

In Defence of Internal Relations

Bertell Ollman

I

Most of the criticisms of *Alienation* have centered on my account of Marx's philosophy of internal relations. I would like to take advantage of the appearance of a second edition to develop my defence of this philosophy beyond the brief remarks found in the appendix on this subject.

In ascribing a philosophy of internal relations to Marx, I intended to call attention to the assumption of identity which underlies his analysis of the different processes and institutions of capitalist society. As Relations, these processes are conceived of as aspects of each other and of the whole they come together to compose. Their mutual dependence or reciprocal interaction can be viewed within each Relation in turn, the chief difference being one of focus and perspective on the whole. After examining some of the problems of language posed by this approach, I used it to help explain Marx's conception of human nature and his theory of alienation.

According to many critics, this assumption of identity makes it impossible to register let alone account for real differences. If Marx had a philosophy of internal relations, it is asked, how could he distinguish between processes which are closely related, those which are loosely related and those which - for all practical purposes - are unrelated? How can he say that something has different relations at different times, if with the change of relations the thing itself changes? Regarding alienation, if each of the practises and institutions of capitalism reflect the same alienated whole, how could Marx distinguish between degrees and stages of alienation? In the same instance, where everything is necessarily related, how can alienation be represented as a sundering of relations? If - in virtue of the philosophy of internal relations - every society constitutes a totality, how can Marx treat capitalism as an emergent totality and as a more fully integrated social system than any which came before? How, too, can Marx represent dysfunctions and contradictions in the capitalist system when the functional dependence of its parts is taken as given and necessary?

Finally, and - judging from how often it was mentioned - most problematic, how can any system based on the philosophy of internal relations single out any process or set of processes as 'primary' or 'ultimately determining'? If all the variables which enter into Marx's analysis are equal, in this case possessing an equal identity as expressions of the whole, how can some be more equal than others? And if they cannot be, it is argued, not only does my interpretation fly in the face of Marx's practise of attributing a primacy to the mode of production and economic processes generally but it renders any meaningful explanation of social phenomena impossible.¹

The form of these criticisms is very similar: certain distinctions appear in Marx's writings, but the philosophy of internal relations - it is said - would not allow him to make these distinctions or to give them adequate weight. Before responding, I would only like to point out that most of the people who make these criticisms believe my book also contains useful explanations of some of Marx's theories (they differ, of course, on which these are). Surely, no explanation is

possible with an interpretive scheme which does not permit one to make distinctions, but if it is admitted that I succeed in recognizing and working with some distinctions (that my approach is responsible for certain creditable insights) how can it be claimed that it is impossible for me in principle to make others? Whether in actual fact I make all the distinctions that are called for is something else again. A possible rejoinder, of course, is that I am not entirely consistent in holding to a philosophy of internal relations, that I covertly import external relations in order to invoke distinctions; and it is this rejoinder - the possibility that I am and have to be inconsistent - which keeps the debate from coming to an abrupt halt right here.

In brief, my response to the criticisms mentioned above is first, that the distinctions indicated there do exist in Marx's writings (I only listed claims with which I am in basic agreement); second, that the philosophy of internal relations does not prohibit Marx (or me in interpreting Marx) from making any of these distinctions; and third, that these distinctions are present in *Alienation* to the extent required by my chosen subject matter.

Although everything in Marx's world is internally related, on the basis of his research some things are found to be more closely related than others (clearly, there are two senses of 'relation' involved here). The same thing can be treated as having different relations at different times if Marx decides (in order to deal with a particular problem) to abstract such changes from his conception of the thing. Each capitalist practice and institution reflects the alienated relationships of the whole system, but the more distinctive qualities of alienation - separation from and loss of control over one's immediate environment, mistaking human for inhuman agencies, manipulation by indifferent and/or hostile forces, etc - exhibit differences of degree and form both between classes and through various stages in the development of capitalist society. Admitting the one does not mean that Marx (and I) cannot, on the basis of concrete investigations, recognize the other. Though all manifestations of alienation are internally related, each has its source in the sundering of species relations between the individual and his activity, product and other people (here again 'relation' is used in two different senses). The same applies to the concept 'totality' where all societies are said to be totalities but capitalism is treated as an emergent totality and as one that is somehow more integrated than other societies. Likewise, disequilibrating contradictions can coexist with a necessary functional dependence because two different levels of existence are involved. Lastly, as regards the special place in Marxism of the mode of production, the assumption that everything is internally related in no way keeps Marx (or me) from emphasizing those influences which are found to be more important.

II

But if I can assert (and often develop) what I should not even be able to think, why is it that so many serious readers have believed otherwise? In a not very different situation - though in

To appear in the 2nd edition of *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society*.

stronger language that is appropriate for this occasion - Marx declared, 'It is characteristic of the entire crudeness of "common sense", which takes its rise from the "full life" and does not cripple its natural features by philosophy or other studies, that where it succeeds in seeing a distinction it fails to see a unity, and where it sees a unity it fails to see a distinction. If "common sense" establishes distinction determinations, they immediately petrify surreptitiously and it is considered the most reprehensible sophistry to rub together these conceptual blocks in such a way that they catch fire.'² Few of the critics cited see themselves as defenders of 'common sense' (indeed, most would call themselves Marxists), but they all share with this school the either/or approach to identity and difference. Marx, on the other hand, considered any study that treated only one of these relations a distortion of reality. Using this quotation as my basic text, I would like to reformulate my views on Marx's philosophy of internal relations, placing special stress this time on the dialectical conception of identity.

If Marx takes account equally of identity and difference, their order in his thinking is identity first and then difference. As part of his way of viewing the world, Marx took identity for granted. It is the relation between mutually dependent aspects of a whole before differences are noted. The aspects, as yet unnamed because unspecified, are identical in containing through their internal relations with each other the same whole. There are basically three different notions of the whole in philosophy: (1) the atomistic conception, already present in Descartes and dominant in modern philosophy, that views the whole as the sum of simple facts; (2) the formalist conception, apparent in Schelling, Hegel and most modern structuralists, that attributes an identity to the whole independent of its parts and asserts the absolute predominance of this whole over the parts. The real historical subjects in this case are the pre-existing, autonomous tendencies and structures of the whole and research is undertaken mainly to provide illustrations. Facts which don't 'fit' are either ignored or treated as unimportant residue; and (3) the dialectical and materialist conception of Marx (often confused with the formalist notion) that views the whole as the structured interdependence of its relational parts - the interacting events, processes and conditions of the real world - as observed from any major part. Since the ordering of elements and their relative importance varies according to the vantage point adopted, this view admits as many totalities (structured wholes) as there are take-off points for analysis.³

Though the dialectical and materialist whole can only be approached from its parts, the actual parts from which the whole is observed and receives its peculiar and complementary structurations are the result of decisions to break up the whole in just this way. In the text, I spoke of this as the problem of individuation - how do the units that are internally related get established in the first place? Dietzgen, whose work in this area received the endorsement of both Marx and Engels, argues - as I indicated - that the possibilities of sorting out and organizing the qualities available to sense experience are endless, and that what is a thing here is but a predicate of some other thing there. The actual decision on where to draw the line, what qualities to include and which to exclude, is made by each individual on the basis of his experience and needs

(given the importance of one's relationship to the prevailing mode of production this generally means class experiences and class needs) as well as the broad similarities found in nature itself.

Assuming identity before noting and establishing differences permitted Marx to see identity where he saw differences and vice versa. Whereas taking differences as prior, attributing an ontological status to external relations, restricts the notion of identity to the Aristotelian equation of $A=A$, where both A s refer to the same static, narrowly defined unit, a unit that has already been declared different from everything else. On this conception, identity and difference are mutually exclusive, and the relation between any two units of reality must be one or the other. This is, of course, the either/or approach to identity and difference adopted by most of my critics. As indicated in *Alienation*, however, whenever accepted boundaries are taken as ontologically given, the task of understanding (therefore, too, of analyzing and presenting) particular interactions and developments is complicated by the need to show that they can occur. The importance of context for any thing appearing and functioning as it does is consistently neglected and undervalued, just as change consistently evokes surprise, because neither is taken as an essential feature of the thing itself. Furthermore, with no ties or changes taken for granted only those found are counted; others are assumed - for all practical purposes - not to exist. Within this view, all pressures operate to reduce reality to appearances, explanations to one-sided causal accounts, and finally knowledge itself to partial and distorted truths controlled by mutually ignoring and ignorant disciplines. No one who conceives of reality in terms of external relations is immune from these pressures, though countervailing forces do exist which can reduce or delay their effect. Only the procedure that moves from the whole to the part, only the prior acceptance of the identity of each part in the whole, permits adequate reflection on the complex changes and interaction that constitute the core qualities of the real world.

Marx does not seem to have had much difficulty in individuating the units which he sets out to investigate and report on. At the beginning, as with everyone else, it was the common experience of the people of his time and place imbibed as parts of the language and culture that mainly determined the character of these units. Very soon, however, Marx's own studies - given the philosophy of internal relations he adopted upon his encounter with Hegel - drove him to extend the boundaries of these units in keeping with the relations he uncovered. It is undoubtedly the case, for example, that the very young Marx grasped 'labor' simply as a synonym for 'productive activity'. With his conversion to the philosophy of internal relations, 'labor' comes to be understood as a social Relation with productive activity as its core notion but including as well the necessary conditions and results of the kind of production which goes on in capitalism. As such, labor becomes a vantage point for viewing (and inquiring into and presenting) the whole complexity of capitalist society. From this structured totality, Marx individuates a notion of labour on each particular occasion that this term appears which is something more than simple productive activity and something less than its full capitalist conditions and results. How many qualities which belong to labour as a social Relation are included and which combination of qualities are stressed are functions

of the particular problem under consideration, which is itself - to a large extent - a function of social conditions that make some problems more pressing and/or easier to observe than others. We are often aided in grasping the special sense ascribed to 'Labour' by the addition of the words (labour) 'in general', (labour) 'power', 'alienated' (labour), 'abstract' (labour), 'wage' (labour) etc, but just as often no such aid is proffered. What applies to the individuation of labour applies equally to the individuation of the other main elements in Marx's analysis.

The identity, then, of the various elements which come into Marx's analysis is given as part of his ontology, his understanding of what it means for anything to exist, while their real differences (which together with Marx's problem of the moment determine individuation) emerge from his observation and research. But if identity is *always* taken for granted, it is only *sometimes* expressed. That is, Marx refers to some processes as 'identical', others as 'not simply identical', and still others as 'not identical'. In such cases, the term 'identity' is used to refer to one possible relation between already individuated entities which on another level (in their pre-individuated, pre-conceptualized state) are assumed to be identical. To actually refer to two already conceptualized units as identical is a way of emphasizing their mutual dependence and existence as aspects of a common whole which can be viewed (approached and presented) from either side, as part of complementary totalities. On the other hand, when it is something peculiar to the core notion or vantage point of a Relation that Marx wants to stress, this can be done by denying its identity with other Relations. Such a denial does not effect what might be called its first order identity mentioned above. Along with a first order, pre-conceptual identity that belongs to Marx's ontology and never changes, therefore, we must recognize a second order, post-conceptual identity that is part of Marx's strategy of manipulating his subject matter and changes with the problems posed in both inquiry and exposition.

These two notions of identity correspond to the two senses of 'relation' referred to in my response to criticisms earlier in this essay. All the elements in Marx's analysis stand in two kinds of relations to one another: an ontological relation where identity is assumed, and an empirical relation (actual or potential) where the attribution of identity is one means of bringing out certain real connections. Without the prism provided by the former, many of the distinctive features of the latter would go unnoticed.

Returning to the example of labour, we see that as a social Relation it is identical with value - they express the same relations of capitalism from different vantage points (in value it is from the vantage point of the products of labour), and as such each contains the other as a moment or aspect. Assuming this identity does not inhibit Marx from individuating labour and value as instrumental units (units which change somewhat with time and place) for purposes of uncovering the real relations between capitalist productive activity and its products. Once found, these real relations are sometimes referred to in the language of identity, as when the different aspects of value are said to be 'forms' of social labour, and as often in language that emphasizes the differences of the individuated units.

The labour theory of value, I have argued, is essentially Marx's account of the metamorphosis

of value into and through the various forms it assumes as a result of exchange between different functional units in the capitalist economy. All of these value forms (commodity, capital, interest, profit, rent, wages, money) express in their way and from their vantage point the relations of alienated labour. All 'act' and are acted upon in ways characteristic of and only possible under conditions of such labour. If Marx could not begin to trace the relations between these forms without distinguishing between value and labour, it is equally true that without the assumption of their prior identity the red thread which runs through them is easily missed. By frequently making this identity explicit, Marx calls our attention to the reciprocal effect between all the elements of his value theory and their common function as expressions of a particular historical period, capitalism. Whereas, proceeding to the differences between labour and value directly, taking the fact of difference for granted (which is the method followed by other labour theory of value economists) would incline one to adopt a causal interpretation of their relationship and to treat value a-historically rather than as a product of capitalism. In interpretations of Marxism, this error also leads to replacing the metamorphosis of value with one or another positivistic conception of value at the core of Marx's political economy, and in the process transforming political economy into 'economics'.

Similarly, the identity of mode of production and relations of production, private property and the division of labour, production and consumption, base and superstructure, class and state - to mention only the best known pairings in Marx's writings - constitutes the ontological basis for the investigation of their actual differences. In each instance, the full complexity of their interaction as distinct Relations is charted only after their prior identity has been accepted and their individuation as distinct Relations achieved. And, as in the case of labour/value, some of the real relations Marx uncovers are spoken of in terms of identity and some in language which stresses differences.



George Grosz: Toads of Property, 1921

At the start of his career, Marx said that after writing critiques of political economy, law, ethics, politics, etc, he intended to 'present them again in a connected whole showing the inter-relation of the separate parts, and finally ... make a critique of the speculative elaboration of the material'.⁴ As we know, Marx never got beyond his presentation of political economy, and there are important gaps in his treatment of even this one sector of capitalist life. While we never get, then, a fully adequate account of capitalism as a 'connected whole showing the interrelation of the separate parts', neither are these connections ever ignored. The 1844 *Manuscripts*, in which this remark appears, is especially effective in bringing out this unity through an emphasis on the relation of identity. Only the *Grundrisse* (1858), likewise an unpublished work whose main purpose was self-clarification, achieves anything like the same effect - and by using similar means. It would appear, therefore, that the stress on the relation of identity plays a special role in the thought process with which Marx constructs the more finished system (also partial) found in his published works.

Marx's dialectical method, which begins with his epistemology and proceeds through his way of investigating problems and presenting what he finds, requires the individuation of a new moment - let us call it 'intellectual reconstruction' - to mediate between inquiry and presentation.⁵ It is the moment when what is learned is incorporated into what is already understood, extending as well as revising and colouring it. Marx understands capitalism before and not always in the same way that he presents it to us. Given the role of internal relations as the organising principle within Marx's epistemology, it is only natural that the information acquired in inquiry pass into Marx's intellectual reconstruction through the relation of identity, and that this be reflected in the attention given to this relation in works directed to self-clarification. And if certain works stress identity, it should be no surprise to find the same stress in the theories associated with these works. Though - as I have argued - alienation is found throughout Marx's writings, it is undeniable that the 1844 *Manuscripts* and the *Grundrisse* contain the fullest treatment of this theory. The theory of alienation was not the form Marx chose to convince people of his analysis and to get them to move on it. For him, the chief importance of this theory, of this organization and conceptualization of the material, lay in integrating the various elements of his understanding in a way that never loses sight of the human subject. Its main function in his thinking is to aid in self-clarification; its locus in his method is the moment of intellectual reconstruction; and its logical scaffolding is the relation of identity.

Earlier in this essay, in admitting the existence of distinctions critics said I could not or did not make, I claimed that they are present in *Alienation* to the extent required by my chosen subject. If the dialectical compatibility of identity and difference permitted me to make all the distinctions mentioned in these criticisms, the particular analysis I was engaged in did not always require them. *Alienation* does not offer a balanced account of Marx's ideas. In the text, I specifically state that this is Marxism viewed from the vantage point of the acting and acted upon individual. As such, it is a version of

Marxism, a version whose necessary distortions are the result of where it begins and what it focusses on. Any detailed account of Marx's views in one area is open to the same qualification, and this applies - in my opinion - to Marx's own treatment of capitalist political economy in *Capital*. I don't believe the one-sidedness of *Alienation* is as extreme as that found in most other interpretations of Marx where it is often coupled with an attempt to separate individual theories from the system. Furthermore, unlike most writers on Marxism, I am conscious of trying to present a complex whole through a single perspective and of the necessary implications and distortions in my approach. At the beginning of the final chapter, I call for studies of other theories, especially of Marx's materialist conception of history, as a way of righting whatever distortions occur from my focus on alienation. Equally important, I believe that in the philosophy of internal relations I have isolated the philosophical framework necessary to understand these distortions and to correct them.

What are the distortions of Marxism to be found in *Alienation*? In light of the criticisms mentioned above, it seems clear that I should have been more explicit in labelling my stress on identity, one of the distortions inherent in the theory of alienation. If the philosophy of internal relations permits, as I have argued, the logical coexistence of identity and difference, Marx's theory of alienation - with its chief function of integrating new information into a people centered intellectual reconstruction - gives disproportionate attention to the moment of identity. From the vantage point of the acting and acted upon individual, *Alienation* treats labour, value, capital, class, state, etc as forms of each other and as expressions of a common whole, with the main negative result that social transformation (the core subject of Marxist history) is seriously underdeveloped. A possible exception is my account of Marx's concepts where meanings are shown again and again to evolve with changing conditions. The primacy of the mode of production and the objective facet of social and economic contradictions in particular suffer from this focus on alienation. They are not so much neglected as short-changed, given their overall importance for Marx. Those critics who accuse me of not paying enough attention to capitalism as an emergent system and to the distinctions which press toward a socialist solution are therefore correct, albeit for the wrong reasons. While clarifying the human costs and problems of capitalism and the human potential of a new communist order, the theory of alienation simply offers an inadequate perspective for comprehending the complex dynamic of historical change and consequently, too, for uncovering the real possibilities of human liberation. If Marx (after the pattern of Feuerbach's transformative critique of Hegel) had to put the individual in the center of human history in order to grasp the full dimensions of his problem, both finding the solution and helping to bring it about required other ways of organizing the 'facts'.

The theory which brings into clearest focus those elements of Marxism which have been most distorted in *Alienation* - particularly the mode of production, objective contradictions and class structure - is the materialist conception of history. Unfortunately, most accounts of this theory, by Marxists and non-Marxists alike, play down or dismiss completely the moment of identity in the dialectic and degenerate into one or another versions of economic determinism. If the

theory of alienation underplays some of the distinctions that lie at the core of Marx's historical dynamic, the materialist conception of history is equally at fault for underplaying the identity of its varied elements as forms of each other and of a common whole. The philosophy of internal relations provides the corrective to this double distortion by enabling us to grasp Marx's different theories as so many one-sided (in the sense of uni-dimensional and therefore incomplete) versions of the same system and to interpret each theory in a manner that is compatible with the others.

As regards the materialist conception of history, this is perhaps most evident in the place occupied by reciprocal effect. On the basis of the philosophy of internal relations, the mutual dependence of all elements in the world is conceived of in terms of a constant, multi-faceted interaction. This doesn't rule out causal relationships, where one element or structure or event is primarily responsible for a change in the form or function of others, but simply qualifies them. Whenever a causal claim is made, the interactive context limits the possibilities of what is being asserted and what, apparently, is being denied. In the text, I spoke of Marx's causal claims setting out the most important influence among processes whose reciprocal effect is taken for granted. Since I was only interested in clarifying the logic involved, how and to what degree such influences are decisive was not discussed - except in the formation of alienated character and social relations. The actual working through of the causal role of the mode of production in capitalism as through history, given the assumption of reciprocal effect, is the central concern of the materialist conception of history.

In tracing the special influence Marx attributes to the mode of production, the philosophy of internal relations also puts us on guard against taking the units of his subject matter - including mode of production - as given and unchanging. The subject of Marx's study are the real people, conditions and events of human history, but the actual units in which he investigates and records his views are individuated and vary somewhat - as I have shown - with his purpose and the then state of his knowledge. The concepts which convey these units likewise experience some elasticity in their meanings. Even the unit, history, undergoes significant variations: Marx sometimes has in mind natural history, sometimes human history, sometimes the history of class society, sometimes the history of capitalist society (earlier and later times viewed in terms of the origins and future possibilities of this society), and sometimes the history of developed English (or French, or German, or Dutch, or American) capitalism. The extension of other

major units in Marx's analysis vary depending on the boundaries established for 'history'. Thus, man in history, grasped as history of the natural world, can only be a thing of nature of natural being, amenable only to natural laws. In history, conceived of as history of the species, he is abstracted as a human being as distinct from other animals. In history, conceived of as history of classes, man is abstracted as a class being, the real subject of history on this dimension being classes. In history, conceived of as the history of capitalism, as a story which begins in the present and moves backwards, man is abstracted as the typical product of capitalism who serves as the main subject of Alienation. In history, conceived of as the history of modern English (or French, or American) capitalism, man is abstracted as particular nations, religions, and parties as well as factions of classes and has begun to acquire the distinguishing qualities that justify individual names and domiciles. Only on this level of abstraction of 'history' can we begin to speak about motivation and choice.

What kind of economic processes are and can be determining, and the sense in which they are determining, is also effected by the level of abstraction of 'history' with which one is operating. For example, where capitalism is the accepted framework, the belief in the primacy of economic forces is based mainly on a detailed study of the capitalist political economy and admits to all the alternative developments that Marx found to be there. Moreover, consumption, distribution and exchange share this primacy with production because that is what capitalism is like. Whereas in history, understood as history of the species, economic processes enter into Marx's schema either as part of his conception of human nature (through the relations he posits between productive activity and man's powers, needs and nature itself) or as low level generalizations based on research in a limited number of societies. The more general claims about history organized in this way (really, on this level) - such as man has to eat before he can engage in politics, culture, etc - are less open to exceptions than the more specific claims directed to history understood as the history of capitalism.

The ongoing debate over Marx's determinism - a debate in which neither side suffers from a lack of quotations - can be largely resolved by concentrating on the character of the abstraction 'history' in each contested claim. Instead of arguing whether Marx is or is not a determinist, the debate will have shifted to uncovering where he is and where he is not and to accounting for how he can be both. Since Marx often changes levels of abstraction - and the logic of explanation appropriate to each level differs - this approach would enable us to account for apparently

BERKELEY
IS
OUTA
SIGHT

George Hegel is innocent

Heisenberg probably rules

MONADS
FOR
THE
CUP

Neatken
is
Dead!
GOD!

The Concept rules: OK
G.W.F.H.

K.M. LIFE

Handwritten scribbles and marks

contradictory claims regarding freedom and necessity in the same work. An alternative approach to the determinism debate is the one adopted in *Alienation* which underscores the elastic meaning of 'cause' and 'determine', but this doesn't bring out adequately the reasons for such variations. If Marx's materialist conception of history, then, deals with the determining role in history of the mode of production, neither mode of production nor history, nor the sense in which the one is said to determine the other can be correctly interpreted without the aid (explicitly here or implicitly as in the works of Lukacs, Sartre, Marcuse, Lefebvre, Kosik and a few others) of the philosophy of internal relations. While I am under no illusion of having explained the materialist conception of history in this brief space, I have tried to suggest what an explanation based on the philosophy of internal relations would look like.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to the fact that only a few of those who criticized my presentation of Marxism within a framework of internal relations seem to share my deep concern with the problems posed by Marx's unusual use of language. Without ever denying the assembled evidence or offering definitions of their own, most critics simply assume that the distinctions which I am said to miss or underplay can be clearly and directed stated: 'Marx believed the mode of production is primary', 'For him, the base determines the superstructure', and so on. But it was the problem of finding different and apparently contradictory statements of the same distinction, and of feeling deeply the kind of dilemma voiced by Pareto at the start of this book, that precipitated my own inquiry into Marx's epistemology. Marx's words are like bats: one can see in them both birds and mice. Unless the seriousness of this problem is admitted, the solution which is offered in *Alienation* will seem at the least unnecessary (as it has to some) and probably false and destructive (as it has to others). Perhaps no one who disagrees with Chapter I of my book, where this problem is first set out, should read any further. In the meantime, it is incumbent upon critics who recognize the difficulties of understanding Marx's language, but reject the philosophy of internal relations, to offer - as none yet have done - another explanation for the same disquieting practices.

- 1 The main reviews of *Alienation* that criticize the philosophy of internal relations are found in *Social Theory and Practise* (Spring 1973), *Contemporary Sociology* (Spring 1973), *Soviet Studies* (July 1972), *Radical Philosophy* (Spring 1974), and *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* (March 1974). Though similar objections have appeared elsewhere, these are the major reviews to which I am responding in this essay. Readers interested in following the discussion through some of the more favorable reactions should also see *New York Review of Books* (March 9, 1972), *Science and Society* (Summer 1972), *American Political Science Review* (Fall 1972) and *Political Studies* (June 1972).
- 2 Marx, *Die Moralisierende Kritik und der Kritisierende Moral*, *Werke IV*, p339.
- 3 This schema for setting apart different views on totality was first suggested by Karel Kosik in *La Dialectique du Concret*, trans. from German by Roger Dangeville (Paris, 1970), p35. There are important differences, however, in what Kosik and I understand of the second and third notions of totality presented here.
- 4 *1844 Manuscripts*, Moscow, 1959, p15
- 5 For a fuller exposition of the different moments in Marx's method, see my article 'Marxism and Political Science: Prolegomenon to a Debate on Marx's Method' in *Politics and Society* (Summer 1973)

ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF
PHILOSOPHY

The Association of Teachers of Philosophy formed in 1974 to provide a forum for philosophy teachers to explore new ideas and discuss common problems, will be holding its conference and Annual General Meeting in the North of England some time around Easter (at the time of going to press the place and time have not been finalised). For further particulars write to: Peter Caldwell, Secretary of the ATP, Bolton Institute of Technology, Deane Street, Bolton.

The Politics of Aggression

Leonard Williams

A comparative study of the social behaviour of apes and men will not in itself disclose the motivations of human action. For this reason any form of behavioural comparison that is unrelated to the specific and historical character of human needs will be regarded by traditional Marxists as suspect from the start. A great deal of new knowledge from the field of primate ethology has in fact a significant value for revolutionary study. If this were understood by protagonists of the left they would be able to assess its value for strengthening socialist thought in almost every area of cultural, social and historical study. Instead they have given the academic intellectuals and pop writers of the establishment a free hand, with the result that much of this new knowledge -

particularly the concept of phylogenetic aggression - has been distorted in dramatic fictions such as 'the behavioural sink', 'the territorial imperative', 'inbuilt violence', 'the struggle for dominance', 'the status-seeking primate', and so on.

Immediately a phylogenetic continuity is established between the non-human and the human primate, valid concepts such as 'the hominization process' are inevitable. The trouble begins when the dialectics of historical change and the politics of human action are ignored in the anti-historical concepts of evolutionism and ecological determinism. A proper assessment and synthesis of new ethological knowledge, as well as a systematic exposure of the silent politics which motivate the