I want to tell you a story

Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, translated and with an introduction by Paul A. Kottman, Routledge, London and New York, 2000. 176 pp., £47.50 hb., £13.99 pb., 0 415 20058 X hb., 0 415 20057 1 pb.

What happens if you Just Say No to the postmodern subject, the one in whose fragility and fragmentation so much energy has been invested? They are all doing it – just saying no – in feminist and cultural and autobiographical studies, and this is what happens when the Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero does it: a book about 'the narratable self', about all our meetings with other people, when we *know* that they are one too, another narratable self, even though we may not know their story. In those moments we apprehend the uniqueness of others, 'in the temporal extension of a life-story that is this and not another'. Cavarero follows Hannah Arendt in insisting that identity is not about the process of identification, and nothing at all to do with social construction, but rather with what 'a singular existent designs in her uncategorizable uniqueness'. Arendt paid much attention to these questions and her work on identity and narrative punctuates *Relating Narratives*; but Cavarero thinks that there was something she missed, which is that every human being, 'without even wanting to know it, is aware of being *a narratable self* – immersed in the spontaneous auto-narration of memory'. We want others to tell us *our* story, here in life, right now, so that in the autobiographical tale, we might become what we already are. So everyone looks for the unity of her own identity in the relationship that provides relating. In short, 'I tell you my story in order to get you to tell it to me.' The very great charm of this book is its determination that – as a philosopher, as Adriana Cavarero, as any *who* – you can do it: say No, not that way; *this* way. And if the narratable self works as a proposal or as an argument, it is because it is (just a little bit) closer to our experience of being one than is the postmodern subject. This narrative self is, then, a phenomenological self.

In one of her few overt confrontations with modern narrative theory, Cavarero insists that the person – the narratable self – is not a construction of any kind of text, spoken or written. Rather, the self is a kind of coincidence, the thing that coincides 'with the uncontrollable narrative impulse of memory that produces the text, and is captured in the very text itself'. Other skirmishes with the postmodern subject (begat out of narratology by Foucauldian discourse theory) are conducted more decorously, though in Paul Kottman's translator's Introduction, there are delicious hints of full-scale confrontation at Berkeley in 1997, where Cavarero presented parts of *Relating Narratives*, just before *Tu che mi guardi, tu che racconti* was published in Italy. (This translator has gone in for concealment: the delicious hints are buried in a footnote, and Cavarero's elegance of exposition is hidden in a ponderous and clunking English prose.)

Cavarero has little time for postmodernism, though she notes the 'stubborn affection' of American feminists for 'the fragmentation of the classical subject'. For her own part, she follows Arendt in being faithful to the idea of 'a world full of stories', stories which are *there*, because there is life itself, and a world in which things happen. Indeed, stories may be the confirmation that the world *is*, full of event and sequence, for 'one can only recount, or relive though the imagination and put into words 'what has in some way happened.' Nor does Cavarero spend much time exploring the assumptions that she works with: first, that there is a connection between self-narration and self-fashioning, and second, that some kind of relationship with an other is absolutely necessary for our 'very self-designation as unique'. She briefly evokes Taylor, MacIntyre and Ricoeur, but does not place them or herself in the long traditions of inquiry that provoked their interest in selfhood and narrative.

Our belief in the connection between self-narration and self-becoming is a very old one, that was paid detailed attention by two twentieth-century traditions of academic inquiry, the literary and the historical. Over the last twenty years, feminist literary theorists and critics have scrutinized the long-term European project of creating an autobiographical canon and have condemned it for being almost entirely made up of items of masculine self-writing. Literary criticism has had its effects, and now, at the beginning of a new century, the autobiographical canon has been greatly

extended, and the autobiographical *theory* derived from it is more likely to be fashioned out of women's writing than that of men.

The concomitant accusation, that the Western autobiographical canon was constructed from the writings of elite men, was more muted, but it brought about an equal shift of attention, from the chronicles of the privileged to the annals of the labouring poor. There are many more writings of women, and of plebeian men *and* women in print and in circulation than there were twenty years ago. In the same period, a vast and proliferating body of postcolonial criticism has directed attention away from the Subject of Europe towards the subaltern and marginalized subjects of the contact zones.

During the same period of academic activity, historians of literacy and culture reinforced the connection between the development of modern autobiography and modern selfhood. Any historian of the early modern and modern periods in Europe and the Americas works with the heavy freight of a historiography that charts the rise of individualism and individuality in the West. This insistent 'background' stresses the role of writing and reading in the making of modern social and political persons. From two ends of the twentieth century, two examples make the point: in Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904–5), spiritual journals, confessional tales, Bunyan's first-person narratives and a whole range of literary texts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are used to inscribe Economic Man or (less figuratively and more prosaically) the relationship between Protestant selfhood and the structures of early capitalist development. In a major publishing enterprise of the 1980s, *The History of Private Life*, the volume dealing with the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries elaborates, refines and illustrates, in charming and compelling detail, all the categories of modernity, so that we might see the things and feelings that proliferate around reading and writing (novels, pens, writing manuals, chairs for reading in and *peignoirs* to wear whilst sitting in them, libraries, closets; romantic love and love for children, privacy, intimacy) as the modern subject makes him- or herself. Such techniques of feeling, connected to the practices of reading and writing, have been even more recently celebrated in John Brewer's *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (1997).

By the early 1990s, the sociologist Anthony Giddens was able to describe the way in which personhood and self-identity had come to be understood as 'the self … reflexively understood by the person in terms of his or her biography'. He saw 'autobiography' not so much as a form of writing, nor as a literary genre, but rather as a way of thinking and feeling: as a mode of cognition – perhaps of being. According to Giddens, actually writing an autobiography, getting it published and having it read is a very minor variant indeed of a much more general 'autobiographical thinking'. In this 'broad sense of an interpretive self-history produced by the individual concerned, [autobiography] whether written down or not … is actually the core of self-identity in modern life' (*Modernity and Self-Identity*, 1991).

Self-narration (meaning 'interpretive self-history' *and* the formal written autobiography) has come to be emphasized again and again as formative, constitutive and descriptive of the subject of modernity. The understanding was refined by Charles Taylor, in *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (1989). Here Taylor surveys the whole of Western philosophy, and the great sweep of the West's cultural history (Renaissance humanism, urbanization, Reformation, Protestantism, capitalism, individualism, *the lot*), in order to claim that *the thing that has happened* since the end of the fifteenth century is the move of the self from outside to inside. He thus inscribed interiority on the modern subject, who is 'disengaged, particular … whose identity is constituted in memory'. This identity is expressed in self-narration: 'the life at any moment is the causal consequence of what has transpired earlier … [and] since the life to be lived has also to be *told*, its meaning is seen as something that unfolds through the events.'

For Taylor the importance of these developments is the questions they force about the *form* of the life- stories people tell. He asked whether the narrated story of the self is simply 'the *result* of the happenings as they accumulate', or whether the form of the life is there already, is somehow 'already latent', waiting to be expressed though an account of what came to pass in any individual life. No one has provided an answer to that one, though it has been generally noted that in these deliberations the self is conceived of as a remembered thing as well as a narrated thing. And now, at the end of these inquiries and deliberations, which have been going on for a very long time indeed, Cavarero has told us of the *desire* for your own story, told to you by someone else.

Ways of developing selfhood are read about, appropriated and learned differently in different historical epochs; they are also *taught* devices. They were taught most enduringly by Adam Smith, in *The Theory of the Moral Sentiments* (1759), where are to be found detailed instructions for how to feel in

relation to another's story, and thus make oneself the full sentimental subject (or, more precisely, how to turn yourself into Man of Feeling). As John Mullan has remarked, in a culture where the art of being an individual involves learning to have feelings, then you will go to the philosophic tract as readily as the novel in order to learn how to do it. Then again, and for example, the subject of British modernity was made a matter for instruction in the years after the Second World War, in the massive programme of teaching selfhood and self-expression that was in operation in state schools in Britain from the early 1950s onwards. 'Creative writing' encapsulated beliefs about the psychological benefits of writing the self for children in classrooms and the pedagogical conviction that writing autobiographically allowed a recuperative selfhood to be developed in working-class children. This taught form of self-expression flourished in conjunction with new practices of self-narration outside the school: in adult education, the development of the worker-writers' and community publishing movement (and thus an astonishing flowering of working-class autobiography in the 1970s), the rapid growth of community theatre, the folk movement and its deliberate forging of a sense of community between past and present narratives of the poor, the practice of oral histories of the working class, the development of the History Workshop movement, and, towards the end of the 1960s, the practice of consciousness-raising in the emergent women's movement. All these practices operated on the assumption that the subaltern *could* speak (should sometimes be forced to speak, indeed) and that through self-articulation in spoken or written words, the dispossessed could come to an understanding of their own story. That story – that life – could by various means be returned to the people who had struggled to tell or to write it, and be used as basis for political action.

Relating Narratives connects at many points with this history of the Western self and its story. 'On the Outskirts of Milan' (the title of Chapter 5), some time in the 1970s, two women attend one of the many 'Scuola delle 150 ore', socialist-organized adult education centres. Emilia does not have the gift of self-narration, for though she tells her story over and over again, it is disconnected, *boring*. Amalia writes it down for her at the same times as she pens her own. Emilia weeps at her friend's autobiography and at her own story, returned to her in writing. Indeed, she 'always carried it in her handbag and read it again, overcome by emotion'.

For Cavarero, Emilia becomes Ulysses at this moment; Ulysses who does not know *who* he is (though he may know *what*), until he hears the 'tale of his story' from the blind rhapsodist, and weeps from the intensity of understanding for the first time what it is it means. The strange construction 'tale of [the] story' is important for Cavarero. Following Arendt, she proposes that life-stories like the one Ulysses listened to and that happened to be his own do not signify the series of actions they contain, nor the agent who performed them, but rather 'the story that the agent, though his actions, left behind him'. The story is always different from the narration. The story, explains Cavarero, 'has, so to speak, a reality all of its own, which follows the action and precedes the narration … The hero's story finds its origins in his actions, not in the epic narration.'

The argument works because of an ultimate insistence that there is *a way in which things are*; this way and not another way. Indeed, the foundation of Cavarero's epistemology is a baby: 'the newborn – unique and immediately expressive in the fragile totality of her exposure … this unity … already a physical identity.' This little bundle of uniqueness is sexed, from its first moments: 'The *one* who shows him- or herself, the existent as exposable, therefore has a sex from birth, because that is the way he/she *is*.'

There are other babies here too, figurative ones. Philosophy (which is what Cavarero has in her sights, rather than narratology, or histories of the self) is Oedipus's child. Oedipus can show us a long-standing confrontation between the two opposing discursive reg-

isters that have shaped the modern world: philosophy and narrative. Philosophy is 'a definitory knowledge that regards the universality of Man'. Then there is narrative, which has the 'form of a biographical knowledge that regards the unrepeatable identity of someone'. In the philosophical tradition that Oedipus inaugurates (the question put to him; the way in which he goes about answering it) the female Sphinx is just an object, only able to be thought in relation to Man, just one more old signifier in *his* story. The myth of Oedipus (the story he knows and does not know) shapes the beginning of the book, before we encounter Ulysses, weeping for what he does not yet know is himself.

This is an important book, not least for the fruitful ways in which it brings two dominant modes of cognition in the West, philosophy and narrative, face to face with each other. And perhaps even more important for its joyous and antinomian rejection of what narrative has brought us, in interiority and all its burdens. Cavarero follows Arendt in proposing that 'inside we are all alike'. Following both of them we may yet be able to find ourselves back in the public square of the Greek city state that Mikhail Bakhtin showed us in his *Dialogic Imagination*. In the spoken and valedictory biographies – in the funeral orations and memorial speeches – delivered there, 'there was not, nor could there be, anything intimate or private, secret or personal … the individual is open on all sides, he is all surface.' In the histories yet to be written, Cavarero's book may be seen as the beginning of a release from the bondages of interiority.

Relating Narratives takes part in the recent 'autobiographical turn' in the human sciences, whilst subjecting it to scrutiny. But I do not know what to do with its proposals in the face of what I have discovered recently about some of hundreds of thousands of stories that actually have been told, in English society over the last three hundred years. These stories were not there already, there was no desire *for* them, nor to *tell* them. In England at least, from the seventeenth century onwards, the emerging administrative state insisted that it was in fact the poor who told their story, in vast proportion to their vast numbers, in order to gain poor relief, or maintenance for a bastardy child, and of course in many courts of law. Multitudes of labouring men and women surveyed a life from a fixed standpoint, told it in chronological sequence, gave an account of what it was that brought them to this place, this circumstance now, telling the familiar tale, asking for a dole – but only because they had to. Formulaic, forced out of them by the local state and the legal system, these stories nevertheless fulfil the criteria for autobiographical narration. The assumption of the 'autobiographical turn' that there is an *urge* to tell the self is of very little help here. In this enforced storytelling, there was no *desire* for narrative, from either side of the bar. It was made in that moment before the bench, story and narration together: one of modernity's many unwanted children. Where do we come from then, the kind of people Cavarero shows us to be now, 'looking for that unity of their own identity in the story (narrated by others or by herself), which, far from having a substantial reality, belongs only to desire'? Not a question for philosophers, I guess.

Carolyn Steedman

Imagining anti-capitalism

Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left, Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, Slavoj Žižek, Verso, London, 2000. vi + 329 pp., £45.00 hb., £15.00 pb., 1 85984 757 9 hb., 1 85984 278 X pb.

This book is the formalization of what has been an informal exchange between Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek over the last two decades. I say exchange, but in reality, until now the discussions have largely been based on Butler's and Žižek's responses to Laclau's work on identity and hegemony, rather than the other way round. Indeed, it was Laclau's and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985) that initially enabled Žižek to place his Lacanian materialism into what he deemed to be a sympathetic political setting; and that allowed Butler to configure her politics of performativity into a workable theory of the counter-hegemonic. As such, we might say, Laclau is the overdetermining factor here. Times, however, have moved on, and what fifteen years ago might have seemed a shared sense of disappointment in an older Marxism and politics and an expectation of thrilling counter-hegemonic times to come, has aged and found itself wanting – at least in Butler and Žižek. For *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* is essentially a confrontation between Laclau's renewed defence of a post-Marxist theory of hegemony and Žižek's leftward moving defection, with Butler somewhere in the middle, or rather, in tentative alliance with Laclau. In this respect, Butler's and Žižek's discussion of Laclau's theory of hegemony reprises some of the objections and arguments from the Left

that greeted *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* when it first appeared – or rather, *it adumbrates* many of these earlier objections and arguments. An unfortunate lopsidedness occurs in both Butler's and Žižek's contributions, in which the call for the repoliticization of political economy within political philosophy and cultural studies (admittedly stronger in Žižek) is never actually produced in the text, as if such ambitions were for another time and another place.

Thus Žižek criticizes Laclau's theory of hegemony for failing to historicize itself as a moment of transition *within* late capitalism, but without providing any accompanying analysis of the forces and relations of production of contemporary capitalism. Similarly, Butler stresses that the linguistic model has produced a formalist turn in counter-hegemonic politics – and argues for the need openly to confront and transcend capitalist social norms – without any reference to the depredations of the market economy. Under fire from Žižek she even admits the absence: 'a critique of the market economy is not found in these pages'. This makes Laclau's own criticism of Butler and Žižek somewhat ironic. For in order to distance himself from what he sees as the *ethical generality* of their positions – especially Žižek's – Laclau highlights a loss of empirical weight in their work which is no less true of his own. As he says of Žižek: 'his anti-capitalism is mere empty talk'. Yet it would be wrong to assume that the discussion is short-tempered or polemical. On the contrary there is a respectful patience with each other's contributions, producing a vertiginous representational chain, in which Žižek quotes Laclau quoting Butler quoting Žižek and Butler quotes Laclau quoting, etc.

The discussion is divided into two substantive contributions and a closing response from each author, based on various prewritten questions by the other writers. Although these questions reflect the different current preoccupations of the three authors (Butler's refusal of the Lacanian 'bar' on the formation of the subject; Laclau's rereading of communitarianism; Žižek's reinvigoration of the concept of the subject as a self-relating negativity) they all contribute to what they state in their co-authored introduction to be a shared philosophical project: the retheorization of the claims of universality and particularism in the light of the 'new politics'. The theory of hegemony, then, as Laclau has continually stressed over the last fifteen years, is always and already an issue of the constitutive relationship between the claims of the particular on the universal and vice versa. Hence his insistence on the importance of Gramsci's break with the unmediated 'abstract universalism' of orthodox Marxism as the basis for a 'modern emancipatory politics'. In Gramsci, Laclau argues, the 'abstract universality' of the proletariat bursting through the confines of civil society is exchanged for a hegemonic universality, in which the identity of the proletariat is produced out of its relations and their representations with other classes and their fractions. The issue, therefore, is that working-class emancipation is uncoupled from the notion of 'full' or fully emergent emancipation. By disconnecting emancipation from the weak universalism of a fully emergent emancipation, the universality of the particular is unblocked. The moment of universality is a *political moment of hegemonic struggle* and not a reconciliation of the universal *with* the particular.

Laclau's anti-Hegelian use of Gramsci, however, is less a critique of 'abstract universalism' than a critique of Marxism as such, as Laclau himself has openly conceded. By claiming that Marx only recognizes full non-mediated reconciliation as true emancipation, his concern is less with the re-evaluation of a Gramscian hegemonic universalism than with what Gramsci's theory of hegemony implies for the expansion of mediation beyond working-class politics. What is at stake is not the re-hegemonization of working-class struggle as the basis for a frontal assault on the capitalist state, but, on the contrary, the hegemonic extension of the particular as universal. Consequently, the failure of Marxism's 'abstract universality' is precisely its sublation of the particular and therefore its limited role in mediating the 'increasing social complexity' of late capitalist liberal democracy. By insisting on the ontological priority of the antagonism between the proletariat as the universal class and other classes in its mediation of all other antagonisms, Marxism reduces the hegemonic work of these other antagonisms to a secondary or epiphenomenal role.

These notions about Marxism as 'essentialist' are familiar from the last twenty years, tediously so, but what separates Laclau from postmodernist identity politics is his view that the expansion of mediation is also a name for the failure of political identity itself. And it is this imputed 'impossibility' of the political as the logic of the political (its ontological grounding as hegemonically incomplete) that constitutes the terrain on which Butler and Žižek conduct their interventions.

Like Laclau, Butler insists on the constitutive incompleteness of politics as a claim on the concrete-

universal. In this her theory of hegemony as a process of translation between non-convergent universalizing discourses (for instance, gay and lesbian rights and anti-racism) is close in spirit to Laclau's notion of equivalence, in which the separate components of hegemonic struggle are held to be comparable in their universalizing effects, but retain their differential character. In this way, for both authors, the particular is always overdetermined, is always a subtended or undisclosed claim on the universal. But unlike Laclau, Butler resists talk of this transitive space of the universal as an 'empty' signifier (as something irreducible to any of its particular modes of appearance). On the contrary, Butler says, the universal is never simply an 'empty' space waiting to be filled by an anterior particular/universal, but a space which already contains its disavowed or repressed contents, the contents of its very emergence, and therefore a space contaminated by the spectre of full emancipation. In this respect, at various points in her contributions, Butler questions the limits of the horizontalizing logic of Laclau's hegemony, what she sees as the tendency in his writing to deliver the concept of equivalence over to existing positivistic norms of dominance and their disidentification. Hence, when Butler says 'our exile in heterogeneity' is 'irreversible', there is a strong sense that her evaluation is meant to be less than sanguine.

On this basis the horizontalizing effects of Laclau's model do a number of things: they return a model of the social to Humean causal laws and to a form of quasi-Kantian atomism, and as a consequence elide emancipation *with* the horizons of liberal democracy. Laclau is hypnotized by the notion that all universalizing claims can only operate within the contingent, temporal, representational space of capitalist relations, all other temporal universalizing claims – that is, those that break with the dynamics of the contingent and conjunctural – are dismissed pejoratively as pure or abstract. The outcome of this is akin to what Daniel Dennett has called 'timescale chauvinism', a failure of historical imagination. Translated into cosmological terms this might be construed as the inability to register the timescale of natural events in recorded historical time within longer cosmological timescales. So, because the earth hasn't been hit by a colossal meteorite or experienced a mega-tsunami over the last few hundred years does not mean that such phenomena will not happen sooner rather than later and shatter the continuity of recorded time. It is this trauma of the unexpected event that forces itself on consciousness which is at the core of Žižek's differences with both Laclau and Butler. As he says in his second contribution, borrowing ironically from Deleuze's anti-Hegelian notion of authentic thought as always based on an encounter with an external real, 'a true thought is always decentred: one does not think spontaneously; one is *forced* to think.'

The imminent possibility of *being forced to think*, is central to Žižek's political ontology. That is, the problem of the political is not just a matter of mediation but of the authentic Truth-Event (following Badiou) that smashes through mediation, in order to disclose mediation's contingency. Thus the equivalences and

translations of hegemonization can never secure their boundaries against the unanticipated event which is unassimilable to hegemonization. Žižek introduces the Marxian problematic of asymmetrical relations into his discussion of identity, translation and the incompleteness of the political. Žižek says, rightly, that not all elements which enter into hegemonic struggle are in principle equal; there is always one that secretly overdetermines the horizon of the series of which it is a part and that has the power to shatter and reconfigure the other elements of the series; and this inevitably is class. Class is that which Laclau's hegemony can only domesticate. Laclau, however, has no time whatsoever for this argument on the grounds that class is no different to other identities: class depends entirely on how the worker's identity is *constituted*. 'There is no special location within a system which enjoys an a priori privilege in an anti-systematic struggle.' Thus it does not follow that because workers are aware that surplus value is extracted from their labour-power that they will resist such extraction. Of course, but what this fails to register is that workers – as a consequence of their place in the relations of production and not as an effect of their externally constituted identity as 'workers' – do resist this extraction. This refusal to accept the tendential effects of causality leaves Laclau without any plausible sense of the *qualitively different hegemonic* capacities and consequences of the concrete-universal.

The political impact of struggles over the boundaries between Western cultures and immigrant subaltern cultures can have significant effects on what the dominant culture sees as inclusively human, but this inclusivity has little transformative impact on the collective redistribution of power itself. The threat to 'Western culture' can be reinscribed as an *expansion* of 'Western culture', as Butler correctly acknowledges. Now, it may be the case that workers' demands can be consistently integrated into the system in similar kinds of ways, but what distinguishes workers' actions, and in particular strikes, on the other hand, is that they have the *potential* to generate forms of inclusivity and disruption that link a transformation in the content of the concrete-universal with the universal transformation of the concrete (capitalism) itself, in such a way as to pose the question to those involved and others: what universal actually is the 'abstract universal' freedom of liberal democracy? The much-maligned recent fuel blockade in Britain provides an unexpected indication of this. The action may have been a tawdry alliance between the petty bourgeoisie and some workers, in the interests of what seemed a narrow particularism and thus antipathetic to the weak universalism (environmentalism) of those who opposed it; but, in being able to shut down oil supply depots and almost put a halt to the food chain, the protesters were able to reveal that the continuity of the capitalist system is based on the universal labour power of the majority. The strike, therefore, always has the unexpected capacity to expand the claims of the universal beyond its hegemonic reinscription into liberal democracy. Žižek moves into this place in his contributions. As he says in *The Ticklish Subject* (1999): we 'can now see why today's post-politics cannot attain the properly political dimension of universality: because it silently precludes the sphere of the economy from politicization'. However, as I have already mentioned, the empirical basis for this necessary repoliticization of political economy advanced by Žižek (and to a lesser extent Butler) is largely missing. As a result Žižek's call for the construction of a new anti-capitalist imaginary and a new universalism is disconnected, practically, from theoretical knowledge of contemporary capitalism.

Some key facts and theoretical points would have made a difference: capitalist conditions of consumption in the West are non-generalizable to the rest of the globe, which means that today's crisis *is* a structural crisis unlike in 1929; the US population is 5 per cent of world population but consumes 25 per cent of the world's natural resources; social democracy is only able to meet integrable demands – the emancipation of labour and the protection of the environment are not integrable demands; the lowering of the general wage level globally has decreased the purchasing power of the working class, storing up credit problems for the system in the near future; there is a widening gap between the ever-increasing need for mass consumers and the ever-diminishing need for living labour; overall profits are continuing to be squeezed by the conflict between the increasing costs of unproductive labour and the decline of productive labour (given that unproductive labour has to be paid out of the value produced by productive labour). Žižek's call for a new anti-capitalist imaginary will clearly need to mediate these, and related, matters.

John Roberts

Grey on grey

Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Zone Books, New York, 1999. 175 pp., £15.50 hb., 1 89095 116 1.

Victor Jeleniewski Seidler, *Shadows of the Shoah: Jewish Identity and Belonging*, Berg, Oxford, 2000. xii + 175 pp., £14.99 pb., 1 85973 360 3.

Books about the Holocaust pile up. Here are two more, of identical length – that is to say slim, essayistic, not vast tomes. Their slightness is transported through their titles onto the event of the Holocaust itself, characterized as a dim phenomenon, a vestige, scrap, something not fully present. For, so it is said, who can find adequate representational form for that most 'unrepresentable' event? For Agamben only philosophy can undertake this task, for only it can understand how a limit-case becomes the norm. Agamben's *Homo Sacer* presented a Schmittian view of modern sovereignty, founded on the decision, the exception and the 'state of emergency'. Modern rule is a permanent state of exception. Its ideal form is the concentration camp. Now Agamben proposes that 'philosophy can be defined as the world seen from an extreme situation that has become the rule.' Philosophy meets its match, then, in Auschwitz, for this is the limit-case, modernity's terminus.

Agamben fumbles amongst the ruins of the exception that proves the rule. His touchstones are witnessing, archiving, testimony, speaking. He is motivated by the quest for 'an ethics'. Apparently we know so much about the procedures of the exterminations, but this is only description and of little use when we 'truly seek to understand'. To understand is to map 'an ethical territory'. Ethical cartography demands the plotting of experience, which once charted retrospectively is testimony. In the death camps, however, bearing witness poses a logical conundrum: how can survivors bear witness to the ultimate horror, for their very survival negates the absolutism of the death camp precept. This conundrum, 'the essential lacuna' at the core of testimony, originates in Primo Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved*. That which is 'impossible', the doubled role of survival and witnessing, is the paradox that Agamben seeks to resolve, linguistically and logically, and to present the results as foundation of an ethics.

Levi isolated a new ethical element at Auschwitz, and called it the 'grey zone', a spot where good and evil fuse, indistinguishably. In the 'grey zone' the *Sonderkommando*, themselves deportees, manage the gas chambers and crematoria – perhaps to survive in order to bear witness to their own actions, perhaps simply to survive. Agamben evokes Levi's story of a concentration camp football match between the SS and the *Sonderkommando*. The game, an exceptional occurrence, comes to define the normal state of ethical relations in the camps:

> This match might strike someone as a brief pause of humanity in the middle of an infinite horror. I, like the witnesses, instead view this match, this moment of normalcy, as the true horror of the camp. For we can perhaps think that the massacres are over, even if here and there they are repeated, not so far away from us. But that match is never over; it continues as if uninterrupted. It is the perfect and eternal cipher of the 'grey zone', which knows no time and is in every place. Hence the anguish and shame of the survivors.… But also hence our shame, the shame of those who did not know the camps and yet, without knowing how, are spectators of that match, which repeats itself in every match in our stadiums, in every television broadcast, in the normalcy of everyday life. If we do not succeed in understanding that match, in stopping it, there will never be hope.

To understand the match is to enter the 'grey zone' and its shadows, a place where not only 'good' and 'bad', victim and perpetrator, are muddled up with each other but where also life and death, the human and the inhuman, coalesce. The grey zone is haunted most strikingly by the *Muselmann* (muslim). This term of indeterminate origin was the name given by inmates to those who shuffled silently through the camp, mentally dead, detached from the camp's social world, starved and obsessed with food. Their expressionlessness – and apparently certain fate, means they are denied witness. Agamben notes that no one sympathized with them; even the very sight of them was unbearable to those who still possessed some vestige of humanity. It is their troubling peculiarity that interests Agamben, for whom 'the *Muselmann*'s "third realm" is the perfect cipher of the camp, the non-place in which all disciplinary barriers are destroyed and all embankments flooded.' The *Muselmann*, this point of indifference in every respect, is the most representative camp product. These zombie figures mark, for him, the point at which humanity and non-humanity, physiology and ethics, medicine and politics, life and death

pass into each other. The camp transforms the Jew into *Muselmann*, the human into nonhuman, barely human or 'merely human'. But if this delegate, the *Muselmann*, is scarcely human, how can his testimony count in the human world? And what is a witness who cannot speak? How can the true witness be the one who by definition cannot bear witness? These are the paradoxes that Agamben twirls, sifting the vocabulary of witnessing and testimony, authority, responsibility, martyrdom and remnants, muddying conventional definitions.

Holocaust literature and philosophy tend to concentrate on the mass production of death and corpses, but here life and survival predominate, hence the ethical question: how to go on living as a 'remnant' of Auschwitz. The 'grey' floods our life too, for Agamben mentions the physiological research of Xavier Bichat, which suggests that there are many shades in between the absolutes of life and death, and the body is a set of organs and parts that die independently and at different times. The *Muselmann*, in other words, is a part of all of us, and if he/she marks the indecidability between life and death, speaking and being, human and nonhuman, witnessing and not witnessing, then this ambivalence must invade our conception of subjecthood, and so our ethics. The witnesses, those who remain, likewise are neither simply dead nor survivors, drowned nor saved but those in between who mark the cavity into which some sort of ethics of the motley may be streamed. This 'grey' ethics is of wider import. 'Survival' is for Agamben the very principle of 'biopower' in the twentieth century, not the sovereign power's capacity to 'make die' or modern power's state-distributed objective of 'making live', as Foucault argued, but a 'making survive' that is manifested in the Holocaust survivor as much as in the neomort on a life-support machine.

If in Agamben philosophy is condensed, through an intricate ballet of concepts, to ethics, then Seidler reduces ethics to biography. Through autobiographical disclosure, beginning with a journey to Poland, Seidler claims the identity of second-generation survivor. A fanciful idea props up this thought: Nazi extermination killed also all those who might have been born had their putative ancestors not perished. The death toll escalates, and likewise the number of survivors multiplies, for every child born to 'survivors' becomes another 'who got away'. Seidler's parents emigrated from the continent before war began, but relatives perished, and so they carried history's wounds against the family with them to Hendon, North London, where they eventually settled. They tried to give their son Victor, born in 1945 and named after the Allies' success in Europe, a 'normal' upbringing, devoid of thoughts of death and suffering. All that is unspoken produces a silence glutted by Seidler's ill-ease: he bore his parent's emotions, their silent secret suffering. As if the truth cannot be concealed from some sort of collective 'race' memory, Seidler always felt abnormal, 'alien', and, he tells us, has spent his life 'waiting for the knock at the door'. He bemoans the discontinuity imposed on his family lineage – and internalizes it as an aspect of his 'diasporic subjectivity'. The book is repetitive, the author gnawing on his hurt feelings, anxieties and a sense of otherness, 'explained' by the biographical-biological (identity politics mantra: the political is personal). This is history reduced to psychopathology, while, concomitantly, memory is generalized. The abhorrent implication is that only Jews, survivors or post-survivors suffer the Holocaust, that only ethnicity, 'bloodlines', 'race' or inheritance (genetic, proprietal) impel sympathy or solidarity.

Sometimes the tight personal focus on the 'painful dynamics of identity and belonging' gives way to a broad-brush approach. Modernity and its agents are arraigned in a now classically postmodern way: the holocaust is the crisis/realization of the Enlightenment. Jewishness as difference holds the key to suffering, but also the key to happiness. Jewish life is cast as a model for pluralistic identities inclusive of difference (e.g. Jewish-Polish), and proffering a liberal model of respect for scholarship, observance of ethical norms and commitment to universal justice. Kant, we are told, identified history and culture as forms of unfreedom and determination that must be erased in the move to individual freedom and autonomy. Kantian modernity – a secularized Protestantism – imposed on subjects the demand 'to think for ourselves as free and autonomous moral agents'. Assimilation's price was to turn Jewishness into a matter of private belief, as tradition was renounced and a universal abstract sense of self adopted. Modernity rips up traditions. Seidler reads a common disenfranchisement occasioned by capitalist modernity as belonging to Jews alone. Now, after Auschwitz, the burden must fall upon Jews to restore and honour traditions and rituals, even if this is an act of faith carried out without belief, and even if those traditions must be reworked in egalitarian and liberal directions. A little 'modernity', then, but not too much.

Where Agamben's book chews paradoxes, so they might become useful for philosophy and the basis of an ethics, Seidler's book slides over them too easily. So, for example, we are told that 'paradoxically' German

Jews survived in larger numbers, but we are not given clues as to why – here the word 'paradox' is just another name for failure of attention, *or* lack of interest, because such details, while relevant for a more adequate understanding of experience and the Holocaust, of European Jewry and its partial destruction, have no role to play in this narrative that mobilizes history as memory and remembering as therapy, for a trauma at least once removed.

Both books hope to found a post-Holocaust/post-modern ethics – something that has set itself in contra-distinction to 'politics'. One (Agamben) claims his main aim is to correct the terms of testimony and survival 'with which we register the decisive lesson of the century', making 'it possible to leave certain words behind and others to be understood in a different sense'. For him, all is a question of semantics. The other is consumed by a now overused language – the wonderfully marketable metaphorics of Auschwitz: 'ruins of memory', 'living with shadows', 'broken histories', an image bundle tailored to express the unrepresentability of the Holocaust – depicting while acknowledging partiality, incompleteness. This rhetoric has become conventional, and suggests a poetics of Auschwitz, an aestheticizing adornment, that Adorno so suspected. Can an ethics or an analysis take place when the phrases so overdetermine, overpower, thought? An arrangement of and about fragments licenses an intermittent reasoning. Perhaps it is time for this poetics of remnants to be remaindered.

Esther Leslie

Table talk

Rebecca L. Spang, *The Invention of the Restaurant: Paris and Modern Gastronomic Culture*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA and London, 2000. ix + 325 pp., £23.50 hb., 0 674 00064 1.

J.M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, Profile Books, London, 2000. 125 pp., £4.99 pb., 1 86197 258 X.

The blurb to Rebecca Spang's history of the restaurant asks why anybody would consider eating to be an enjoyable leisure activity – a question which seems either impossibly metaphysical or utterly naive. But the work itself skilfully avoids subverting itself in either of these directions, while unfolding a narrative that is fascinatingly ramified in what it has to tell us about the place of eating in French life and politics from the mid-eighteenth century. This is the story of the restaurant from its origin, in Paris in the 1760s as a kind of urban spa, via its transformation, in the period of the Revolution, into a contested and politicized public forum, to its establishment in the course of the nineteenth century as depoliticized refuge, devoted to the essentially 'aesthetic' pursuit of *gourmandise* and the 'art of eating'.

The restaurant takes its name from the restorative medicinal *bouillons* to which its 'menu' was initially restricted. It offered itself as a place where the 'weak-chested' (a diagnosis referring as much to the cultural sensibilities of its victims as to any precise physical malady) could benefit from (and debate the merits of) its refined and spiritually revitalizing concoctions. As a culinary style which promised to restore through innovation, the restaurant *nouvelle cuisine* readily figured as burlesque version of the famous Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns as to whether humanity was progressing or in decay, and its emergent restaurant culture was, as Spang puts it, 'inscribed – right from its beginnings in a tightly sealed soup kettle – in debates about modernity and historical change'.

Restaurateurs, however, were quick to understand that the seductions of their new institution lay more in its individualizing practices than its ascetic regime, and within a couple of decades had greatly varied the fare on offer. In the restaurant, for the first time, diners could escape the set meal times, lack of choice and common board of the *table d'hôte* offered in the inn or ordinary caterer's eating house. It provided, in short, a very congenial way of remaining private in public; and as such, Spang suggests, can be viewed as the emergence of a specific formation within the general opening up of what Habermas has termed the 'public sphere'. But as a site where private intimacies were subject to potential public exposure, the new milieu of the restaurant could prove awkward to negotiate: when Rousseau – renowned for his exacting line on truth-telling – is confronted in a famous restaurant by the pregnant daughter of the owner, and asked whether he has any children, he is hugely embarrassed and denies all knowledge of the five offspring he had by then fathered and left on the steps of the Foundling Hospital.

Politically, too, the restaurant is ambiguous. A meal place in the public eye, but also one whose *à la carte* self-indulgence and individualized modes of eating had brought it under suspicion by the late 1780s, in opposition to the egalitarian simplicity of the fraternal street repasts and honest fare of the *table d'hôte*. What Spang offers in this context is much more than a social history of the restaurant as institution: a highly nuanced and scholarly commentary on the centrality of

food and eating (who provides it, who serves it, who gets to eat it, who pays for it) as metaphor of political critique and counter-critique during the years of the French Revolution and its immediate aftermath.

In the final episodes of her story, Spang turns attention to the emergence of Paris during the nineteenth century as European gastronomic centre and the resituating of the restaurant as a site of pleasures conceived as quite distinct from and autonomous of the vagaries of political life and other cultural controversies. Kant may have insisted on the distinction between the pure aesthetic judgement and the judgement on the 'agreeable', but on Spang's account this ahistorical abstraction of the pleasures of the table goes along with an increasing disposition to treat cuisine as art form, and to present judgements on the tastes of food and wine as if they could and should win universal assent. Spang, however, draws attention to the possible satire of the delirious effusions on peas, pastries and partridges to be found in such early forms of *gourmand* journalism as Grimod de la Reynière's *Almanach des Gourmands*, and is informative throughout on the evasions and repressions concealed within the discourses of gastronomic abstraction.

This is a book which works on a number of different levels. There is meat and drink here for those interested in the metaphysical and metaphorical aspects of eating; a wealth of erudition on some relatively little studied aspects of Enlightenment culture and the French Revolution; and for those scholars of the period who follow convention in regarding the rise of the French restaurant as epiphenomenon of the French Revolution, a well-presented challenge to their account.

The animal extractions that launched the French restaurant are the juices which revolted Plutarch. 'You ask me,' he writes in his moral essays, 'why I refuse to eat flesh. I, for my part, am astonished that you can put in your mouth the corpse of a dead animal, astonished that you do not find it nasty to chew hacked flesh and swallow the juices of death-wounds.' The 'Plutarch Response' (as the narrator-son refers to it in Coetzee's curious tale of animal rights) is a favourite with Elizabeth Costello, the mother and central figure in the book. A distinguished literary figure, best known for her novel about the life of the fictional Mrs Marion Bloom, Costello is invited to give the annual Gates lectures at Appleton College. But Costello is also a passionate vegetarian, and, in lieu of the expected address on her own work, she lectures her American academic audience on the nature of animal being and the horrors of meat-eating. In this, she draws for support on the works of Kafka, Swift and Ted Hughes, among others, and is hostile in varying degrees to Descartes, Peter Singer, Michael Leahy and Thomas Nagel. Her argument is shockingly insensitive in its comparison between animal slaughter and Jewish genocide. It is inconsistent in its anti-anthropocentricity, objecting, on the one hand, (and rightly) to any assimilation between great apes and mentally impaired humans, while, on the other hand, insisting that humans can have no problems in imagining what it is like to be a bat (or, so one is given to believe, any other form of animal). Overall, her discourse is a strange amalgam: arresting in its insights, but often missing the point, interestingly elliptical yet emotionally jarring, and her audience (not least her son and daughter-in-law) are variously offended, irritated, compelled and perplexed.

The opposition voiced in the novel (some of which comes with footnotes) is eloquent, the questions posed apt and provocative. Yet Costello is presented as always in some sense beyond their overly narrow commitment to rational argument. Her case is about empathy and rests on an intuitive feel for the being of the animal. Philosophical reasoning is thus (at least in the somewhat limited form in which it is represented in the novel) hobbled from the start, and Costello's confidence in her own empathies remains unshakeable. So, too, one feels, does her belief in her own sanity, despite the doubts she expresses about this to her son on departing.

Coetzee is himself a vegetarian, who delivered his novel about Costello in two parts as his own Tanner lectures in 1997–8. (It was originally published by Princeton University Press with critical essays by other writers.) *The Lives of Animals* is, at one level, an admirably succinct orchestration of the animal rights debate; and it is one that powerfully captures the truth that, since the issues raised in the debate turn on the status and value of reason itself, there is a limit to which they are susceptible to rational disputation. In many respects, it instantiates the claims that can be made in favour of literary intimation over philosophical assertion. But at the same time there is something manipulative, even a kind of dishonesty, in its very refusal to acknowledge its own agenda. Coetzee creates a screen of fiction and dialogic argument in order to spare himself the exposure of saying what he himself really thinks to be true. But if this is, as his character Costello insists, that meat-eating is a stupefying crime analogous to the Nazi Holocaust, then the charge is so grave that any concealment of position on it seems tainted by moral cowardice.

Kate Soper

The administration of disorder

Mark Neocleous, *The Fabrication of Social Order: A Critical Theory of Police*, Pluto Press, London, 2000. xv + 160 pp., £45.00 hb., £14.99 pb., 07453 489 9 hb., 07456 484 8 pb.

For those of us who came to politics during the 1960s and 1970s, the idea that the police were an 'impersonal and non-partisan legal authority, … cultivat[ing] a service role', as Reiner describes the popular myth, is a bad joke. British politics during that period were characterized by a massive concern with public order and its breakdown, and the police were seen as the instrument by which public order could be restored. In a way, the instrumental role of the police in the establishment of state ends, during the industrial disputes of the 1970s, the Brixton and Toxteth riots, the 1984/5 miners' strike, was never more obvious, as the question of order, and specifically capitalist order, was posed in a naked way. The obfuscations of what Neocleous here describes as the liberal understanding of police and security fell away during an extended moment of political crisis. What is remarkable is the rapid reveiling of the police connection to *raison d'état* during the last decade, where the police project has received a new articulation in the guise of 'policing by consent', which was an attempt to construct a new hegemonic understanding of the police as, again, neutrally situated as arbiter within a plural constituency. That this project is open-ended, never completed, only serves to point up the contradictory task of attempting to yoke the policing function – in essence a moment of force – to a notion of consent which relies on ideas of interest and advantage.

The salutary virtue of Mark Neocleous's short but rich text is his clarity in exposing this constant role of police in the establishment of not only public order but the social order as such: not merely its restitution after infraction, as would follow from a concern with crime and the breaking of the law, but its fabrication, an active engagement in the production of the social. For Neocleous, police is a function which is not restricted to the narrow domain of crime and the apprehension of those who break the law, but rather is a moment of the state's production of a chosen social order: police is the means by which a given order is secured.

The first chapter outlines the origins of police in the breakdown of feudalism, and the shift from a backward-looking attempt to reimpose the norms of a decaying order to a concern with the general good, and the attempt to fabricate the conditions of the general welfare. The police state of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is in fact a policy state, a state in which police are the administrators and guardians of the general good. The connections here between mercantilism, absolutism and the construction of the bureaucratic state are particularly well drawn. In subsequent chapters, Neocleous is concerned to see how this police function operates, albeit disguisedly, under regimes where the market economy has begun to exercise its determination. Police operates as a fabricator of order, even whilst disavowing this very role, claiming its sole concern as crime and the enforcement of the law. Neocleous's unpicking of this ideological sleight of hand is extremely well done. It demonstrates through a close reading of the founding texts of English police science, and with an attention to historical detail, that the object of police was precisely the class of poverty, the basis for the production of surplus value. Police strategy was to ensure that this class was disposed to accept the wage form, first by eliminating any possibility of different means of subsistence – poor law relief or charity – and then by drawing a sharp line of criminality between perquisites and wages in kind and wages as such. The strong claim is that police were a moment in the production of the working class in that they ensured the discipline of money wages and the criminalizing and punishment of non-wage appropriation. Police thus had a central role in the transition to the market economy, and in management of the mechanisms of social control.

The problem for capital, however, is that its order is founded on private property, a foundation that is constantly insecure, and must be secured by the exercise of power. This is the police function: the production of security, by the administration of disorder. That disorder constantly threatens as the basis of private property, the expropriated labour of the poor cannot be relied on: capital always risks losing mastery over the class that it masters. That class always threatens to refuse its subalternity, and hence security is an unfinished and perpetual process.

The historical development of police indicates that the police function extends outwards through the state as other agencies take over the multiple tasks that the police *sensu strictu* fulfilled in the early nineteenth century. Neocleous discusses their order role in the production of municipal hygiene and sanitation, later

taken over by 'medical police', and their role in information-gathering and administration within the provision of poor law relief, a function subsequently taken over by 'social administration' with the development of the 'welfare state'. Nevertheless, police are constantly deployed in order-making tasks, or disorder-diminishing tasks quite other than their supposed law-enforcing functions – and it is precisely this imprecision which is essential to their functioning. Neocleous notes that there is no conceivable matter that could not be the business of police, and this extension of the field of police intervention to the whole of the social links with their anomalous position with regard to law, and their operation of an extensive power of discretion in what is a matter of their concern. In his final chapter, Neocleous gives an admirably pithy and polemic discussion of 'legal fetishism', the separation of law from the ensemble of social relations, and its mistaken identification with justice.

Neocleous's discussion has a clarity of focus which is especially illuminating in the account of the establishment of capitalism in England. I was less convinced by the functionalism which he evinces in more general discussion: there is a tendential supposition of state apparatuses working smoothly together in a common project, and that project happily in tune with the interests of an undifferentiated capital. 'Bourgeois' and 'capitalist' do a lot of work in the text, occasionally giving one pause: 'in class society this means that the police dispense violence on behalf of the bourgeois class' begs a few mediations. The peculiarities of the English might support such a model, although the complexity of capital formation in Britain suggests a more nuanced picture. The polemic energy against the myth of a neutral and law-bound police service leads to occasional simplifications or plain rant in the last chapter, which seems the most breathless: witness the discussion of deference, with its officers 'institutionalized to achieve order at all times' who 'cannot cope with ambiguity in any way', which suggests an overwrought psychologizing. This identification of function and subject leads Neocleous into repeating the Foucauldian error he complains of in his introduction, where 'police officers themselves' fail to appear in the text.

The police function is carried out by an institution recruited from that very class it is designated to police. The formation of this institution, its own cultural moment and subjectification, the contradictions and conflicts that take place internally and in relation to other state agencies, all seem worthy of the sort of assiduous analysis that Neocleous has carried out on its functional deployment. The current 'demoralization' of the police, for example, may well be connected to the failure of deference, and the inadequacy of the institution to the contradictory tasks demanded of it. And one might wish for a more extended discussion of policing in colonial and postcolonial contexts where the production of order is related in a complex way to the reproduction of multiple relations of subalternity. The sketches of police function in 'exceptional' states could be expanded. But Neocleous's book is to be warmly welcomed as a rescuing of the discussion of police from a narrow focus on crime, and from a misconstrued debate about reform or re-enforcement that systematically misunderstands the fundamental coercion involved in the very notion of policing.

Philip Derbyshire

Rebirth

Michel Serres, *The Birth of Physics*, Introduction by David Webb, translated by Jack Hawkes, Clinamen Press, Manchester, 2000. xxii + 192 pp., £45.00 hb., £18.99 pb., 1 903083 04 4 hb., 1 903083 03 6 pb.

Born in 1930, Michel Serres is of the same generation as Derrida, Deleuze and Foucault. However, in spite of a substantial body of work which includes over twenty full-length books, he has never received the kind of international recognition enjoyed by his contemporaries. There are signs, however, that Serres may finally be getting the kind of attention he deserves. Over the past few years a number of Serres's recent works have been published by American academic presses. However, because these works tend to take for granted a familiarity with his earlier material,

their appearance has done relatively little to promote a real understanding of Serres's unique perspective. Clinamen's decision to publish *The Birth of Physics*, one of Serres's most important books which contains many of his key ideas, is cause for celebration. In fact, for the small but rapidly growing band of Serres enthusiasts, there should be a double celebration since Clinamen have also recently published *The Dialectic of Duration* by Gaston Bachelard, who was Serres's thesis supervisor and a major influence on the development of his thought. The appearance of these two works together is a major step towards placing the neglected tradition of French philosophy of science back in the spotlight.

One reason philosophers have so far shown little interest in Serres's writings is that, for many first-time readers, it is not immediately obvious that what they are dealing with is, in fact, philosophy at all. For example, Serres hardly ever uses philosophical terminology and rarely refers to other philosophers. But perhaps more worryingly for philosophers, his writing appears to be devoid of the kind of 'critical' perspective they take to be the defining characteristic of their discipline. Yet – as Bruno Latour clearly recognizes when he refers, ironically, to Serres's apparent 'naivety' – far from having neglected or simply overlooked epistemological questions, Serres considers himself to have moved beyond them.

Following Bachelard, Serres maintains that the division of labour that has existed between scientists and philosophers, whereby the former make claims about the world and the latter investigate the basis of those claims, while at the same time examining the concepts which inform and guide empirical research, rests on a false dichotomy and that the sciences have their own 'endo-epistemology'. Briefly stated, what he means by this is that, since every claim concerning some set of objects is always, at the same time, a claim about what we can know, each time a (paradigmatic) scientific theory is successfully challenged the theory of knowledge which is implied in that theory is also undermined. Thus, the passage from Newtonian mechanics to statistical thermodynamics is an epistemological revolution as well as a scientific one, since it takes us from determinism and the belief in certainty to indeterminacy and probabilistic modes of reasoning – a revolution which David Webb describes very well in his excellent Introduction to this volume. Consequently, Serres rejects the whole post-Kantian conception of philosophy as a 'transcendental' discourse and opts instead for what he calls a philosophy of 'synthesis' in which the role of the philosopher is not to inquire into the conditions for knowledge in general (something which the sciences already do as a matter of course), but to roam freely over the whole domain of knowledge, opening up 'passages' between narrow disciplinary specialisms and weaving together seemingly unconnected problematics so as to create new possibilities for thought.

The passages opened up by *The Birth of Physics* are between science, literature and philosophy. This is done through a reading of Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, which Serres believes has been largely ignored by philosophers and scientists because they take it to be nothing more than a historical curiosity, a poem based on the ancients' conception of atoms. For Serres, however, a careful analysis reveals it to be a complex treatise on the mechanics of fluids which, in some respects, anticipates the non-linear dynamics of twentieth-century physics. The concept of the 'clinamen', for example, which means something like 'first curvature', ought to be interpreted as an early attempt to understand what we now call 'bifurcation'. But Lucretius is also of interest, Serres argues, for his discussion of the relationship between knowledge and violence. Consequently, far from being a subject only for Latin scholars and a handful of historians of science, Lucretius should be viewed as having an important contribution to make to current debates.

As well as providing the reader with a particularly effective demonstration of Serres's often dazzling hermeneutic skills, *The Birth of Physics* provides an almost ideal point of entry into Serres's work as a whole, since it announces many of the central themes of his later writings, while at the same time giving the uninitiated some sense of his method. So, in the absence of any reliable secondary material on Serres, *The Birth of Physics* should serve as an intriguing introduction to an exciting body of work.

Alan Murray

Pardon?

Paul Ricoeur, *The Just*, trans. David Pellauer, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2000. xxiv + 161 pp., £13.00 hb., 0 226 71339 3.

This book confirms Ricoeur's self-identification as a post-Hegelian Kantian. He shares the faith in threefold analyses, often following the pattern of thesis, antithesis and a possible mediation. The success and details of these mediations are often left open by Ricoeur, as he stresses the conflictual and tragic nature of many phenomena. Instead of conceptually guaranteed mediations Ricoeur analyses paradigmatic means of practical mediations. For example, narratives have

for Ricoeur such mediating roles between different poles of identity, and practical judgements can mediate between different poles of morality.

The Just, which originally appeared in French in 1995, consists of lectures and essays based on Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another*, and especially the 'little ethics' included in it. The novelties of this book are the analyses of different phases of juridical practice: hearing, judging, sanction, rehabilitation and pardon. It is fascinating to read how Ricoeur analyses these with his hermeneutics of detours or hermeneutics of distanciation, attempting to do justice to both interpretation and argumentation, both punishment and pardon, and so on.

One lecture concerns the complementary relation of argumentation and interpretation in the phase of hearing. Ricoeur tries to show by internal criticism how Dworkin's interpretative and Alexy's argumentative approaches need mutual supplementation. Another lecture concerns the act of judging. The short-term function of the judgement is to state what the law is in a singular situation, whereas the long-term function is to contribute to social peace. Ricoeur applies the idea of reflective judgement to judicial judging, following Hannah Arendt in expanding Kant's notion of reflective judgement to new areas. Yet he voices some reservations because Arendt is dismissive towards Kant's second critique and the late doctrine of right.

Ricoeur also devotes an essay to the execution of the penalty and the functions of rehabilitation and pardon. Ricoeur agrees with both Kant and Hegel in stressing the penalty as an act of recognition, and not as vengeance. On the whole, the very point of juridical process is to replace immediate vengeance with just distance between the parties of the dispute. Analyses of the distributive justice of both Rawlsian and Walzerian type get more space in this book than in *Oneself as Another*, and they are also interestingly compared to a pluralistic theory of justification developed by Boltanski and Thevenot. Two essays on Rawls are included: one on *Theory of Justice* and one on Rawls's later writings stressing the problem of stability.

For someone expecting more details than the general pictures drawn in *Oneself as Another*, a short book consisting mainly of lectures is a disappointment. The level of analysis remains on the general level of drawing maps rather than arguing for these maps in detail. But I think the way of drawing these maps is Ricoeur's real strength. He seems to capture the crucial points relating to the debates around the notion of justice – the universalism–contextualism debate, for example.

Owing partly to the Hegelian critique of Kantian morality, Ricoeur gives an Aristotelian teleological grounding for ethics, thus subscribing first to the thesis of a priority of an aim for a good life over imperatives of justice. Yet the possibility of wrong and violence inherent in human action necessitates the deontological perspective as a complementation to the teleological perspective. Thus Ricoeur subscribes secondly to the thesis of the priority of the just over the good, following Kant's second critique. Third, this teleological and deontological double perspective finds its final determination in practical judgements in situations. Singular decisions in concrete situations are analysed in terms of Aristotelian *phronesis*, Gadamerian 'application' and Kantian reflective judgement. Thus Ricoeur tries to synthesize the kind of Kantianism (e.g. Rawls's and Habermas's) which relies on the second critique, with the kind of Kantianism (e.g. Hannah Arendt's) which relies on the third critique.

These three moral predicates (the good, the obligatory and the phronetic) form a vertical hierarchy and are equally necessary according to Ricoeur. All of these can be approached from three horizontal perspectives: questions concerning oneself, concrete others and generalized others. Thus the perspective of justice is horizontally the perspective of generalized others, and it goes through all the vertical levels: the basis is a sense of justice as a good, which is mediated through the perspective of justice as impartial principles and applied to concrete cases in the form of equity.

Ricoeur draws a further threefold distinction within this perspective of justice. Generalized others can be approached first of all atomistically, considering everyone in abstraction of institutions as a pre-social individual or a member of the Kantian kingdom of ends. Ricoeur is critical towards such atomism: 'Without institutional mediation, individuals are only the initial drafts of human persons.' Second, generalized others can be approached as members of institutions, of a Rawlsian distributive basic structure of society. Ricoeur sees Rawls's 'distributive holist' perspective of society as an important middle path between methodological individualism *à la* Weber and collectivism *à la* Durkheim. Third, the question of justice can be approached from the more specific viewpoint of legal institutions. It is the analysis of the legal perspective to justice, as well as the insightful use of the general architecture of 'threefolds' that make up the strengths of this book.

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