Reviews

Goodbye to all that?

Perry Anderson, Considerations on Western Marxism, New Left Books, 121pp, £4

Marx in British culture

Through the sixties and early seventies English academic Marxism lay back with its legs open. We experienced the successive thrusts of penetration by the giants of continental European Marxist philosophy. Althusser, Korsch, Adorno (perhaps we had a bit of difficulty there), Althusser, Colletti. The last of the line, in the chronology of the translation programme, Sartre with his massive Critique of Dialectical Reason, has just arrived. Only just in time, for it seems that this tradition of Western Marxism which has been inseminating our culture is now senile, perhaps even a corpse. Looking back one can see a pattern. As each new text appeared in English there was a wave of excitement. New battle lines were drawn. New loyalties forged. New footnotes written. But each time it was a more or less transitory affair and there soon followed a post-coital tristesse. For none of these Western Marxists has really settled in our culture or really provided us with a space with which we could safely be...id our own work. It has all been a rather confusing experience. Perhaps the comrades of Carlisle Street could have been a bit clearer in their own minds and in their editorial guidance as to what the whole prolonged process was supposed to have been about.

Perry Anderson is the editor of the New Left Review. In the Foreword to his Considerations on Western Marxism he explains that the Review has methodically pursued a programme of 'publishing and discussing, often for the first time in Britain, the work of the most salient theorists from Germany, France and Italy', a programme which was, with a little help from their friends (for it was Lawrence & Wishart who published Gramsci's Prison Notebooks and Merlin who published Lukacs' History and Class Consciousness) reaching its end by the early seventies. The drive behind the programme was Perry Anderson's diagnosis of the poverty of British socialist thought. The British socialist movement floundered in a terrible, debilitating theoretical vacuum. But the diagnosis had two rather different aspects. Firstly, 'English culture significantly lacked any tradition of "Western Marxism" in the epoch since the First World War (see 'Components of the National Culture' in The Last Battle lines were drawn. New Left Review. In the Foreword to New Left Review 50, 1968). Secondly, 'we must be unique among advanced industrial nations in having not one single structural study of our society today; but this stupefying absence follows logically from the complete lack of any serious global history of British society in the twentieth century...'. No attempt has ever been made to even the outline of a 'totalizing' history of modern British society. (see 'Origins of the Current Crisis' in Anderson and Blackburn, eds. Towards Socialism, Fontana, 1965). A fair assessment of the state of British culture at the time. But there remains a puzzle about the relations between these two aspects of the diagnosis: on the one hand the absence of a tradition of 'Western Marxism', and on the other the absence of analyses of the British social formation. Of course they are connected by the word 'totalizing'; it was because of the first absence that we had no idea what that way of describing the second absence meant. But the two faces of our ignorance did seem to indicate two alternative ways forward for Marxist intellectuals, two ways forward that were in fact also indicated by the choice of contributors to that Towards Socialism volume, in which Anderson and Andre Gorz rubbed shoulders with Richard Titmus and John Westergaard, as it were representing two emergent British responses to the poverty of British Marxism. Incidentally it is worth remembering that some far more astonishing shoulder rubbing was also going on in that volume, for among the contributors were Thomas Babington Macaulay and Richard Crossman. Their response to the poverty of British Marxism was to firmly establish themselves within the camp of British capital. But of course this was in 1964, the year of the great Labour victory and the white heat of Wilson's vision of a socialist crusade, and almost all of us had more illusions then than now. Two possible ways forward. The New Left Review way forward was a programme of cultural importation of continental philosophical Marxism. The alternative was to go straight to the task of empirical research on the British social formation. The subsequent history of British socialist intellectual production has by and large gone these two separate ways. 'British Marxism' has developed through the works of Ralph Milliband on the State, John Westergaard on the sociology of class, Raymond Williams' cultural histories, and the work of the historians E. P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawn, Raphael Samuel and the Ruskin Workshops. A certain amount of debate about the relations between British and Western Marxisms has appeared in the New Left Review over the years, but there has been no on-going systematic editorial exploration of the issues involved. The Review's defence of its strategy for intellectual work has never gone much beyond that initial indication of our theoretical poverty. Now that the programme of translations is at an end an overall assessment of the tradition of 'Western Marxism' is attempted in Perry Anderson's book. But the first point to be made about this assessment is that it concentrates almost entirely on the task of plotting the 'coordinates of Western Marxism' itself and discussing its discontinuity with the earlier tradition of 'Classical Marxism' and does not concern itself with the relations between these Marxisms and the recent British variety. To put this another way, there is no attempt made to analyse and evaluate the New Left Review programme as a specific strategy, as a prolonged and influential intervention in British socialist culture, nor to evaluate the contribution this programme has made to overcoming that other lack, the lack of knowledge about the British social formation, which had been identified at the outset as such a crucial obstacle to the development of the socialist movement in Britain. In other words the Review adopts its usual policy of refraining from analysing its own activity politically. The consequence of this is that the impact the book might have made on the current debate about our present intellectual options and responsibilities will be severely limited. The book does have an important and controversial thesis which, if accepted, has major implications for our theoretical strategy. But since the book does not situate itself nor explicitly draw out its implications we will have to do this work ourselves.

These remarks should not, however, be taken as dismissive of the achievements of the New Left Review. They have contributed in a major way to our Marxist culture. They have helped to construct a counter-hegemonic force with which we can resist the philistinism, smugness, arrogance and unimaginative stupidities of British university culture. For generations academics have treated Marx and Engels with contempt. In writing about them they have abandoned all elementary principles of scholarship in a way they would never have dared to do when
writing about Plato or Herbert Spencer. Most academic judgments of Marx and Engels have been made, with sneering confidence, by bourgeois fools who have never studied their major works. It is no longer so easy for them to get away with this. They are increasingly confronted and challenged by an educated audience of Marxist intellectuals. There is no doubt that the *New Left Review* has helped to bring this about.

Although perhaps the major innovation has been the publication in English of works by Marx and Engels themselves in recent years. Of course 'recent' is a relative term, and many of those who we now teach in the universities and polytechnics, having been no more than ten years old in May 1968, may not realise just how recently *Theories of Surplus Value*, the full text of *The German Ideology*, the 1857 *Introduction*, *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, the *Grundrisse*, and the *Notes on Wagner* have become readily available in English.

**Varieties of Marxism**

The main themes of *Considerations* can be stated quite simply. In the book itself, of course, they are developed, documented and qualified in ways that make them far more interesting and plausible than they can seem here in summary. The first 'generation' of Marxist theorists were Labriola, Mehring, Kautsky and Plekhanov. Their aims were the *systematisation* and *recapitulation* of a body of very new and close behind them. Of far greater importance were their successors, the 'second generation', and Anderson discusses this group in far more detail. They made fundamental contributions to Marxist theory, extending it into new areas and adding to its repertoire of theoretical concepts. This generation (Lenin, Luxemburg, Hilferding, Trotsky, Bauer, Preobrazhensky, Bukharin) with all its political initiatives, indeed were active leaders of their respective political organisations. They played significant roles in the political life of central and Eastern Europe. Their main theoretical contributions were in two broad areas. Firstly they analysed the capitalist mode of production and the laws of its development. Their contributions can be found, for example, in Hilferding’s *Finance Capital*, Kautsky's *Agrarian Question* (neither of which have yet appeared in English editions, an amazing indication of our cultural insularity), in the work of Bukharin, Luxemburg and Lenin on capital accumulation and imperialism, and in the work of Preobrazhensky on the economic theory of the transition to socialism. Their second major contribution is their work on politics; they produced both analyses of concrete social formations and important works of political theory (the theory of the bourgeois State, of the role and strategy of revolutionary organisations, of proletarian democracy and so on.) The main contributions here were those of Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky.

Anderson sketches in the main historical forces which produced the decisive shift away from the interests and style of work of this tradition, and towards those of the new tradition of 'Western Marxism'. The West suffered a period of fascism and a subsequent reestablishment of a dynamic capitalist political and economic order. In the East Stalinism effected a complete and brutal elimination of that significant theoretical Marxist work. The centre of Marxism thought shifted to the West but the situation prevented its taking root in the political organisations of the workers movement. Marxist thought had to contend not only with a strengthened capitalist ideological hegemony but also with a workers' movement that was dominated by Parties which were slavishly obedient to the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. It was in these conditions that the new generation of Marxist theoreticians were destined to work, and the shift of focus from politics and economics towards philosophy was a consequence. The possibility for a unity between theory and practice was objectively blocked. Marxist theory retreated more and more into the theoretical and the political. It was in this altered universe that revolutionary theory completed the mutation which produced what can today retrospectively be called "Western Marxism". For the body of work composed by (these authors) in effect constituted an entirely new intellectual configuration within the development of historical materialism. In their hands, Marxism became a type of theory in certain critical respects quite different from any that had preceded it. This mutation was produced through the work of Lukacs, Korsch, Gramsci, Benjamin, Horkheimer, Della Volpe, Marcuse, Lefebvre, Adorno, Sartre, Goldmann, Althusser and Colletti (although Gramsci turns out to be an exception in almost every respect to the main tendencies of the tradition). 'For over twenty years after the Second World War, the intellectual record of Western Marxism in original economic or political theory proper - in production of major works in either field - was virtually blank.'

Not only is Western Marxism marked by a displacement of focus away from politics and economics towards academic philosophy, it is also marked by a deep 'subterranean pessimism'. It despairs of the working class. It is no longer convinced of its revolutionary potential (this is particularly true of the Frankfurt Marxists). It lacks the confidence and optimism of the founders of historical materialism. As for Sartre and Althusser, their pessimism is even darker for they introduce doubts about the very vision of socialism itself. They paint a picture, according to Anderson, of society as opaque and ridden with ideology (Althusser), and as inherently tending to degenerate into bureaucratic tyranny (Sartre). In this tradition 'Marxism spoke thoughts once unthinkable'. In all these respects Western Marxism is the product of defeat. 'The hidden hallmark of Western Marxism as a whole is thus that it is a product of defeat. . . . Its major works were, with perhaps one exception, produced in situations of political isolation and despair.'

Anderson's thesis thus strikingly and boldly contrasts these two different Marxisms and maps the radical discontinuity between them. The account is complicated, however, in the closing stages of the book, by the appearance of a different, more marginal tradition, a tradition which has survived as the true inheritance of the classical tradition, historically in continuity with it but pushed towards the periphery of Western socialist culture. This continuity is personified by Trotsky and the tradition which he kept alive has developed through the work of Deutscher, Rosdolsky and Mandel. Trotskyist Marxism 'has been a polar contrast to Western Marxism. It concentrated on political tactics that had no philosophy. It was resolutely internationalist, never confined in concern or horizon to a single culture or country. It spoke a language of clarity and urgency, whose finest prose (Trotsky or Deutscher) yet possessed a literary quality equal or superior to that of any other tradition. It filled no chairs in universities. Its members were hunted or outlawed. ' This synoptic overview of the traditions of Marxism is certainly an original and exciting achievement.

**Epistemological Levitation**

As it happens, however, *Considerations on Western Marxism* announces not one ending but two: the completion of the NLR programme of translations and the death of the tradition of Western Marxism itself. For this tradition of university-based, philosophical Marxism, which as far as its English audience is concerned culminates with the arrival of Sartre's *Critique*, is said by Anderson to have run its course and to be giving way now to a revitalised Marxism of a more classical kind. We might have thought that Sartre's massive volume represented a substantial gift of philosophical aid to those seeking to help us through our continuing provincial famine. In fact we are encouraged to
receive it in this spirit by the New Left Books catalogue which characteristically says that the international reputation of Sartre's Critique has not ceased to grow in the fifteen years since its original publication, so that 'for the English world this translation is a major intellectual event'. On the other hand there arrives on our desks almost simultaneously, and from the very same address, Perry Anderson's Considerations which would encourage us rather to view the Critique as a kind of huge monument to a now defunct tradition, a tradition which had taken Marxism further and further into philosophical speculation, esoteric idealism, academicism and pessimism, and ever further away from the soul of Marxism.

This schizophrenic attitude to the tradition of Western Marxism is achieved, in Considerations, by a shift to a standpoint which is somewhere (it is not clear where exactly) other than that which he is describing. Sudden­ly a great gap has opened up between the tradition and its spectator, for he is now surveying its coordinates from the external standpoint of a Cartesian geometry. But the shift to this new standpoint seems to be achieved less by historical argument than by a kind of epistemological levitation. Although there are certain considerations which do suggest that events are removing us from that historical epoch in which the tradition of Western Marxism had its roots, these developments are as yet still limited and uncertain. As Anderson himself hints, the main determining historical forces which drove Marxist theory into the universities and which ruptured the vital links between theory and prac­tice, are still very active. The dead hand of Stalinism in Eastern Europe and the dominance within the workers' movement in Western Europe of the Communist Parties (and in Britain the continuing near monopoly of Labourist ideology) are still very much alive and active, albeit in circumstances of capitalist economic crisis. The implications of this for Perry Anderson's book are that his purely retrospective view of the Western Marxist detour, and his confident Olympian judgments about its fate may turn out to be premature. Perhaps we are not as liberated from this tradition, or from the conditions that produced it, as his methodological illusionistic device of attempting to view this tradition from above may suggest.

Whether or not this is so it will still be necessary for Marxist intellectuals to read this book. In spite of the limitations I have pointed out, it does have positive and pro­gressive value. It calls upon us to reflect upon our theoretical allegiances and loyalties. It challenges us to define our commitments in the light of the distance now between us fundamentally idealist tradition, as Anderson seems to argue. He is so intent on identifying the tradition's 'coordinates' that he fails to pay attention to its contradictions. The question of whether, in the case of each writer, the use made of Freud was predominantly an idealist or a materialist one, could only be settled by a far more detailed analysis of the works involved than Anderson allows himself in this book. But in general the chosen historiographical device of defining the common tradition and a 'generation' seems to encourage a minimisation of differences which is hardly compatible with a Marxist assessment of the works involved. Thus, for example, Anderson points out that the Western Marxism tradition has concerned itself with 'sub­stantive' issues, outside philosophy, only on the terrain of ideology and culture. But it seems quite perverse not to note that within this similarity there are many differences and a vital that is from the point of view of Marxist theory itself and for our own work within it. For instance Benjamin's starting point was in the labour process, with the notion of mechanical reproduction; Sartre's was in an idealist ontology, with the definition of individual freedom; Althusser's was with the concept of the reproduction of the relations of production, a starting point that leads immediately to problems within economic and political theory.  

This latter point suggests another criticism of Anderson's way of drawing the map. I am not convinced that Althusser falls so unambiguously within the tradition of Western Marxism as Anderson claims. It seems likely that here again we have an effect of his general methodological device which relies so heavily on talk about traditions and generations, and which works by transferring the problems within economic and political theory to the question of where philosophy stands in the light of Perry Anderson's considerations. It certainly seems to be the villain of the piece. But we should remember that the categories which are employed here function purely descriptively. There is no attempt at a theoretical account of the kinds and varieties of Marxist intellectual inquiry and the relations between them. We do not know whether it is philosophy as such, or only a philosophy which illegitimately monopolises Marxist research, which is the enemy. There is no exploration as to the potential role, if any, of philosophy within a Marxist tradition which fully returned to the epistemology of the founders of historical material­ism, and which functioned firmly in unity with a tradition of revolution­ary politics. This is why the impli­cations of the book's theses for our present concerns, for our present strategy, are not at all clear. As the author himself apolo­getically admits in an Afterword, it would be easy to read a naively activ­ist politics into the book's implicit condemnation of philosophy and its insistence on a unity between theory and practice. For it finishes on a disturbing note: 'When a truly revolution­ary movement is born in a mature working class, the "final shape" of theory will have no exact precedent. All that can be said is that when the masses themselves speak, theoreticians - of the sort the West has produced for fifty years - will necessarily be silent.'

I do not believe that this is all that can be said. Something can already be said about the relations between philosophy and other areas of intel­lectual production, about philosophy in relation to ideological and political struggle. It is for philosophy to dis­cover how it must change in order to shoulder its responsibilities.  

John Mepham

Owen Chadwick, discussing the popular handbooks of materialism and atheism of the latter 19th century, writes of the psychologist Büchner asking his brother’s advice on the publishing of such a text; on hearing the title, *Force and Matter*, his brother jumped out of his chair, exclaiming 'Why, the title alone is worth money. Any publisher will buy the book without looking at it!' (Chadwick, p172). Contrasting that time with ours, Chadwick mentions that we could not imagine such enthusiasm in a modern publisher. Clearly, this is true. The cultural space once occupied by polemical generalisations of evolution theory and militant anti-clericalism has emptied of such works. They have been replaced by *Supernature*, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, *The Secret Life of Plants* etc etc. A publisher might now jump out of his chair if offered the title *Psychic Force and Matter*. Works such as *The Secret of Plants* might be more important, not for their evidence, which was often weak, but for their stance: a large public wanted to read 'scientific' attacks on religion - 'if a scholar said that all the gospels were forged in the fourth century, it got wide publicity; the refutation got little.' (Chadwick, p179). The claim that plants produce quasi-human effects on a lie-detector is well known; it is less widely known that the claim was made by a CIA interrogator and that attempts to replicate his results have failed. There is now a public that wants scientific defences of religion.

John Randall’s *Parapsychology and the Nature of Life* is for the upper end of this market, and has been acclaimed as an excellent introduction to its subject.¹ Its conceptual and evidential tactics will be examined to demonstrate one of the strategies in the bourgeoisie’s cultural scorched-earth campaign, as it retreats from the terrain of rationality.

The book has three sections:

1. An account of the success of evolution theory and biochemical in explaining life in naturalistic terms, and the lamentable extension of this approach to persons; a review of the history and empirical results of parapsychology (or 'psi-research'), which allegedly refute the exaggerated claims of physicalism; a discussion of alleged internal inconsistencies in evolution theory and the author’s solution to these.

2. The book takes as its motto a quotation from the psychologist William McDougall, who was instrumental in establishing the discipline of experimental parapsychology in North America: "... in the name of science, many thousands of young people are every year taught to believe that man is literally nothing more than a piece of mechanism, without power or influence on his destiny. Against this fatalistic dogma, so destructive of aspiration and so weakening to all higher effort, I have not ceased to wage war."

This dogma, 'mechanism' is nowhere clearly defined or analysed, all we are offered are such tautologies as:

- "The mechanist believes that all living things are completely explicable in terms of the laws of physics and chemistry. To him, organisms are nothing more than highly complex machines." (p21) Randall gives the following account of the cultural effects of this doctrine over the last century:

- In Victorian times church attendance was high, social reforms were increasing, there was confidence in the future, God existed, life was essentially different from matter, and man was essentially different from the animals. "It seemed as though Church and State would go forward in partnership for ever, to the salvation of man’s soul and the advancement of his physical well-being."

- The Clique of the Oxford school of logical positivists (sic), who set out to demonstrate that all metaphysical propositions are nonsensical. (p50) According to Randall, the chief mechanic of the Oxford Circle was Ryle, whose *Concept of Mind* was simply a behaviorist exorcism of the ghost from the machine. The doctrine of 'mechanism' has had a disastrous effect on social behavior, having caused men to regard themselves as mere machines engaged in a mutual struggle for survival. One of the effects of 'mechanism' is that:
  - Capitalists found in Darwinism a means of rationalising their exploitation of the workers. (p55)

Worse still: Through the teaching of the Marxists, the poorer classes were encouraged to enter into a perpetual struggle against their rulers. Once again, the suffering generated by the class war was justified by an appeal to the *Survival-of-the-Fittest* principle: after all it was, apparently, nature’s own way of doing things (p56)

Darwinism, so we’re told, became a central element in Stalinism and Nazism, and led to the barbarism of the concentration camps. 'Mechanism' now pervades our culture and has generated an 'existential crisis', manifested both in neuroses and in a search for ways to revive meaning.

For Randall, Darwinism is the anti-Christian wage wage of social influence. His social influence shows either an ignorance or a dishonesty that is amazing from a teacher of biology. He ignores the consistent support given by Darwin’s family, his associates, and his followers to progressive causes, such as solidarity meetings with the French Revolution and anti-slavery agitation (Gruber, Ch. 3). Far from the Nazis turning to Darwin for support, the only reason to claim that social influence implies that the Aryans race had once been less than perfect (Moses, p103). Their ideologue Othmar Spann even used words that could be Randall’s: ‘Darwin and Marx have done terrible harm to our civilisation by their mechanical conception of development...’ (quoted in Needham, 1976, p165). And how can anyone believe that “compulsory classes in Darwinism were given in the Stalinists’ prison camps” (p57) unless they’ve never heard of Lysenko?

The research program of parapsychology was begun by men who were hysterically opposed to evolutionism. McDougall was quite clear on this:²

Unless psychical research can discover facts incompatible with materialism, materialism will continue to spread. No other power can stop it; revealed religion and metaphysical philosophy are equally helpless before the advancing tide. And if that tide continues to rise and advance as it is doing now, all the signs point to the view that it will be a destroying tide, that it will sweep away all the hard-won gains of humanity, all the moral traditions built up by the efforts of countless generations for the increase of the Darwinian process.

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¹ For McDougall (and later for Alister Hardy and Arthur Koestler) the ‘parapsychology’ programme provided a feasible mechanism for the inheritance of acquired characteristics - thus bridging the gulf between the somatic and psychic realms that is maintained in the principle of the substantial continuity and functional independence of the latter from the former. The attempt to demonstrate the inheritance of acquired characteristics was ‘the major experimental effort of his career’; according to Rhine, who was a close collaborator in McDougall’s research. (Rhine, 1971, p176)

of truth, justice and charity. (From Religion and the Sciences of Life, quoted in Turrell, p245)

Very briefly, Randall’s account of the study which is to save man from the ‘existential vacuum’ is:

Research began in the closing decades of the last century with studies of mediumship, hypnosis, telepathy and hauntings. In the early 1930s the study of telepathy was put on a rigorous experimental basis by the work of J.B. Rhine in the USA. He further demonstrated the existence of:

clairvoyance - direct, non-sensory perception of material events.

precognition - direct, non-sensory perception (not prediction) of future events.

psychokinesis - direct, non-motor, effectiveness on material events.

Since then, experimental methods have been refined and new psi-effects discovered. Psi-researchers have successfully defended themselves against scepticism and narrow-minded accusations of fraud; their discipline is now irreversibly established in the scientific community, and any remaining doubts have been dispelled by the use of automated testing devices.

In outline, the classic Rhine testing procedure for perceptual psi is that the subject attempts to ‘guess’ the sequence of cards in a ‘Zener’ pack, consisting of five cards of each design: square, circle, cross, wavy lines, star. The cards to be guessed (‘target cards’) are: concentrated on by the sender, to test for telepathy; placed in a sealed, opaque envelope, in a sequence then sensorially unperceived by anyone, to test for clairvoyance shuffled into the target sequence after the guess, to test for precognition.

The number of correct guesses are then compared with the number to be expected on the basis of chance alone (the ‘null hypothesis’) and the anti-chance odds calculated. On the null hypothesis, it would be expected that as the number of ‘runs’ through a pack increases, so the number of correct ‘guesses’ would tend towards the chance level of 50%.

A subject scoring 6, 7, 8 ‘hits’ over half a dozen or so runs is statistically insignificant; but if the number of runs is in the hundreds, then the improbability of such average scores becomes astronomical.

Psycho-kinesis is tested for by the mechanical casting of a precision die, the subject ‘willing’ it to fall on a particular face; the improbabilities are calculated in a manner analogous to perceptual psi.

The most modern testing procedure, using a random number generator (or ‘Schmidt device’, after its inventor) is:

A generator emits 10⁶ pulses per second, these pass through a ‘gate’ and advance an electronic switch through a cycle of 4 positions. Each position is connected to a lamp; the subject faces an array of these 4 lamps, each with a push-button in front. When any button is pressed a Geiger counter is connected to the ‘gate’; the next particle from a radioactive source to strike the counter triggers an electric impulse which closes the ‘gate’ (the source emits approximately 10 particles per second, the precise moment of emission being in principle unpredictable - thus, the apparatus seems a perfect source of randomness.) This blocks the impulses to the switch, which stops at the next position; its connected lamp then lights. The subject’s task is to guess which lamp will light. If it is the lamp behind the pressed button, then the guess is correct. A modification of this device tests for psychokinesis:

The randomiser is connected to a circular display of lamps; at a given time one of these is alight, the randomiser determines whether the next one to light is clockwise or counterclockwise to the one previously lit. The subject’s task is to ‘will’ the direction of movement of the lamp in a given direction.

The device contains an automatic recorder.

In tests of both kinds results are obtained which are significantly higher than would be expected on the null hypothesis. There are four possible explanations for this:

1) Experimental error, such as invalid statistical evaluation or sensorimotor leakage (A fundamental flaw in the general notions of probability, or of randomness itself).

2) Experimenter fraud (The operation of the unexplained forces or faculties generally referred to as ‘psi’).

3) The interesting feature of this kind of test - as compared with dice-throwing - is that the subject is usually unaware of even general working principles of the device. The apparently undeveloped efficacy of their ‘willings’ has been claimed as powerful evidence for the ’teleological’ nature of mind (Beloff, 1976). (An accessible paper by Schmidt is in New Scientist, 16.10.68.)

4) For discussion of (2) see Ayer and Spencer-Brown. In practice (1) and (2) are not easy to separate. The most comprehensive criticism of the evidence is Hazzard, 1966 (pp25-39), but his argument against miracles. An early classic experiment is criticised by Scott and Haskell. This paper, together with others, appeared in the October 1974 Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research.

In this test, the amazing and astonishing account of fraud at the hands of systematic psi-research. For criticism of Schmidt-type testing, see Holzinger 1976 and Guggen. Several critical papers are in the New Humanist, November 1975.

One of these is a powerful statement by J. E. Dingwall, who after six years, partly because the present immense interest in occultism and in the grosser forms of superstition is due, to a certain ‘conservatism’ and fear reaching propaganda put out by the parapsychologists.’ He further remarks that ‘After sixty years’ experience of these experiments with most of the leading parapsychologists of that period, I do not think I could name half a dozen whom I could call objective students who honestly wished to discover the truth’ (p111-2). Rhine discusses the issue of fraud and the possibility of fraud - proof evidence in his book, The Psi Files, 1956. The last two centre on the resignation of his successor as head of a research institute, after being discovered faking an experiment.

Most parapsychologists, of course, accept (4). Much of the evidence appears to show that the operation of psi is unaffected by distances between subject, sender, target; by material or electromagnetic screening. Randall, following Rhine, takes this as not merely evidence for a faculty or force which is at present unrelatable to the effects, constants, principles and laws of the physical and biological sciences; but as conclusive proof of the existence and immateriality of mind.

What they mean by ‘mind’ reads like one of Ryle’s jokes:

the human spirit... I am speaking as a naturalist but I am referring to the same thing that I learned in the US Marine Corps to call esprit de corps, and every marine knows that means something. It is a force that works wonders in a symphony orchestra or a football team, in a nation going through the horrors of war or the austerity of depression. (Rhine, 1953, pp206-7)

It is not shown how the existence of psi phenomena would confirm a theory of ‘mechanism’. It is a symptom of the extreme empiricism of Rhine’s school that they consider as high-level a doctrine as ‘mechanism’ or physicalism to be falsifiable by such bare and utterly untheorised ‘facts’ as they proffer. It is taken as simply obvious and conceptually unproblematical that man would be saved from ‘mechanism’ if shown to be a mind in a machine. This is no critique of ‘mechanism’, but its converse. This doctrine negates ‘mechanism’ only in the sense that a photographic negative negates its positive; they are structurally identical and interconvertible. It accepts a mechanical view of the world and attempts to vitalise it; it claims to be ‘the heart of a heartless world, the spirit of spiritless conditions’ - it is its mirror-image: the repudiators of mechanism represented minds as extra centres of causal processes, rather like machines but also con-

5 Armstrong agrees that the evidence for psi phenomena is incompatible with physics (p54): ‘I consider that the subject of parapsychological research are the small black cloud on the horizon of a materialist meddling with the mind. I despise the idea that normal phenomena to consider, there would seem to be little serious objection to the complete identification of mental states with states of the nervous system.’ Belford argues this in his ‘The Identity Hypothesis: A Critique’, in Smythies 1965. Cooper 1976 argues that they are compatible. Also, see the papers by Price, Burt, Margen and Dobbs in Smythies 1967. Not all parapsychologists accept the operation of psi is independent of known material forces. One such is John Taylor, best known for his work with Uri Geller.

6 With his enthusiasm for the US Marines it’s perhaps not surprising that Rhine regarded psi-research as a ‘countermission’ - ‘a countermission to home and abroad against the menace of the “communist block” of nations.’ This is ‘in Why National Defence Ignores Parapsychology’ (Rhine, 1957). ‘If the present-day facts of parapsychology had been well known before Marx and Lenin, materialism would have been discredited in the West as well as in Russia... Logically, then it would seem that some defence agency should long ago have focused on this body of empirical evidence as a crusade to communism which the free world desperately needs.’ (pp37-8). Others wonder whether some ‘defence agency’ took his advice.
siderably different from them, minds had to be described by the mere negatives of the specific descriptions given to bodies. Minds are not bits of clockwork; they are just bits of not-clockwork. (Ryle p21).

It is ironic that Ryle's 'paramechanism' is offered as an account of mind by the parapsychologists.

Randall's dualism and his de-animation of matter is even bleaker than Descartes', for:

when matter is not interacting with mind, it shows a tendency to increasing disorder;

we infer that mind has interacted with matter whenever the information content of a physical system shows an increase which cannot be attributed to chance, or to the transfer of information from another physical system. (p232)

The evolution of life is a case of the increase of order in a physical system, so Randall must contest the view that chance was a major factor in this:

we shall examine certain problems within the field of orthodoxy biology which should also give the mechanism of chance pause and reflect. But perhaps the most urgent reason for seeking an alternative to mechanism lies in the fact that it fails to satisfy the spirit of man. (p192)

The pattern of his argument is the typical one of a Fundamentalist:

Offer a simplified account of evolution, cite an expert to show an inconsistency or empirical difficulty; then point out that this refutes the theory "only a theoretical framework within which certain observed facts may be organised, not a once-and-for-all discovered truth' (Randall 1976, p217); triumphantly proclaim that evolutionism has been refuted, leaving a gap which can only be filled by God.

One of the problems he discusses is that of the relation between genetic information and adult structures. It used to be thought that organs in different species which were fundamentally similar in form and/or bodily disposition ('homologous' organs) were determined by the same genes. This is refuted by the fact that if a population of eyeless Drosophila flies lacking the gene that normally determines eye forming is interbred, then, in a few generations eye-bearing individuals will appear. Clearly, the eyes produced normally and in such a population are homologous yet not determined by the same genes. Thus, 'The concept of homology in terms of similar genes handed on from a common ancestor breaks down' (Randall p210, quoting Hardy p213 - emphasised in Hardy). Furthermore, this concept of homology is absolutely fundamental to what we are talking about when we speak of evolution' (Randall p210, quoting Hardy p211). Randall takes this as refuting the evolutionist doctrine that homology shows the origination of similar species from a common ancestor, through the action of natural selection allowing the perpetuation of similar gene complexes. He quotes at length from his favourite authors Koestler (p133-7) who makes a similar use of Hardy: 'The traditional explanation of this remarkable fact is that the other members of gene complex have "reshuffled" or reconstructed in such a way that they deputise for the missing gene'.

Koestler goes on to point out that 'reshuffling' is a randomising process and thus cannot generate order. In this quotation he refers to Hardy p212 where there was quoted the word 'reshuffled', but 'recombined' - which has a very different force. Koestler then alters his quote to set up a bigger target for his unsteady aim. In these texts the problem of homology undergoes a kind of evolution':

In Hardy it appears as a difficulty in the mechanism of natural selection, yet 'I am not wishing to suggest-for a moment-what any of these matters will be found to lie outside the process (of evolution)' (Hardy p208).

For Koestler, the facts cited are part of his denunciation of the paradigm against which they appear anomalous - that 'homologous structures in different species are due to the same "atomic" genes'.

With Randall it is incorporated into a wholesale onslaught on evolutionism:

What the Drosophila facts do show is very clearly stated by Hardy in the emphasised quote: homology in terms of a one-to-one correspondence between genes and adult structures has broken down. What is unclear is why this is surprising. Why should 'the language of inheritance' be unique in having the univocal and non-arbitrary relationship between signs and meanings that linguistic theoreticians and philosophers never deny to language? Perhaps behind this surprise is the lingering notion of germinal material as homunculi - genes in the machine?

What anyway disqualifies Randall's use of such arguments from being serious criticisms of evolutionism is that he never discusses the earlier and more fundamental difficulties which it has already successfully overcome. 7

The point of his criticism is to show how organic patterning can only be due to 'some overall "plan" rather than the result of random mutations generated by a changing environment' (p211). Consistently with this alienated notion of mind, this entails 'some outside influence, some "organising force" or factor, not at present recognised by orthodox science' (p209). This is why parapsychology and its supposed support for Cartesianism is important for Randall and his kind; it allows the introduction of God, prematurely pronounced dead, as the only possible explanation for the emergence of life.

Mind interacted with certain molecules on the cooling planet, bringing into existence highly improbable configurations of matter ... the creation of life involved the transfer of information from Mind to matter ...

The purpose of this is that Mind has been shown to exist for periods of time, to produce a living organism capable of expressing its own creative desires. In Man, something very close to this has at last been achieved. (p233-4)

Chadwick maintains that the crus of secularisation was the 'axiom that miracles do not happen' (p16). The ideologues of parapsychology are working to reject that axiom; in doing so, they show just how intimately late capitalism can weave together the most refined technology with the rankest irrationalism and superstition.

David Murray

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Stirner's idiosyncratic style which incorporates a sub-Hegelian vocabulary. There is an English translation of Stirner; and those who have the stomach for it could well find it rewarding to find their way into these polemics.

The last part of the Volume contains similarly detailed polemics against the 'True Socialists'. A good idea of its content may be gained by turning to Section III 1c of the Manifesto of the Communist Party where Marx later nailed this tendency to the wall.

The Manifesto can be found in Vol. 6 of the Collected Works which has now appeared. (It is, indeed, quite extraordinary that with the centenary of Marx's death approaching we are still in the middle of the production of a proper collected works.) One thing is certain: at £3 a volume there cannot be any better buy in the bookshops.

Chris Arthur

**History or Mystery?**

Ralph Miliband and John Saville, eds

The Socialist Register 1976. Merlin, £2.50

**Socialist Register 1976** is an important contribution to the present debate on the state of the left in Britain. From John Saville documenting the origins of The Reasoner (perhaps the midwife to the New Left) to Ken Coates ticking off the inaccuracies of David Widgery's *The Left in Britain* (its infantile disorder?) this edition of the Register is a timely if sobering review of the communist left (small 'c') since Hungary. Ralph Miliband's endpiece to the first part, 'Moving On', completes the documentaries by carefully and clearly showing that what there is is not as yet to move on.

The key issue of the Register is that of history, the immediate history of the New Left, crawling, climbing and breaking out of the old.

That the attempt was nearly still-born is shown often enough in the Register's pages. That the moment of birth still mesmerises the left and holds its formations gripped in the struggles of the late fifties is hinted at. And the magnet is always the Soviet Union. During the sixties it always seemed that the first question you were asked, usually belligerently, meeting for the first time a youthful member of another group was 'So what is your position on Russia?' And on your answer stood or fell your whole political credibility. As for 'your position' on workers control, trade union strategy, working in the Labour Party or anything of local or national significance that was simply read off or relegated to division three. So the 20th Congress of the CPSU and Kruschev's (not Stalin's) tanks in Budapest and the mentally disjointing acrobatics of the CPGB form the focal point of most of the articles.

It is not so much that the left lacks a history of this period but that it has so many, so many folkloric, triumphalist old-husbands' tales dedicated to proving that 'we' were right all the time - even before 'we' existed. The official view, the History as Mystery account, 'Stalin is in his heaven and all is well with the Party' is long discredited (big 'P') but the Widgery Pokery of the outer left, 'I.S. rules O.K.' only deepens the confusion. With the shapes and contours of its history lost in the mists of group subjectivity, it's not surprising the left finds it difficult to move on, rather like getting astride a bike with no wheels.

This is an important book for clearing the air. Though they are no doubt dismissed by the really Left, the accounts and analyses of some of the actors in the drama, Saville, Coates, MacEwen and Milliband (though sadly not Thompson) telling it how it was, give those of us who were politically conceived in the hectic heterodoxy of the climate they helped to engender some clue to our parentage. Some clue about the claustrophobic orthodoxy of the Marxist hegemony of the Party, its 'democratic' centralism, the relations of workers with anarchists, and as always the multi-headed dialectic of Revisionist Reformism.

For the left to move on instead of moving around this is vital first hand evidence and sober history. Putting wheels on the bicycle, creating or nourishing the institutions and organisations of proletarian power is what the left is about and this edition of the Register is an invaluable guide to what in many ways looks like the scrapyard we have inherited.

However while it is the modesty of the project of the editors and contributors which give the Register its solid strength as the hardy annual of the unpartied partisans of the left it is also perhaps its weakness. In a
way it feeds the craving it attempts to satisfy - where do we go from here? One feels that Ken Coates' apt description of I.S. as 'a rather shrill, if also intellectually infertile, sectarian grouping' would find echoes in all the groupuscules, but has any one done a close enough analysis of them to really know? But it is Ralph Miliband who really throws us the fastest morsel, though morsel it remains.

Having dismissed the groupuscules as minority movements he returns at last to the Communist Party, bigger than the rest put together but one of the smallest CPs in the capitalist world, and getting smaller; he says:

Nor is there any good reason to think that the Communist Party will eventually be able to fill the gap that exists on the left. In order to do so, it would have to transform itself so thoroughly as to become a new-party: it is not a realistic expectation.

(my emphasis)

Maybe it's time to throw away the bike and put a deposit down on a car?

Tom Steele

News

Dialectic project

At time of going to press, plans are being finalised for the one-day conference on 8 January. This will include discussion of Richard Norman's article (parts 2 and 3) and a critique of Norman by Rip Bulkeley. Contributions are expected on Hegel, Lukacs and philosophy of science. For further information on the project, and to join the mailing system, write to Richard Norman, Keynes College, University of Kent at Canterbury.

Working Group on Marxist Philosophy of Science

It is proposed to set up a national working group in this field, within the framework of the national RP Dialectic project. Would people who are interested please contact either Rip Bulkeley, 29 Richmond Road, Oxford, tel. 0865 52000 or Madan Sarup, 61 Ardoch Road, London SE6 tel. 01-698 9717

RP Newsletter

Newsletter 3 was produced by the Bristol Group last term; they plan to produce number 4 this spring. Number 3 includes news from the Womens' Philosophy Group and the Bristol RPG. The newsletter is now the medium for circulating financial and business news about RP and will be later linked to festival and AGM planning. Individual and group contributors and subscribers should write to the group at the address on page 1 - send stamps.

Please Don't Say You Won't Play With Me Any More ....!!!

'Ask yourself the following question.

(Warning: I am not going to answer this one for you!) Suppose that someone you have known for many years turns out to be a robot. You find out in some reliable way that, instead of being 'born of woman', he was manufactured in a secret laboratory in a remote part of the Soviet Union. What would your reaction be? Would you stop ascribing consciousness to him? Or what? (Don't say it couldn't happen; you can't be sure it couldn't. I am asking you to suppose that it has.)'

In 'Body and Mind', Units 1 and 2 in the Open University's Problems of Philosophy course, p54

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