

ples; conclusions are neatly derived. The best is probably 'Religious Imagination'. Distinctively philosophical techniques and texts are skilfully deployed to extend our grasp of a difficult concept and challenge traditional boundaries. Even Sartre's contribution is not excluded. In 'The Nature of Choice' a philosophical rhetoric is deployed to offer a less pessimistic view of old age.

But there is too much emphasis on what others can learn from philosophy and not enough on different contributions to a common dialogue. For example, 'The Concept of Inner Experience' misses a chance to learn from psychology by continuing to defend what philosophers have chosen to call the common sense conception of 'inner experience'. Too often the outcome is to rule challenging ideas out of order. The issues at stake in 'Man and Other Animals' and 'The Human and his World' ought to open the question whether our concepts of persons and values must necessarily be articulated in relation to human beings and their concerns. But such a development is explicitly disallowed. Similarly, 'The Good of the Child' elaborates an argument that a right can only be defined within some associated concept of law. The purpose seems to be to point up the limitations of the UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child. But the possibility that new ideas and attitudes are being formulated is not considered, and the effect is to create confusion.

Some discussions stop short at the point where philosophical thinking might have begun. In 'Towards a Moral Consensus', Warnock concludes that society can survive without a general moral consensus provided that there is respect for the law and its members are prepared to continue talking to each other. But the obstacles to creating and maintaining these conditions are not considered. 'Honesty and Cynicism' does give a persuasive analysis of some of the difficulties. Greater 'candour' in public life would help, but 'a style of presentation that commands belief' is not enough to sustain a dialogue. Again, in 'The Human Genome Project', Warnock suggests that 'slippery slope' arguments can be blocked by legal boundaries and that the inertia of the legislature is a way of maintaining them. But those who see a boundary drawn with no proper rationale are not likely to respect the law that draws it or the institutions that prevent change.

The boundaries and the tasks of Warnock's lectures reflect her conception of philosophy and its role. Her approach derives without much self-questioning from Oxford in the '50s and '60s. Alternatives get scant recognition. There is a nice side-swipe at the 'Death of the Author' in

the introduction. If it had been pursued, it would have opened up the closed circuit of the orthodox debate in 'Personal Continuity'. Instead, Bergson comes in for the routine analytic debunking treatment. In general, these lectures are too contained within their limits to demonstrate the special challenge of philosophical thinking.

**Claude Pehrson**

**Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory*, translated by Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Claman, New York, Columbia University Press, 1992. xxiii + 265pp., \$29.50 hb., 0 231 07590 1.**

Jacques Le Goff is best known in Britain for his work on the Middle Ages, as a prominent member of the second generation of the *Annales* School of historians (Bloch, Febvre, Braudel) which transformed French historiography in the 1930s and 1940s through its critique of event-orientated historical narratives, its broad-based interdisciplinarity, and its emphasis on a new conception of historical time. Like other members of the School, he has also been concerned with questions of historical methodology, co-editing two important French anthologies, *Faire de l'histoire* (1974) and *La nouvelle histoire* (1978).

*History and Memory* is a translation of four of ten essays originally written for an Italian encyclopedia at the end of the 1970s, and subsequently published as a book in France. Each surveys a general historical concept, or pair of concepts – 'Past/Present', 'Antique (Ancient)/Modern', 'Memory', and 'History' – historically, from the standpoint of current debates. As such, the book is indicative of recent interest in the 'history of history', whilst situating that interest within its framework of self-reflection.

The first two pieces conform most closely to the conventions of the encyclopedic overview, reviewing familiar ground, albeit with an uncommon wealth of erudition. The other two ('Memory' and 'History') demand a more explicit engagement with current debates. Work from the last two decades has seriously discredited traditional ways of conceiving of the opposition of orality to writing; while the new oral histories and the development of electronic media and the computer have introduced technical means with far-reaching theoretical implications. At the same time, the political stakes of collective memory in constituting social identities have been raised in struggles over democratisation. Anyone seeking an introduction to these issues that connects them up to history's past will find the essay on memory an

excellent point to start.

Of greatest interest, however, is the long essay 'History', in which the transformations in historiography in the twentieth century brought about, first, by the *Annales* School and, more recently, by the 'new history' inspired by Foucault are placed at the end of a wide-ranging historical survey. The Foucaultian critique of the document, with its emphasis on the productivity of history's archaeological auxiliary, appears here as the culmination of a deep-rooted process which continues to revolutionise (and to problematise) the historian's craft. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, the professional historian has been keen to distinguish him- or herself from the amateur, the populariser, and the philosopher of history alike, by the systematic rigor of a variety of methods. This model is currently in danger, less from any philosophical critique (to which, as Le Goff shows, historiography has generally responded) than from the increased volume and complexity of 'sources'. What Le Goff calls 'the crisis in the world of historians' is in this respect as much a product of success as of anything else.

It is a pity, given Le Goff's concern for the historian's craft, that the editors of this translation have attended so little to their own. No attempt has been made to provide references to the English-language editions of foreign-language texts listed in the bibliography, even when, as in the case of de Certeau's important *The Writing of History* (1975), they have the same publisher, and even appear in the same series. The text itself is littered with errors of transcription. It is particularly galling, for example, to have a history of historiography distorted by polemics allegedly occurring in 1949 appearing in texts published in 1933, with both references given on the same page (181); or to have the founding date of the *Annales* journal listed a decade too early (xiii). New history demands reflection on its own institutional conditions; but I doubt if Le Goff intended to provide quite so graphic a demonstration of its necessity.

**Peter Osborne**

**Frank Furedi, *Mythical Past, Elusive Future: History and Society in an Anxious Age*, Pluto Press, 1992. ix + 310pp., £25 hb, £9.95 pb, 0 7453 0530 X hb, 0 7453 0531 8 pb**

The central topic of this book is contemporary society's negative perception of change. Furedi argues that we have an 'overwhelming preoccupation with the past' and that 'veneration of the past reflects a mood of conservatism'. He seeks to combat a view of history which sees the

past as a means of legitimating contemporary human action, and instead 'restates the case for the main insights of the Enlightenment, in particular the potential for progress'. There is an obvious paradox here, in that Furedi too is appealing to the past - the Enlightenment - to authorise his own project. How could such a contradiction go unnoticed? The reason, no doubt, is Reason: the assumption that there are rational standards which transcend any local, historical, or merely traditional ones. But belief in Reason, like belief in God, seems to be getting rarer all the time.

To bolster his plea for rational progress, Furedi aims to 'provide a sociological account of history and a historical analysis of our view of society'. By this, he means to show how debates over history reflect contemporary society's concerns, and also how those concerns have developed historically themselves. His book is primarily concerned with public debates over history, rather than with academic historiography.

Furedi suggests that conservative 'defenders of the established order' seek to purvey history as a source of moral lessons and as a means of promoting national pride in a supposedly heroic past. He elaborates this thesis through a detailed and convincing consideration of historical debates in America, Germany, Japan and Britain. The project of conservative historians is problematic, however, since national histories can contain compromising episodes, and also because of the lack of consensus over whose history should be represented, which in turn reflects a contemporary impasse over values. Another symptom of the present moral crisis is the conservative attack on education, which denigrates teachers for failing to inculcate a proper respect for traditional values and institutions.

But Furedi goes on to make the much more controversial claim that 'the characteristic distinction between left and right-wing thought has little meaning today' since both reformers and conservatives 'share anti-Enlightenment assumptions' and that this 'represents a belated triumph for the conservative reaction against the Enlightenment'. But surely the opposition between left-wing and right-wing thought is contrastive rather than absolute? Even if both groups now appeal to tradition and are wary of the idea of progress, they appeal to *different* traditions. There is a distinction to be made between accepting values because they are traditional and locating ourselves in a tradition because it reflects our values. There is nothing contradictory in the idea of a 'reforming tradition', for instance. Science is formally committed to cognitive progress, but this

does not preclude the existence of a scientific tradition. So the strict dichotomy of tradition and reason seems to me to gloss over the fact that reason is itself a tradition, as well as eliding the all-important question of whether either can help us make true value-judgements. Indeed, the root of the moral impasse that Furedi alludes to seems to be the difficulty of finding *any* source for values that can compel agreement.

Furedi writes cogently and with conviction. But it is noteworthy that his commendation of rational change seems to entail no substantive ethical, political or social prescriptions. Although his occasional use of the term 'bourgeois thought' suggests political radicalism, he accepts the 'empirical recognition that there is at present no ideological alternative to liberal capitalism'. Hence Furedi's commitment to Reason is apt to seem like an expression of faith rather than a rational option. To be fair, he is critical of reason as a 'transcendental idea', *destined* to be achieved in history, since he feels that this minimises the role of human agency in achieving progress. But it seems to me that Furedi is still committed to reason as a principle which transcends place and time. For how can we tell whether change is merely change or whether it is progress, without Reason as a standard of evaluation?

Gary Kitchen

**Richard Rorty, ed., *The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method*, with two retrospective essays, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992. 407pp., \$17.96 pb, 0 226 72569 3**

Since the appearance of *The Linguistic Turn* in 1967, its title has taken on a life of its own. The phrase has been used to cover a vast and supposedly progressive tendency in twentieth-century thought as a whole, and it has been joined by lots of other performers with turns of their own: phenomenological, transcendental, and deconstructive turns for instance, and historical, aesthetic and, of course, postmodern ones. The history of all former philosophy, it seems, is the history of turns.

Originally, though, the 'linguistic turn' meant something quite precise and controversial. The term was coined in 1953 in an article on Logical Positivism by Gustav Bergmann, which echoed Husserl's earlier conception of a 'transcendental turn'. The linguistic turn, for Bergmann, was a radical doctrine about the nature and goals of 'technical philosophy'. It involved renouncing the ambitions of traditional philosophy, and transforming it into a modern scientific discipline, distinguished by a

special relationship to language. The linguistic turn, according to Bergmann, had been initiated by Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*; it had caught on in the 1930s and 1940s, and then divided into two tendencies: 'ideal-language philosophy' (e.g. Carnap) and 'ordinary language philosophy' (e.g. Ryle).

Rorty's book was an anthology of classic documents about the linguistic turn in this narrow sense. It ranged from Carnap, Ryle and Schlick in the early 1930s to Quine, Strawson and Cavell in the 1960s. The longest piece in the book was the Introduction, where Rorty gave a superb elucidation of the 'metaphilosophical difficulties of linguistic philosophy'. Rorty's diagnosis was that the linguistic turn was only the latest of numerous would-be revolutions in philosophy. Like its predecessors, such as the Kantian and Cartesian revolutions, it aimed to provide philosophy with a method by which all the old controversies could be settled once and for all, either by being exposed as non-issues or by being settled through systematic inquiry. Rorty praised the linguistic turn for 'putting the entire philosophical tradition on the defensive', and indicating the possibility of getting beyond the 'spectatorial' account of knowledge. On the other hand, he argued that it had failed, like every other revolutionary programme in philosophy, to provide an incontrovertible method for resolving philosophical disagreements. The great choice, as Rorty saw it at this time, was between continuing with the idea of 'philosophy-as-discovery' or opting for a 'post-philosophical' idea of 'philosophy-as-proposal'.

Followers of Rorty's later work will know that he himself has opted for 'post-philosophy', thereby risking his former self's scorn for would-be philosophical revolutionaries. This edition of *The Linguistic Turn* comes with two postscripts which chart Rorty's own turnings. The first, from 1977, focuses on the idea that the results of Davidson's theory of language make the whole idea of language 'representing' reality untenable. In the other, written in 1990 for a Spanish audience, Rorty laughs at himself for having supposed that the linguistic turn was 'among the great ages of the history of philosophy'. Having pondered further on Davidson, Rorty can no longer believe in such entities as 'language' or 'philosophy'. Consequently the questions of philosophical method which preoccupied him twenty-five years ago now strike him as 'likely to prove unprofitable'. However that may be, the essays in *The Linguistic Turn*, including Rorty's, are the best possible introduction to them.

Jonathan Rée