immediately: he cannot see it, as it were, face to face... Instead of dealing with the things themselves man is in a sense constantly conversing with himself. He has so enveloped himself in linguistic forms, in artistic images, in mythical symbols or religious rites that he cannot see or know anything except by the interposition of this artificial medium.

(An Essay on Man, pp24-25)

As the basic concepts of science are obtained by a synthesising act of the mind, so, Cassirer goes on to argue, that synthesising activity of the mind determines all types of knowledge. Our concepts, in whatever field, are man-created intellectual symbols by means of which experiential contexts are established.

Natorp of the Marburg school had stressed that particularists do not remain isolated but are merged into a context determined and defined by causal interrelations. Cassirer extends this, holding that the causal mode of integration is but one of many possible modes. 'Objectification' is achieved and the particular is fused into a context by many means other than logical concepts and laws of logical relations. Art, mythology and religion are all held by Cassirer to exemplify those other possible types of integration - but they do not merely reflect an empirically 'given'. All constitute their 'objects', their 'world' in conformity with some independent principle of integration.

Each creates its own symbolic forms, forms which are not of the same type as the symbols of science but which, nevertheless, are epistemologically equivalent to them, coming as they do from the same sources. No one of these differing types of symbols can be fully represented by any other, nor can it be translated into or derived from any other. These types of symbols are not to be regarded as different ways in which the one and same 'thing-in-itself' reveals itself to us - rather, they are modes whereby the mind achieves its 'objectification' of experience. Kant's 'Copernican Revolution' then, has to be extended to all spheres. The validity of each approach cannot be derived from an object, for that object presupposes the symbolic activity and is constituted by it. There is no realm of absolute fact serving as an immutable datum. What we call fact is always theoretically orientated in some way, seen in regard to some context and implicitly determined thereby. Theoretical elements do not somehow become added to a 'merely factual' but they enter into the constitution of the factual itself.

Cassirer published a number of works on the history of philosophy, notably those on the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and in his more systematic works he makes extensive forays into the history of philosophy. Criticism has been levelled at Cassirer on the lines that his approach to the history of philosophy is limited by his overriding concern for the idea of symbolic form. Such criticism is certainly justified about his last work, The Myth of the State, written in 1945, in which Cassirer tried to offer some critical light on the theories that allowed the rise of National Socialism in Germany in the '30s. Here, Cassirer's concern with man's symbolic activity shapes his whole analysis of political thought. He argues that man by his symbolic activity creates his world, and that any attempts to regard symbolic worlds as absolute realities, beyond critical discussion and change, constitutes a denial and evasion of man's proper freedom. If The Myth of the State is seen as a history of political thought then there are obvious defects in Cassirer's fundamental concern: to show that what is offered as 'fact' or 'reality' is but one of many possibilities, and that symbolic thought endows man with the ability to constantly reshape his human universe.

Bibliographical Note

Cassirer's most important work is the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. The English translation has a useful introduction to the work of Cassirer by C.W. Heldel (in vol.1). Cassirer also write An Essay on Man (New Haven, 1944) as an introduction to his thought for English readers.


Ordinary Language and Radical Philosophy

Vincent di Norcia

Prior to the task of educating the workers, peasants and soldiers, there is the task of learning from them.

Mao Tse-Tung

The debate provoked in RP8 by the relatively innocuous editorial comments in RP6 on the problem of 'orthodox English-language philosophy' surprised me. It has seemed unable to sort out the complex relations between radical philosophy and common sense. Some fundamental distinctions are not being made. And they must be made, if one is to develop an emancipatory philosophy and not an ideological one. Sayers, in his zeal to reject ordinary language philosophy (or OLP) tends to see only ideology in ordinary language. Of course, Stoljar has represented a propagandist victory of upper class talk over the levelling realism of plain people's language. But both usages are part of ordinary language.

The RP editorial itself started with the tradition...
disciplinary, or philosophical, not-in-the-same-sense, of course, since Ryle "can", "may", or "should" criticize rules, and, with Oakeshott, that rationality is not preposterous in explicit precepts and (p58), and of 'meaningful development in response to environmental changes' entails 'the means of assessing the significance of the behaviour which it prescribes' (p64). But he also argues that rules of proper performance are constrained by 'current, socially established standards' which constitute an 'external check' for the individual (p119, 32), and, as Wittgenstein wrote, 'justifications must be brought to an end somewhere'. These standards must therefore be established independently of the individual's will' (p39). It is not surprising then that for Winch the anarchist differs from others inasmuch as he lives according to implicit but different and flexible, 'stylistic' rules (p52). But surely an anarchist's 'non-conformity in explicit precepts and (p58), and of conservative 'established standards', and (2) may constitute the creation of new social rules and standards.

These possibilities are obscured by Winch's unimpressed desire to bring justifications to an end. This surely means merely that in the normal course of events people take the bases of their everyday activities for granted. It does not mean that they can or should not put the most fundamental social standards of action in question if the need arises. If they can, do, and should, then the limit to justification represented by social standards is merely practical. Winch's thesis is not a philosophically fundamental one. No public debate concerning justice, economic exploitation, ecological destruction by modern industrial economies, could get off the ground with so arbitrary a limitation to its extent. And such discussions are not to be restricted to the intelligentsia. They arise and have, as a form part of everyday life, at its very best. To such debates we might apply the phrase Collingwood used in his Autobiography for Marx's views, 'gloves off philosophy', just as we might apply to OLP his equally accurate label 'minute
We have been seeking independence from all the empires to which our history has bound us. One would think we would be less prone to accept the ideologies of Oxford ordinary language or Cambridge (UK or US) scientism. Paradoxically that is not the case. Rather they are successfully paraded in our universities as superior wisdom. Anglophones have used the Oxford position in opposition to the US-ophiles; and vice versa. Philosophically, only radical critique can dissolve these false ties we think to for and about ourselves. This situation has interesting implications for philosophy's relation to popular common sense. That relation was suggested in Mao's words quoted at the beginning. It is more developed in Paulo Freire's Pedagogy or the Oppressed. That both are from the third world is no accident. But what does it mean to listen to ordinary people? Especially when, as in colonial Canada, our culture is so alike the imperial culture of the US (and previously the UK), the messages sent by our common sense are often those of cheerful slavery and dependence. Cultural domination, C.W. Mills warned, can produce 'cheerful robots'. The critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse et al., who have been long engaged in analysing the repressiveness of modern culture, have shown how advanced industrial societies can co-opt to its purposes culture, common sense and language. What then are the consequences of common sense to a radical philosophy? First, such a philosophy must be intellectually sound. It would accept the help of linguistics and other sciences in understanding and describing how ordinary language operates internally, logically and socially. It would not ignore the findings of genuine research in the area. It would not talk about deep grammars but about the class structure implicit in normative grammars. 'Grammer', for example, is grammatical, if spoken where it occurs as a part of a local dialect. If it is acceptable among some people to say 'grammer' for 'grammar' and 'hoit' for 'hurt', then why is it only acceptible to write 'grammer' and 'hurt' and not the other way around? The answer to this question reveals the double-edged integrating function of print media as a social binder not only across regions but across classes. The same might be said of mid-Atlantic English, but not about the British use of an upper class dialect to control the other classes. For the latter represents a cross-class carry-over paradigm of 'proper English' and binds classes in a different, more traditional manner: upwardly. The Upper-crust uses its dialect to hold the whole loaf in place. However, that philosophers should respect their relevant findings of the place of ordinary language and common sense does not make the relation of philosophy and science any easier to formulate. I will have more to say about this in a minute. I am not suggesting for a moment that only through scientific methods can one develop an understanding of how language operates and reflects a social structure. The ordinary person's feel for the concrete phrase which tellingly hits off a point, his/her disdain of artsy, high class wordiness and euphemisms, testifies rather to a genuine linguistic realism, usually found in working class ways of speaking. This realism is testimony to the ability of unscientific consciousness to correctly use language to describe how the world is. This is my second point. Common sense and language, as ordinarily used by people in their everyday affairs, can and does disclose how the world is. It often does this better than do scientific formulations, general theories or scientific methods can one develop an understanding of how language operates and reflects a social structure. The ordinary person's feel for the concrete phrase which tellingly hits off a point, his/her disdain of artsy, high class wordiness and euphemisms, testifies rather to a genuine linguistic realism, usually found in working class ways of speaking. This realism is testimony to the ability of unscientific consciousness to correctly use language to describe how the world is. This is my second point. Common sense and language, as ordinarily used by people in their everyday affairs, can and does disclose how the world is. It often does this better than do scientific formulations, general theories or sophisticated high-class euphemisms. For in plain fact it is the stupidest statement possible that ordinary language must be listenened to by the radical scientific.
scientism. It is a problem of critical reflection which is infrequently encountered in everyday practice or is expressed in uncommonly abstract categories.

In that world those on the top know they are on the top, but they have difficulty in justifying their position to others. Those in the middle do not like to admit that there is a top and bottom, but blithely struggle on to reach the top, while sensing qualms of conscience in climbing over the bodies of their friends and standing on the shoulders of those underneath them. Unfortunately the latter group are hardly noticeable, precisely because they are down below. Those on the bottom, like those on the top, are usually more conscious of their social position. Unlike those on the top they are more aware that their position is a result of sheer power and its look among themselves and systematically unfair allocation to others. Explanation and description of the structure and its mechanisms are here not so easily transmuted into moralizing judgements or rhetorical legitimations. And when one seeks to perform something of value. True. But this licenses no monopoly for the sciences over all knowledge and rationality. Nor are they the sole matrix of social critique and emancipation. Such sciences involve a philosophical error of massive ideological proportions. Rather, the common sense of the new industrial state's top-middle-bottom model has become a quasi-autonomous new productive force whose potential for good is often not directed to the commonweal. In education scientific method has become a fetish used to alienate students (and teachers) from their own lives. Finally, modern sciences and techniques rationalise and support the new industrial state's imperial and class domination. They also display its competitive and hierarchical social relations. Therefore they, too, need radicalisation. 13

Nonetheless the sciences of man and nature do retain an emancipatory potential. They have served to eliminate many myths, mystifications and dogmas concerning the world and produce a better understanding of facts of reality not before comprehended. Scientific knowledge and technical know-how still do constitute human goods, but not unconditional or primary goods. 13

Radical philosophy can not then define itself solely in terms of common sense or science. It is constituted by a basic human project, that of social self-emancipation. Both the sciences and common sense can aid or retard that project. Nor are all scientific findings, however valid, or equivalent value to that project. It may have been better often for different research to have been proscribed.
Instead of the insignificant and useless knowledge so often produced. And some research has clearly been dangerous, e.g. in biological warfare and eugenics.

The result of this excursus is that radical philosophy must define itself in terms of the task of social liberation. It is part of the theoretical arm of that work. As such it cannot be neglected, at least not until the theory is realised in practice. Moreover radicals can not be know-nothings, since rationality is essential to their social critique. The project of liberation arises within common experience and practice, of course. Ordinary and theoretical reflection on that experience yields and articulates the criteria used in criticizing other areas of life. The criteria radical philosophy employs to criticize OLP as ideological cant, for example, are derived hence, at least in significant part. However, the fatalistic common sense of oppression can only be the object of radical critique, never its source. The repressive elements in common sense and the sciences inhibit their emancipatory potential and veil the ways in which they support domination.

In sum radical philosophy's attitude to both science and common sense is the same: where it helps, use it; where it doesn't, criticize it; where it gets in the way, remove it.

12 On this problem see the references in note 8 and the following works: J. Habermas, Toward a Rational Society and Knowledge and Human Interests (Beacon, 1970 and 1971); H. Marcuse, Negations (Beacon, 1969), ch.6; The Political Philosophy of Bakunin (Free Press, 1953), pp76-83; S. and H. Rose, 'The Radicalisation of Science' in the 1972 Socialist Register (Merlin, 1972), pp105-33; T. Ferguson, 'The Political Economy of Knowledge', Telos, no.15 (Spring, 1973), ppl24-36; and the March 1972 issue of Liberation (New York).


Discussion

Merleau-Ponty's Politics

Madan Sarup

A reply to Sonia Kruks' article 'The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty' RP11

By concentrating on only two of Merleau-Ponty's early works in her article, Sonia Kruks gives a rendering of his life-work that I do not agree with. Only in the penultimate paragraph does it become apparent that in his later work he came to reject not only the 'Communism of his time' but Marxism as well. In the following brief note I offer an alternative reading; I give an account of his rejection of Marxism by referring, mainly, to The Adventures of the Dialectic. Kruks writes that Merleau-Ponty's notion of a philosophy was of one who examines things 'in wonderment at the complexity and coherence of the world', but I want to ask: was his philosophy subversive? Does it bring the basic contradictions of capitalism to consciousness? Does his philosophy accelerate a development which leads to a society without exploitation?

It is often not generally known that Merleau-Ponty's rejection of Marxism reached its final form as early as 1955. His writing during this period gives one the impression of an individual immersed in himself; the question he is continually asking is: was he a Marxist or not? Defensively, he wrote that it did not make sense to ask whether one is a Marxist or not, since even those who reject Marxism do so only in terms of reasons which owe a lot to Marx. He contended that the contradictions within communist regimes belonged to theoretical Marxism as well. One of his main topics is the relationship between theory and practice, as exemplified in the roles that the proletariat and the Party play in history. He outlined three main interpretations of their inter-relationship which he held were embodied in Lenin, Lukacs, and Trotsky.

According to Merleau-Ponty:

Lenin refused to recognize that the proletariat could achieve a revolution on its own. By itself, its consciousness was limited, and to anticipate a spontaneous revolution would involve an indefinite period of waiting. Lenin therefore asserted that the political initiative had to come from a strong centrally-organized, vanguard Party.

Lukacs had a notion of dual mediation: on the one hand, the Party mediates between the proletariat and history, and on the other, the proletariat mediates between the Party and history. Lukacs hoped for an equal mediatisation in which the Party and the proletariat together bring about proletarian consciousness and lead it to action. This view however is in conflict with the Leninist view, in which the Party is the final interpreter of history for everyone. As is well known, Lukacs' early work was repudiated by official communist circles and by its author. Trotsky believed in the spontaneity of the proletariat, with the Party playing only a minor role. Such a belief in the proletariat, Merleau-Ponty thought, can only be based on some notion of scientific predictability, or historical determinism - the notion that history is so determined that the proletariat will automatically come to power.

Merleau-Ponty was thus torn between Lenin's elitist view or some sort of historical determinism. He did not believe in the Leninist view because he felt that the Party had betrayed the Revolution, and had become the new ruling class. Nor could he be a historical determinist as the proletariat had failed to materialize in any universal form. As early as 1948 he was acknowledging that the proletariat had forgotten its mission. In his last statement on this question he declared that the...