reviews

Discourse Terminable and Interminable

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B. Hindess and P.Q. Hirst, Pre-capitalist modes of production, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975, £7.50 hc £3.75 pb
B. Hindess and P.Q. Hirst, Mode of production and social formation: An auto-critique of 'Pre-capitalist modes of production', London, Macmillan, 1977, £5.95 hc £2.20 pb

The 'Notes' to RP17 concluded with the statement:

> 'The present upsurge of fundamental Marxist researches may indicate an exit route from the cycle of philosophy's deaths and rebirths, via which the problems of the specificity of the philosophical might be both subverted and understood.' (RP17 p1).

The two books reviewed here may give, in my opinion, some support to this hope. However, it is not only the subversion of philosophy that these texts may propose, but also, perhaps, a subversion of Marx-ism itself. Starting out, in Pre-capitalist modes of production (PCMP), from an investigation of concepts of modes of production in Marxist theory and the rejection of Althusser's and Balibar's positions in Reading Capital, Hindess and Hirst reach conclusions, via a critique of epistemology in Mode of production and social formation (MPSF), that may well appear scandalous to many 'Marxists'.

The arguments presented in these two books are, I believe of the greatest significance for the work of RP and warrant a fairly lengthy presentation in its pages. Hindess' and Hirst's positions have already aroused interest and controversy concerning their implications for 'Marxist' economic and political theory. Their work may be of more particular interest to RP in that it can be seen as representing a thoroughgoing rejection and critique of the prescriptive pretensions and legislative aspirations of philosophy to effect a closure of forms of theoretical discourse(1). In particular one might single out the recurring concern of radical philosophers with the attempt to elaborate a 'dialectic' (see RP14), and the perennial attempts to provide an epistemological 'foundation' for Marxist theory (see Ian Craib's article in RP17), as being directly at stake in their work. In a more positive vein, at certain points the positions advanced by Hindess and Hirst may be seen as opening out onto the field of investigation inaugurated by Michel Foucault which RP has been presenting in recent issues (see RPs 15, 16 and 17). In this review I will concentrate on a summary of only the most general theoretical and epistemological issues raised in these books.

1 For an extended criticism of PCMP see John Taylor 'Review of "Precapitalist Modes of Production" Part One, Critique of Anthropology no. 4/5, 1975, and Part Two, Critic of Anthropology no. 5, 1976. For Hindess' and Hirst's reply see 'Mode of Production and Social Formation in PCMP: a reply to John Taylor' in Critique of Anthropology no. 8, 1977. For discussions of the consequences of their critique of Althusser for the concepts of 'class' and 'ideology' in Marxist theory see B. Hindess, 'The concept of class in Marxist theory and Marxist politics' in Class, Hegemony and Party, papers from the Communist University of London, edited by Jon Bloomfield, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1977, and P.Q. Hirst, 'Althusser and the theory of ideology' in Economy and Society vol. 5, no. 4. London, November 1976

Constructions in discourse

Despite the apparent promise of its title, PCMP is not a work of 'history'. It does not attempt to rationally reconstruct 'the past' or specify any 'scientific laws' of a supposed 'historical reality'. It is problems generated by the work of Althusser and Balibar in Reading Capital that give rise to the investigations in PCMP. In their 'Conclusion' the authors reject Althusser's epistemological conceptualisation of Marxism as a 'science of history' along with the notion of 'structural causality' in which he thinks the nature of this science. In opposition to the epistemological project of Reading Capital Hindess and Hirst insist that their work simultaneously breaks with the idea of 'history' as an object of scientific knowledge, and the attempt to constitute the concepts of modes of production as knowledge of independently existing real objects, as 'appropriations of the concrete in thought'.

In PCMP the concepts defining a mode of production designate an object constructed entirely within theory. The objective of PCMP is given as to 'determine the theoretical status and validity of certain specific concepts' (p1), that is, those concepts of particular 'pre-capitalist' modes of production which Marx designates at different places within his work. To this end general concepts drawn principally from Capital (relations and forces of production; necessary and surplus-labour etc), function as the means for the construction and validation of other specific concepts of particular modes of production. General concepts, organised in a definite logical order, serve as criteria for the construction of 'valid' specific concepts. They determine the conditions that must be satisfied by specific concepts if they are to be the concepts of a determinate mode of production. A purely 'logical' procedure is proposed whereby a set of general concepts defining the 'problematic' of a theory functions as the means for validating/invalidating specific theoretical constructions. This is presented as a theoretical investigation of specific concepts and not of concrete historical realities. For example, the specific concept of, say, the slave mode of production, is 'valid' if it is possible to construct it coherently according to the general concepts and criteria internal to, and defining, the problematic of the theory of modes of production. It is 'valid' with respect to this theory. On the other hand, the concept of the so-called 'Asiatic' mode of production is declared 'invalid' because the concept of relations of production given for this mode of production in Marxist theory does not permit the coherent construction of the concept of a determinate mode of production, i.e. according to the same general concepts and criteria.

The specific concepts so constructed do not refer to empirically given real objects and so cannot be judged by measuring them against any such supposedly pre-given reality. The authors also deny that the general concepts they employ constitute a 'general theory' or science of modes of production of the kind suggested in Balibar's contribution to Reading Capital. These general concepts do not define invariant elements of an essential structure

from which can be deduced possible variant forms corresponding to objects capable of an independent historical existence (particularly 'real' modes of production).

In PCMP the concept of 'mode of production' is defined as an articulated combination of determinate relations of production (the specific mode of appropriating surplus-labour and the corresponding mode of distribution of the means of production) and determinate productive forces (the specific structured combination of the elements of the labour-process). The relations of production are claimed to be always and necessarily dominant in this concept. Productive forces, it is argued, cannot be specified independently of the determinate relations of production with which, and under whose dominance, they are combined. Productive forces do not comprise merely an enumeration of a set of independent 'elements' such as forms of labour-power, techniques, instruments of labour, raw materials, scientific knowledge, etc. These 'elements' only become productive forces in the specific form of their combination, which is an effect of their structuration by the relations of production. The concept of determinate relations of production determines what must be the particular form of combination of the elements of the labour-process. It is this structured combination, and not the elements themselves, that comprises the productive forces.

The argument of a necessary dominance of relations over forces provides Hindess and Hirst with their means and criteria for the construction and validation of specific concepts of particular modes of production. In order for the concept of specific relations of production to define the relations of production of a determinate mode of production it must be possible to deduce the necessary form of the productive forces corresponding to them. If no corresponding set of productive forces is deducible, then the concept of these relations cannot function as concepts of a determinate mode of production (as, for example, in the case of the 'Asiatic' mode). Thus, the 'proof' of the 'validity' of a concept of a particular mode of production:

> '... involves the specification of its relations of production, the deduction of the corresponding forces of production, and the demonstration that the relations and forces form an articulated combination...' (p18)

The form of analysis I have roughly outlined is not, in fact, consistently maintained in all of the investigations in PCMP. For example, in the case of the 'Asiatic' mode of production already cited, as well as declaring the concept 'invalid' on the basis of their formal criteria of 'proof', the authors also reject the concept on the grounds that the conditions of existence of 'Asiatic' relations of production can only be thought in teleological terms as determined by a functional necessity. Also, in the investigation of the Feudal mode of production they are led to problematise and reformulate the general concepts they had been employing in earlier investigations. This reformulation of the concept of relations of production and their conditions of existence is continued in MPSF and ultimately leads to a rejection of the concept of mode of production itself.

However, beyond questions of the consistency and internal unevenness of their investigations, a more general question arises with respect to the refusal to accord the status of 'knowledge' to either their general or specific concepts. If, as Hindess and Hirst claim, their work does not produce any scientific knowledge, what is the theoretical and political pertinence of their lengthy and difficult deliberations? At this point a systematic ambiguity enters their work to which I will return after considering their critique of Althusser and Balibar.

From Marx to Eternity

If Hindess and Hirst deny that the concepts of the Marxist theory of modes of production 'appropriate' in a knowledge definite independently existing real objects, the opposite is the case for Althusser. Althusser, in Reading Capital, conceives of Marxist theory as a science providing knowledge of objects capable of independent historical existence. The way in which these objects are conceived by Althusser is a function of his particular epistemologization of Marxist concepts.

The concept of structural causality is central to Althusser's conceptualisation of Marxist theory as a 'science of history' and refers to the mode of causality which is said to govern the object of this science - its 'dialectic'. This concept attempts to resolve the classic problem in Marxism of the 'base'/'superstructure' relation: how to conceive that paradoxical couple, 'determination in the last instance' of non-economic 'levels' by the economic, and the 'relative autonomy' of the non-economic vis-a-vis the economic? The different ways in which these classic propositions are theoretically formulated will clearly determine correspondingly different conceptions of history. The proposal of a structural causality attempts to theorise the question of determination in a non-reductionist way. He seeks to force recognition in theory of what he claims Marxist political practice (Lenin, Mao) already 'knows': that forms of political and 'ideological' social relations and practices are irreducible to something other than themselves, that they are not merely the effects, expressions or forms of manifestation of an essential 'cause' or principle ('economic' or otherwise). The difficulties involved in any such attempt at a non-reductionist account which seeks to remain within the terms of 'classical Marxism' are already foreshadowed in the strange conjunction of terms in which the question is traditionally posed. How can we theoretically affirm the irreducibility of so-called superstructural forms (i.e. their 'relative autonomy') without simultaneously denying this affirmation (i.e. through their 'determination in the last instance')? What is the theoretical significance of the qualifying terms ('relative autonomy'/'determination in the last instance')? Hindess and Hirst claim that Althusser's reformulation of this classic question ultimately reproduces this structure of the effective denial of an affirmed non-reductionism.

Althusserian epistemology rigorously distinguishes between a thought-object (constructed entirely within scientific theory) and an (independently existing) real-object. It is through the theoretically constructed thought-object that the real-object is 'appropriated' in the form of a scientific knowledge. Althusser's critique of empiricism expels the real-object from the interior of scientific knowledge. Science, it is claimed, never confronts a pre-given real object but always constructs its own 'object'. But, as will be seen, this expulsion is not an abolition: the 'real world' remains 'as before'. Thus, for Althusser, the 'object' of a science of history is not any pre-given empirical-'historical' reality but a constructed theoretical 'object'.

Althusser rejects the idea of a given, 'real history'. All forms of historicity are no more than

functions of the theoretical definitions of particular concepts of social totalities and of the mode of causality governing them. Against teleological conceptions of history as an inevitable progression in which the end is present already in the beginning, and against the associated conception of social formations as 'expressive totalities' in which every aspect of the social whole can be read as the immediate expression of an essential (teleological) principle or cause, Althusser advances a conception of the social whole as a complex structure or distinct levels or 'instances', articulated in a hierarchy of determinations. The 'essence' of such wholes is no more than their complex structure governed by a mode of action which Althusser calls 'structural causality'. A mode of production comprises such a social whole.

In this conception the economic 'instance' has a double status being both one level amongst others in the social whole, and that level which is 'determinant in the last instance'. Specifically, what the economic 'determines' is the hierarchical articulation of levels, i.e. their place, function and specific effectivity within the whole. 'Ideology', for example, is not itself an effect of the economic level, but its specific effectivity within the articulated whole is the effect of the particular structure of the economic. The role of the economic as the instance which is 'determinant' is itself the effect of the action of the structure of the whole. Thus the concrete functioning of the distinct levels comprising a social totality is the effect of the structure of the whole which plays the role of 'cause' in this conception. The social whole is not the effect of one of its parts, nor is it the manifest existence of some essential inner principle: it is nothing but the existence of the structure in the form of the totality of its own effects. The structure exists, then, in and as its own effects. Social totalities, existing as the effects of the action of their structure, cannot be conceived as subject to conditions which are 'external' to themselves. Any such limitation of the action of the structure by 'external' conditions would destroy the effectivity of structural causality by introducing an alien form of causality beyond its control, and to which, therefore, it must ultimately be subject. The existence of the structure is an effect of itself, and it must secure its conditions of existence by its own action. (Althusser may be seen here as rigorously respecting the theoretical conditions necessitated by his continuing to conceive his object in the form of a 'totality'). In this conception of social wholes every element of the whole exists as an effect and condition of existence of the structure of the whole.

The concept of such totalities is the concept of what Althusser calls a Spinozist 'eternity'. It is the concept of a totality which is self-caused and whose existence is the necessary effect of itself. It is the concept which provides knowledge of an object which exists as self-conditioned and, necessarily, as eternally self-reproducing. Althusser insists that there is nothing in the concept of such a totality that entails its dissolution or transformation into another totality: 'the concept is not also the concept of its own supersession' (p 266). The concept of history corresponding to such social wholes is 'merely the existence of determinate social formations (arising from specific modes of production), articulated as social wholes' and has 'no meaning except as a function of the essence of these totalities, i.e., of the essence of their peculiar complexity' (Reading Capital, pp108-9, emphasis added).

'Structural causality' gives rise to concepts of social wholes as cause of themselves and as 'eternities'. In the classical language of different 'levels' of a social formation this means that each level must be conceived of as the necessary effect of the action of the structure of the whole, and as securing the continued existence of the whole. The articulation of distinct levels within the whole is governed by, and is an effect of, the action of the structure. As Althusser puts it, the relative autonomy of distinct levels is a function of their 'dependence' upon the whole. PCMP argues that the concept of structural causality, and the concept of modes of production as 'eternities', necessarily introduces incoherence into the discourse of Reading Capital. This incoherence emerges in the attempts to conceptualise the question of transition from one mode of production to another. The concept of modes of production as 'eternities' rigorously precludes a coherent conception of transition. All that this concept permits is the formation in theory of a series of possible distinct, and discontinuous, social wholes.

The question of transition can only be conceived as a function of the theoretical definition of social wholes and the mode of causality governing them. Hindess and Hirst ask: 'if each mode of production is an eternity, then how is transition to be conceived, if transition is to be possible then how can each mode of production be conceived as an eternity?' (p274) If transition from one mode of production to another is to be possible it is necessary that the conditions of existence of the mode to be superceded are not secured. But the concept of modes of production as eternities is the concept of a structure which produces its conditions of existence as necessary effects of itself. If the conditions of existence of one mode of production is secured by its own action, what can secure the conditions of existence of another mode of production which supercedes it? In short, if the cause of the existence of one mode of production is itself, then the cause of its dissolution can only be external to it. And, if this is possible, structural causality must be essentially limited and cannot give rise to modes of production as 'eternities'.

In Balibar's attempt to conceptualise transition structural causality is supplemented with another, teleological kind of causality, in the concept of a 'transitional mode of production'. In 'transitional' modes the action of the structure is governed by an end : the transformation of one eternity into another. (Here the concept is the concept of its own supercession.) Without examining this conception in detail it is nonetheless possible to see that it fails to resolve the problem. What remains impossible to conceive is how one gets from a period of non-transition (in which structural causality determines the existence of modes of production as eternities), to a transitional period (in which teleological causality determines the possibility of the supercession of a mode of production).

One final attempt to escape these consequences might be made by employing the opposition between the 'abstraction' of theory and the 'concrete' of real class struggles. But such references to 'concrete class struggles' are no more than irrational appeals to an 'outside' of theory, to a beyond of causes whose conditions are unknown-unknowable in theory. Structural causality conceives the conditions of class struggle as necessary effects of the action of the structure of the social whole. To introduce a 'concrete' beyond the specification of conditions in the

concept can only mean a reference to the irrational of non-conceptualised causes, i.e. accident.

> 'Thus Althusser's and Balibar's attempt to construct a theory of history combining a Spinozist concept of mode of production with the possibility in certain cases of transition ... requires the incoherent combination of three apparently distinct causalities: structural causality, in which the whole existence of the structure consists of its effects which are also its conditions of existence; teleological causality, in which the existence of the structure consists of its effects which are the conditions of its supersession; accident, the effect of causes foreign to Marxist theory' (p275).

The concept of modes of production as governed by structural causality makes it impossible to conceive the effective action of particular forms of economic, political and ideological practices in the transformation of social formations. The particular conditions of class struggle are reduced to the status of effects necessitated by a structure governed in its action by the end of its own continued existence - effects required by this end. Despite their intentions Althusser and Balibar return through the concept of structural causality to a definition of the social whole as a form of 'expressive totality' in which the complexity of distinct autonomous practices is effectively negated in their reduction to the status of expressions of an essence - in this case, a structure.

PCMP argues that Althusser's retreat into this kind of theology is the necessary consequence of his distinction between a thought-object and real-object in which is thought the status of Marxist theory as a science of history (science, and science of history).

A Non-historical history

Althusser rejects the notion of a pre-given 'real history' as the object of knowledge. There is no 'real history' given prior to and independently of theory. 'History' only ever exists as constructed within and by definite theoretical practices. The idea of a 'real' or 'empirical' history as the object of a possible knowledge is itself the theoretical product of such practices (e.g. empiricist or speculative philosophies used to justify the historian's practice). But if there is no 'real history' given independently of theory, there is no conceptual or 'thought-history' either. The thought-object of Althusser's science is resolutely non-historical; it is specified as a mode of production conceived as an eternity. There is no 'history' in this conception; only distinct theoretically constructed eternities which engender their own specific temporalities. In what sense can this non-historical object be the object of a science of history?

But is it true to say that Althusser rejects 'history' as a real object? In the act which denies it as the object of knowledge it re-appears, uncriticised, in the other term of the distinction between thought- and real-object. If the thought-object is the non-historical concept of 'eternities', what is the (retained) real-object? It can only be the (ideological) notion of a 'real history', maintained but placed on the other side of knowledge. The concepts defining a non-historical thought-object are the means whereby an (ideological conceived) 'real-object' - history - is known or 'appropriated in thought'. What can this mean?

Althusser's distinction between thought- and real-objects retains the classic features of epistemology. The retention of the 'real', in distinction to the 'thought' which knows it, poses the general question of what must be their relation for one to be a knowledge of the other - the epistemological question as such. If concepts of eternities are appropriations of the real 'in thought', then they must designate definite realities. Again, the concept of structural causality must correspond to an effectivity existing 'in reality'. Concepts of modes of production are concepts of objects capable of independent historical existence ('societies'). PCMP argues that this conflates the logical order of concepts in discourse and the (supposed) causal order of the real. If the concept is to be an appropriation of the real in thought, then the real must exist in a form appropriate to being-thought: the real must exist in the form of its concept. Social formations must be conceived as being governed by a causality of the order of a logic, i.e. of the concept of structural causality. The essence of 'history' becomes identical to the concept: 'the real is rational'. Althusserian epistemology returns us to the idealist conception of social formations as the concrete forms of existence of an ideal essence. The retention of the real (which is in fact no more than the retention of an ideological conception of 'the real'), and the retention of the epistemological problem of its 'appropriation in thought', engender the consequence of an idealist philosophy of history as the successive forms of existence of an essential rational order.

It is the epistemological conception of eternities as knowledge of the real that generates the problem of transition. The retention of the (ideological conception of the) 'real' produces the problem of the adequation of the concept to 'real history'. In 'real' or 'empirical history' we do not find a series of distinct eternities - 'real transitions' take place. This should not worry Balibar or Althusser if they maintain their rationalism rigorously. The features which are conceived as characteristic of a 'real history' should not disturb the calm of a project which claims to construct its own object independently of any notion of a pre-given 'real'. But the epistemologization of this project (as an appropriation of the real in thought) re-introduces the problem just as it has been abolished. Thus, for Balibar, what is conceived in advance of the process of theoretical construction as an essential property of the 'real' (i.e. transitions) determines what must be thought in theory if the concept is to adequately appropriate it. Theory thereby becomes the rationalisation of a pre-given conception of a real object - 'history'. The rationalist epistemology of Reading Capital leads inevitably to both idealism and incoherence.

It may seem incredible that Althusser's efforts should end up producing a version of the idealism he himself so rigorously castigates. Nothing could be further from the theoretical, or political, inspiration of his work. A few comments can be made on this point.

The authors of PCMP would acknowledge that it is principally the work of Althusser that makes possible their own critique. Their criticisms are precisely located at a definite level of his work and in many respects involve turning this work against itself (especially Althusser's critique of 'empiricism'). Althusser's own rejection of the 'speculative rationalism' of Reading Capital is not considered by Hindess and Hirst, nor his representation of this work in terms of its interventionary political inspiration. The critique in PCMP is, quite reasonably, concerned with the definite consequences of formal theoretical arguments. Appeals to the political function of these arguments, or to the 'conjuncture'

in which they were written, are out of place here. Such appeals cannot effect a closure of these arguments, they cannot terminate the effects they will continue to produce. This does not mean that the question of the political investment of these arguments (as of all theoretical work) is not an important question. Althusser's writing does not constitute a unified edifice, the product of some ideal totality (e.g. a 'problematic') but emerges from the interior of a complex theoretico-political space constrained by definite theoretico-political conditions. What perhaps is most interesting about this theoretical practice is the way in which, whilst it strains the classical apparatus of 'Marxist' theory to its limits by subjecting it to theoretical forms which tend to subvert and even dissolve its categories and problems (something which, of course, was recognised by his 'enemies'), at the same time, this subversion is itself subverted by the objective of 'defending' Marxism in terms of the most orthodox claim of its scientific status (as his 'friends' were not slow to point out). This 'play' in the writing of Althusser continues in a new form in the contortions of Althusser's 'self-criticism'. Here, the criticism of his own work and his rejection of the pretensions of philosophy is accompanied by a retreat into theoretical 'argument' by dogmatic assertion, and ever more 'orthodox' positions in politics.

The ambiguous concrete

Before turning to MPSF we have first to consider the ambiguity of the authors' claim that their analysis and concepts are not 'appropriations of the real in thought'. In the 'Introduction' the authors distinguish between 'the construction and investigation of abstract, general concepts' on the one hand (the work of PCMP), 'and the investigation of particular real conditions (of) ... a determinate concrete social formation' (p4) on the other (the work of, say, Lenin's Development of Capitalism in Russia). Both investigations are said to take place within scientific theoretical practice. The former functions as the necessary means for the production of the latter. So, the knowledge relation denied at one level of theoretical work is admitted at another. Hindess and Hirst stress that their abstract investigations of concepts acquires both its theoretical and political pertinence from the necessary function it performs in making possible 'concrete analyses'. Thus, the epistemological question evaded with respect to the work of theoretical construction and investigation of abstract concepts re-emerges with respect to 'concrete analysis'. As the words themselves suggest, the object here does comprise an independently existing reality: 'particular real conditions', 'determinate concrete social formation'. The question that immediately arises is what privileges this specific order of concepts or 'problematic' as the means necessary for the production of a scientific knowledge of concrete reality? Why these concepts and this order? What is the nature of their necessity for the production of knowledge? Hindess and Hirst remain silent on this question and the epistemological status of their concepts remains unargued. This suggests a rationalist privileging of an order of concepts which depends on no more than the dogmatic assumption of their epistemological necessity.

However, the authors are not, as I have suggested, unambiguous on this point concerning knowledge of the 'concrete'. In the final pages of PCMP a different, non-epistemological, approach to the question of the relation between the investigation of abstract concepts and 'concrete analysis' is suggested. Drawing support from Lenin and the category of the 'current situation' they argue that abstract work in Marxist theory exists to make possible analyses of the 'current situation' in and for political practice. But, as they point out, the 'objects' of such analyses are not objects of a knowledge, these 'objects' are always formed within, and are relative to, a definite field of political practice within which theoretical work is inscribed. Theory, they argue, is always invested within a space of forms and relations of political practice in which it functions as a means of formation, analysis and criticism of problems and positions effective within this space. The relation between theory and its 'objects' in the analysis of 'current situations' is not, they say, a relation of knowledge at all. This point is developed further in MPSF and I will return to it in considering that book.

'We read Capital as philosophers'

> 'The "real world" - an idea no longer of any use, not even a duty any longer - an idea grown useless, superfluous, consequently a refuted idea: let us abolish it!' (Nietzsche)

If the (category of) the 'real world' is retained as ground and ultimate horizon of both Reading Capital and PCMP, it finally vanishes in MPSF. In this book Hindess and Hirst continue the critique begun in PCMP and claim to 'complete' the break with Althusserian positions. Central to this process is a critique of epistemology and the rejection of the formation and validation of forms of theoretical discourse according to epistemological prescriptions.

Epistemological conceptualisations of the relation between discourse and its objects are defined in MPSF as possessing a structure of distinction and correlation. A realm of discourse is distinguished from another, independently existing, realm of actual or possible objects. Also, if the former is to be a knowledge of the latter, then a mechanism of correlation must be conceived whereby the one is able to know the other (express, represent, reflect, grasp, appropriate it, etc). This correlation, it is argued, is effected by granting a privileged status to a specific level of discourse in appropriating independently existing objects. Thus, epistemology can evaluate discourse by reference to the level it designates as privileged (e.g. empiricism may privilege a level of 'basic observational statements' in which objects given to experience are represented, or, in a rationalism, a specific conceptual order - such as a 'problematic', or a 'dialectic' - may be privileged as appropriating the essence of reality). MPSF argues that this form of conceptualisation has definite conditions and effects.

Firstly, this structure implies that objects known in discourse must exist in a way that can be designated and described by (the privileged level of) discourse: Being, if it is to be appropriated in Thought, must exist in a form appropriate to Being-thought. Epistemology must presuppose an ontology to the extent that what is thought to exist must include at least what is designated by the epistemologically privileged aspect of discourse - it must exist in the form of its discursive designation. Knowledge claims, therefore, may be judged by reference to what aspect of discourse is represented as being privileged in the designation of objects. But, as MPSF claims, the pretension to judge discourse by epistemologically privileged levels depends solely upon the dogmatic assumption of the privilege of epistemology itself. The level designated as episte-

mologically privileged cannot be coherently demonstrated to fulfill the role with which it is charged. The argument that a level of discourse is privileged can only be supported by an epistemological discourse which grants itself the privileged status of being able to designate (know) such levels of discourse which designate (know) reality, (it must know 'reality' already as what is knowable and capable of existing in a knowledge).

Secondly, epistemological conceptualisations generate distinct modes of critique and reading of other forms of discourse. On the one hand, the conception of independently existing (and knowable) objects makes possible a 'realist' critique in the form of a claimed non-correspondence between 'theory' and the 'real object'. For example, it may be claimed that the concept of the feudal mode of production constructed in PCMP fails to correspond to any real past or presently existing feudal modes of production. But since reference to such 'realities' can only be to their representation in another form of discourse, this form of critique merely measures the 'substantive distance between the objects specified in one discourse and those specified in another' (p44). On the other hand, discourse may be re-evaluated by reference to the level privileged by epistemology. For example, the 'problematic' identified in a given discourse may be declared 'unscientific' on the grounds that it fails to correspond to that 'problematic' which the epistemological reading privileges as providing knowledge of reality. More commonly this kind of reading is found in its empiricist guise and produces some remarkable effects. For example, when Freudian discourse is read through the epistemological grid of empiricism certain elements which are recognised as corresponding to the requirements of 'basic observational statements' are separated from other elements which appear to fail to so correspond, e.g. supposedly observable 'events' like infantile seductions or castration threats are abstracted from the practice of interpretations in analysis and the theoretical determination of concepts. Having pulverised the discourse being read , the way is open for such absurd conclusions as that 'we cannot test claims regarding the effects of infantile seduction and castration threats since such "events" are always reconstructed from unverifiable memories'.

Thirdly, as well as presupposing an ontology and a privileged access to the nature of what is knowable, the structure of epistemology also implies a conception of the conditions under which discourse is produced, i.e., in terms of the necessary agencies which can produce knowledge and the conditions necessary such that the production of knowledge is possible. For example, the conception of basic observational statements implies the necessary existence of human subjects as discourse producing agents endowed with definite faculties of experience and judgement. If 'basic statements' are to be representations of observed phenomena, some account is required of the subject and his observational capacities. The problem that this raises is that the 'subject' presupposed as a condition of the knowledge process cannot itself be conceived as open to objective investigation. Attempts to demonstrate the characteristics of the agent-subject must either presuppose what has to be demonstrated (since it is a prior condition of knowledge), or it must conceive this agent in a way which does not presuppose its effects in the investigation itself. In the first case we rest upon dogmatism, and in the second the privileged status of the agent is brought into question by conceiving a knowledge process which does not require it. MPSF argues that the notion of a 'subject' of discourse should be extended to designate 'whatever knowledge producing agency may be posited by an epistemology...' (p17) What functions to produce knowledge need not be a human subject. In Althusserian epistemology human agents are not the subjects of knowledge but 'supports' constituted by the functioning of a theoretical apparatus - a 'problematic' - which is the real 'subject' of the knowledge process. Althusser is thereby included within this criticism.

The circularity and dogmatism of these characteristics of epistemology are seen as the inevitable consequence of the conception of:

> '... an independently existing realm of objects that may none the less be correlated with their representations or appropriations in determinate forms of discourse. To deny epistemology is to deny that correlation. It is not to deny forms of existence outside discourse but it is to deny that existence takes the form of objects representable in discourse. The rejection of epistemology implies ... that the relation between discourse and its objects cannot be conceived as an epistemological relation at all' (pp21-22).

The rejection of epistemology implies the rejection of conceiving discourse through the twin figures of 'thought' or 'theory-in-general' and 'being' or 'reality-in-general'. Epistemology conceives of discursive objects through a play on words which assimilates the specific entities designated in discourse to the general status of independently existing object-ivity and objects-to-be-known. To deny this form of conceptualisation is to argue that what is specified in discourse, i.e. its 'objects', can only be conceived through discourse; either through the discourse which specifies them itself, or through another discourse. This raises the question of what form of analysis of discourse is being proposed in MPSF?

The rejection of epistemological protocols for the reading, analysis or criticism of theoretical discourse precludes any recourse to an assumed privileged level by which a discourse may be judged as 'adequate'. Hindess and Hirst reject attempted closures of discourse through a reduction by means of epistemological categories:

> 'Theoretical discourse we shall define as the construction of problems for analysis and solutions to them by means of concepts. Concepts are deployed in ordered successions to produce these effects. This order is the order created by the practice of theoretical work itself: it is guaranteed by no necessary 'logic' or 'dialectic' nor by any necessary correspondence with the real itself... Theories only exist as discourses - as concepts in definite orders of succession producing definite effects ... as a result of that order. Theoretical discourse, like discourse in general, speaking and writing, is an unlimited process' (p7).

The form of analysis which MPSF engages in may be characterised as an 'internal' critique of the coherence of specific forms of conceptual order. That is, their analysis is restricted to a specific level concerned with the deployment of concepts in definite forms of order, their connections, presuppositions and 'logical' conditions and effects. The form of criticism they employ operates in terms

of the incoherence, inconsistency, dogmatism, etc, implied by the forms of discourse they analyse.

It should not be thought that the form of analysis employed by Hindess and Hirst is a kind of substitute epistemology. Their arguments do not attempt, a priori, to prescribe limits to forms of theoretical discourse. Neither do their criticisms pretend to disclose the 'truth of' those discourses which are subjected to them. One effect of the rejection of epistemology is the removal of any 'fixed point' from which their discourse could speak in such a universal form. Rather, their analysis might perhaps be seen as a specific and limited intervention, strategically deployed against the functioning of epistemology in what Foucault has called a '"regime" of truth' (see RP17, p14). Their object, then, is not an alternative determination of 'truth' but the subversion of certain of the forms and representations of truth - and their political effects. This is not all that can be said about discourse. It is distinct from the problems that arise in conceptualising its production, conditions of existence and political effects.

The rejection of epistemological conceptualisations means that theoretical discourse cannot be thought of as the realisation of an epistemology. If, for example, the categories and conditions of empiricist conceptions of discourse-object relations are denied, then no discourse can be conceived of as 'empiricist', that is, as a real instantiation of an epistemology. A substantive discourse may produce epistemological arguments and concepts but it is not itself the product of the objects and conditions specified in any epistemology. This is not to deny that epistemological conceptualisations can, and do, function within a discourse alongside, in relation to, and producing effects in, non-epistemological forms of conceptualisation. It is merely to assert that the conditions of existence of a discourse are non-epistemological:

> 'those conditions can no longer be conceptualised in terms of their interference in the knowledge relation or of their securing that relation against interference ... it is necessary to conceive of theoretical, political and other forms of discourse as determinate forms of social practice with their own conditions of existence in other social practices (experimental, political, economic ...) and in social relations and as having definite effectivities with regard to those practices and relations' (p22).

This distinction between an 'internal' critique of discourse on the one hand, and the conceptualisation of its conditions of existence and effects on the other, poses certain problems for the analysis of particular features of MPSF. I will return to this after considering Hindess' and Hirst's argument concerning the way in which connections between objects and entities specified in discourse are to be conceived. This directly concerns the vexed question of 'determination' in Marxist theory.

'economic conditions explain..'(Marx)

Objects of discourse, then, have no existence independent of the forms of discourse in which they are specified. This means that connections between 'objects' (e.g. between relations of production and other, political, legal and social relations) can only be conceived as a function of these discursive forms and cannot be reduced to any single universal form of connection. That is, forms of connection between objects which are a function of epistemological conceptualisations of the relation between discourse and its objects are rejected. This leads Hirst and Hindess to reject the two general forms in which connections between objects are usually conceived within Marxism - mechanical and expressive causalities.

In empiricist conceptions objects are thought of as existing outside theory and as represented in discourse through the category of experience to which they are given. Likewise, connections between objects are conceived as given in experience, i.e. as a regular and recurrent observable correlation. The corresponding conception of the form of relation between objects is that of an external relating of distinct, individually given objects in a mechanical causality. Conceptual relations play a secondary role here in the determination of connections between objects since, for empiricism, it is less the logical structure of theoretical concepts that is epistemologically privileged than the level of statements which represent observed states of affairs. Consequently, all theoretical constructions must be subject to the ultimate test of experience (particular observations). Generalities are less important (or privileged) than the particular observable instances which 'confirm' or 'refute' them. So, in conceiving the relation between, say, definite production relations and particular forms of legal contract, empiricism represents their connection as always a unique case of an external relation between independently given objects that may or may not be observed to obtain.

On the other hand, rationalist conceptions must represent the connections between objects as determined by the logical order of conceptual connections. For rationalism the real exists in the form of a rational order so that distinct objects may be deduced from other objects. The corresponding conception of the form of connection between objects is that of an expressive causality. In this conception phenomena are thought of as the manifest form of essential relations identical to their concept. Here, the connection between definite production relations and particular forms of legal contract is that of an existence of the latter necessitated by the concept of the former. The form of connection between distinct objects becomes deducible from the concept of the relations of production, i.e. as a function of the 'logic' in terms of which the discourse conceives objects to exist. One is the necessary effect of the other. We have already encountered a form of this in the critique of Althusserian rationalism.

Mechanical and expressive causalities, it is argued, are functions of epistemological conceptualisations of discourse as knowledge of a realm of independently existing objects. If one rejects the view of discourse as an 'appropriation' of independently existing objects, then one also denies that objects exist in the form of their discursive designation. Connections between objects cannot be thought of in a universal form of the order of either an external mechanical causality, or an ideal expressive causality. Conceptions of a general form of causality connecting objects are a function of epistemology in that they are an effect of how objects must be conceived if they are to be the objects of an adequate knowledge. If the concept is to appropriate the real, then the real must be grasped in all of its conditions and determinations which must, in principle, be 'general'. The forms of connection between objects are determined by the logical properties of discourse since the object must exist in this way if it is to be appropriated. Any form of connec-

tion between objects not specifiable in terms of the general characteristics of the epistemologically privileged level of discourse will undermine the status of that discourse as knowledge. If epistemological conceptions are rejected, then one also rejects the notion that there is any general, universal form of causality connecting objects of discourse. It entails that one reject what many consider to be the 'touchstone' of Marxism - the thesis of a general 'determination in the last instance' by the 'economy'.

Conceptions of a universal form of connection between objects, in the form of mechanical or expressive causalities, have functioned in Marxist theory as the means of appropriating reality, that is, they have served to determine the terms in which the connections between objects must be conceived in order to produce an adequate knowledge of reality. But more usually, 'Marxist' theorising eclectically combines a conception of an essential, and general, determination which enables the deduction of the essential character and relations of superstructural forms from the essential character of the economic base, with a piecemeal recognition of (what is represented as) particular, non-deducible and empirically given variations in the relation between distinct objects along with their unique effects.

The rejection of the thesis of 'determination in the last instance' leads Hindess and Hirst to conceive economic and other social relations in a new way. For example, the definition of a specific 'object' in discourse, say relations of production, is the effect of the 'logical' ordered forms in which concepts are deployed, forms of demonstration, etc, the result of which may be that the definition entails a reference to the effects of other 'objects', e.g. non-economic forms of determination of the capacities of agents occupying determinate places in the relations of production. Here, then, the 'logical' order of concepts defining a specific object presupposes a reference to the effects of other objects (other social relations and practices). However, the 'logical' presupposition of this reference in the definition of an object is not the same as saying that one can deduce the nature and existence of the object referred to from the definition itself, e.g. as its 'necessary effect'. In the definition of relations of production proposed by Hindess and Hirst the connection between relations of production and the effects of other social relations and practices is conceived in terms of conditions of existence. The specification of determinate relations of production involves a reference to conditions of existence which are the effects of other social relations and practices. It must be stressed that, in this conception, relations of production do not themselves determine that these conditions are in fact secured, nor the form in which they may be secured. All that is asserted is that the specification of one object entails a reference to the effects of other objects. To conceptualise determinate relations of production will involve, therefore, the production of concepts specifying the way in which these conditions of existence are secured through a specification of those objects which provide them: what these objects are and how they are to be conceived cannot be determined in advance on the basis of the definition of relations of production.

The way in which Hirst and Hindess propose to conceptualise relations of production involves a distinction between a 'logical' order of conceptual connections through which objects of discourse are defined, and another level of conceptualisation concerning how connections between objects specified in discourse are to be conceived. On the basis of this it becomes possible to conceive what might be involved in a specific analysis of theoretical discourse. In a text like Capital, for example, it may be possible to distinguish different, but interpenetrating, levels of conceptualisation. For instance, in the definition of capitalist relations of production it would be possible to identify a definite order of connections between concepts that entail a reference to other concepts designating the effects of e.g. legal and political relations and practices. At this level one would be concerned with particular forms of discursive order in Capital, and their 'logical' presuppositions. However, at the same time, one may be able to identify a different level of epistemological forms of conceptualisation and demonstration which produces distinct effects through its determining that connections between concepts be conceived as representing an essential causal connection between the objects they specify, e.g. that legal social relations be conceived as necessary effects of economic relations. Thus the combination of distinct forms of conceptualisation can be registered along with its effects, e.g. the conflation of a 'logical' order of conceptual connections with a supposedly general causal order of connections between objects. Such a form of analysis would not seek to determine some essential unity to the text of Capital, it would not seek to disclose its 'truth'. On the contrary, it would produce through the deliberate operation of a precisely located level of analysis (it is not the only form of analysis possible), a division of the text according to different, interpenetrating, and even contradictory forms. Such an analysis would attempt to open up definite problems for conceptualisation free from the bolster of a 'return' to an ideal text.

Rejection of totality, total rejection?

> 'the will to a system is a lack of integrity...' (Nietzsche)
>
> '... this particular idea of the "whole of society" derives from a utopian context. This idea arose in the Western world within this highly individualized historical development that culminates in capitalism. To speak of the "whole of society" apart from the only form it has ever taken is to transform our past into a dream.' (Foucault)

The extent of the implications of Hindess' and Hirst's critique are, I believe, devastating for much of the traditional forms of 'Marxist' theorising. Ultimately their arguments would appear to subvert the entire discursive apparatus that has served the 'left' in its theoretical and political analysis and practice. I will only indicate here what I believe to be some of the important general (and negative) consequences of this onslaught.

(1) Firstly, the idea of 'totality' seems increasingly fragile. It is often claimed that the 'superiority' of Marxism resides in its grasp on the 'totality'. One wonders how far is this conception a consequence of a rationalism unthought in its implications? (A question which suggests another, not asked in MPSF: what motivates this rationalist desire for all-inclusiveness, this utopian desire to embrace the totality of Being in an exhaustive and systematic knowledge? who wants this knowledge, and for what ends?) The idea of the object of theory as a totality arises from a rationalist epistemology which represents the conceptualisation of social relations in terms of a general theory, or 'science', of so-called society. But this object, 'society', is an ideologically conceived

object, the product of definite political, legal, historical, and philosophical discourses, themselves inscribed within definite social practices. It is retained in Marxism as the imagined 'real' reference which is to be known. In order for this object to be known it must be conceived as a totality complete in itself with all its determinations, conditions and effects. Any determinations or conditions not conceived as necessary to itself, not conceived as its own necessary effects, will problematise the aspiration of theory to be its knowledge since the object will be subject to conditions and causes beyond the ken of theory. And, by return, the conception of conditions and causes beyond the limits specified in the concept will undermine its designation as a totality. If we reject the epistemologization of discourse we also dispose of the necessity to conceive of its objects as totalities.

MPSF is careful to conceive its object as 'determinate sets of relations of production, conceived as forms of economic class relations, their conditions of existence and the forms in which those conditions are provided'(p55). This formulation avoids the pitfalls of totalising pretensions. The concept of social formation in MPSF no longer designates a totality corresponding to the ideological notion of 'society'. It refers to a specific 'object of discourse in which the conditions of existence of determinate relations of production are secured' (p16). This conception frees us from the necessity to think all 'social' objects as under the sway of a general law of the whole. It frees us from those absurd reductionist contortions by which everything is forced within the contours of a 'class' struggle essentially unified at its point of 'origin' within economic relations. It frees us from the tentacles of a 'dialectical' rationalism which wants to insinuate itself into every sphere.

But this conception, in that it foregoes the exhaustiveness of rationalist aspirations, at the same time frees us for a consideration of a whole host of problems and theoretical investigations which are generally an embarrassment to a marxist epistemological imperialism caught between the twin figures of either the offer of annexation or the decree of banishment. The rejection of the services of the 'totality' obviates the need for that forced choice between an annexation to 'Historical Materialism' as the condition of attainment to truth, or an eternal banishment to the realm of error and 'ideology', i.e. in both cases to a form of systematic subsumption. One could cite here the difficulties marxists may have in recognising the significance of such pioneering investigations as have been initiated by Michel Foucault. (What is he studying? Does his work find a place within the region of Marxist theory of ideology? Is he just another 'bourgeois' historian of ideas? And so on). Or again, one could cite the contortions Marxists have forced themselves through in their relation to psycho-analysis. There are still many questions to be asked of this desire for 'the whole'.

(2) Secondly, the dissolution of a general law of 'determination in the last instance' dissolves a whole tradition of 'class analysis'. We have already considered the critique of rationalist conceptions of the relations between objects as governed by a general causality. The form of conceptualisation of economic class relations proposed in MPSF effectively dissolves the problem of 'determination in the last instance'. The nature and effects of the objects which secure the conditions of existence of economic class relations can no longer be derived from the conception of these relations themselves. But nor are they empirically given. As a consequence, the concepts of economic class relations cannot be privileged in the construction of the concepts of these other objects nor sanctioned against the effects which may be produced by the theoretical practice which conceptualises them. This has important consequences for the way in which social relations and practices are conceived.

(a) The rejection of 'determination in the last instance' problematises the notion of ideology as a determinate instance or level delimited and unified by the functioning of a general cause. The concept of a general 'determination' functions to assign unity to

Prison papers

Issues 16 and 17 of RP have included two discussions on prisons: an interview with Michel Foucault and a presentation of his recent book, Surveiller et Punir (shortly to be published in translation by Allen Lane as Discipline and Punish). Essential reading for anyone interested in the current struggles in and around the prison system in Britain is PROP, the bimonthly paper of the national prisoners' movement. PROP costs 10p for single copies and £1.30 annually for postal subscriptions. Also available is the report of the public inquiry organised by PROP into the Hull prison riot, costing £2 plus 20p postage & packing. Address: 32a Park Road, Colliers Wood, London SW19; telephone 01-542 3744.

The journal of the prisoners' movement in France is Le Cap, a monthly paper published since 1973 by the Comité d'Action des Prisonniers, 15 rue de Trois Frères, 75018 Paris. Subscription rates for France are 16 francs for six months and 30 francs for a year. Le Cap is sold by some newspaper kiosks in Paris.

Politics & Epistemology

Social Theory and Political Practice, the recent work by Brian Fay (Allen & Unwin, 1975), is attracting considerable attention both in its own right and as a statement from within the analytic philosophical tradition of many of the principal arguments of the Frankfurt School of 'critical theory'. Following his review of the book in RP 14, Russell Keat has produced an extended and detailed critical discussion of it which, whilst sympathetic to its approach, poses serious difficulties for conceptions of the relationships between epistemology and politics widely held by critical theorists and on the left generally. The paper is of quite general interest, but would be especially useful for students and teachers using Fay's text as a way into critical theory as well as more advanced students of critical theory. Copies of the paper can be obtained from: Russell Keat, Bowland College, University of Lancaster, Lancaster LA1 4YT

an ideological level. The effectivity of this level is ultimately subject to conditions determined by the 'instance' of the economic. 'Ideology' - the diverse forms of cultural, philosophical, scientific , etc, forms of practice and institutions - cannot escape the limits imposed by the general category of determination without undermining this category itself. The general category of determination, in assigning limits and unity to 'ideology' as a determinate 'level', thereby determines the possibility of that fashionable project of a general theory of 'ideology' i.e. as a finite unity expressible in its concept. The rejection of 'determination in the last instance' problematises the unity and limits of objects of discourse. This means that the objects conceived - for the time being - under the rubric 'ideological', cannot be thought of as necessarily essentially unified or bounded by conditions imposed by a general determination. It puts in question the very project of that oft lamented 'theory of ideology'.
(b) But, if 'ideological' practices and social relations are not subject to the limits imposed by a general determination, then the nature and effectivities of specific 'ideological' forms (e.g. 'socialism', religion, racism, sexism, etc.), cannot be conceived of as being necessarily constrained by an essential connection with economic class relations. It means that economic classes are not predestined to any definite forms of politics or ideology as a function of their place within economic relations: nothing predestines the proletariat to revolutionary politics. There is no general and essential form of relation between economic classes and the forms of political and ideological social practices within which social forces are formed; there can be no general function assigned to an essentially 'class' struggle. Political forces and the objectives they pursue must be conceived of as formed within specific forms of political practice, and not as subject to a general economic determination. The central tool in the Marxist's apparatus for calculating political practice is fundamentally problematised.
(3) Finally, the idea of a 'scientific' politics ('scientific socialism') is rejected. This follows from the rejection of ideology - or any other object - as a level delimited by the functioning of a general determination. The dream of politics as the rational realization of a 'programme' based upon an objective knowledge can no longer be maintained. (Again, what desire did this dream betoken?) In this respect MPSF urges that we cease talking in terms of the 'unity' of theory and practice (thought and the concrete) and begin instead to conceptualise the diverse connections and interpenetrations of discourse and social, political and cultural relations and practices.

At this point MPSF takes up the concluding arguments to PCMP. Political 'knowledge', Hirst and Hindess argue, is always invested in definite social relations and practices and involves definite forms of calculation:

> 'In political practice the conditions of calculation of effectivity and of the production of effect are not separable. Political practice involves calculation of effect, of the possibilities and results of political action, and that calculation rests on political relations which condition the degree of certainty of calculation and the range of the calculable ... there can be no one form of political calculation for the simple reason that there is no one form of the political conditions of that calculation' (p59).

This point usefully returns us to the distinction I noted earlier between what might be called an 'internal' or 'logical' critique and analysis of discourse on the one hand, and the question of conceptualising the production, conditions of existence and political effects of discourse, on the other. With regard to the latter aspect Hindess and Hirst do not attempt to offer more than a modest indication of the way in which investigation might proceed, and their comments are restricted to the connections between theoretical discourse and political practice only. MPSF argues that in the construction of concepts and problems in theoretical discourse diverse means of formation are applied to problems from equally diverse sources. For example, problems may arise from a definite political practice and are represented by means of different forms of discourse invested in this practice (e.g. the 'problem', so-called, of racism). The means used to represent definite political 'objects' and to calculate possible forms of action and effects are inscribed within definite practices and relations and conditioned by them, e.g. party political practice and relations. There are no pre-given 'problems' or 'objects' of such theorisation. The 'objects' confronted in, for example, political theory are not assimilable to the status of independently existing reality-in-general, nor is theory itself assimilable to the status of theory-in-general. The field of objects represented, and the means of representation employed, are always conditional upon specific social and political relations and practices.

Now in MPSF no attempt is made to consider the conditions of existence, functioning and effects of the forms of discourse they subject to what I have called an 'internal' analysis. Their critique is restricted to the level of an examination of its 'logical' presuppositions and consequences. The question arises as to what ends is this analysis directed?

Discourse of politics; politics of discourse

In the light of what I have taken to be the far-reaching consequences of Hindess' and Hirst's partial deconstruction of 'marx-ist' forms of discourse, it will no doubt occur to many to ask what is left of 'marx -ism' in this critique. Without confronting this question directly I would like to approach it indirectly via a more general question concerning the relation of MPSF and its 'internal' critique to the constituted field of 'left' politics.

The area in which Hindess' and Hirst's critique principally functions is that of the field of problems, categories, and forms of analysis broadly termed 'Marxist'. It would appear that the authors remain, in some sense, 'socialists'. The political pertinence of their critique would seem to derive from the conviction that the effect of epistemologization of theoretical work is to produce a significant and persistent obstacle to the formation of problems for theoretical investigation in and for revolutionary socialist political practice.

Thus, MPSF appears to remain strategically located within, and directed to, the existing field of 'left politics'. That is, MPSF appears to be strategically oriented to a form of political practice whose theoretical armoury it fundamentally problematises. This can be seen in the discursive priority they accord to the conceptualisation of economic class relations. This priority is political and not epistemological. It appears to be based upon a calculation of the pertinence of this conceptualisation for the construction of problems for analysis in and for

political practice (problems which have their source, in part at least, in a particular field of political practice). They castigate the left in the following terms:

> 'The mode in which questions are formed and then theorised depends on the level of development of both politics and theory, and on the extent to which they are inscribed one in the other. One undoubted consequence of the weakness of the Left in this country, its lack of engagement with existing politics and political forces, its doctrinaire gesture politics, its lack of political theory, is the weakness of development of problems for theorisation" (p58)

These comments indicate the site from which, and to which, their discourse is addressed. Finally, two volumes of collective work are promised for the near future on Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today, from which we should be better able to judge the direction of their researches. The question I would like to put is, what is this 'politics' of which they speak?

By their own admission, Hindess and Hirst would have to agree that the forms of theoretical discourse they reject have been, and still are, inscribed within definite forms of 'political' practice. Yet MPSF does not really investigate this connection which, I would suggest, goes far beyond just revolutionary politics, to the heart of 'politics' itself (to its constitution as a 'master' practice and as a site for the enunciation of a universal, and universalizing, discourse...). MPSF rigorously restricts itself to the level of an internal critique. This is not a criticism of the book, but it raises the question of its purpose and the significance of its retention of the horizon of 'existing politics' at the same time as it subverts the way in which 'politics' has been conceived. The question MPSF does not ask, and which I would like to put in conclusion, is how far are the forms of discourse they reject not merely obstacles within an existing field of political practice, but, on the contrary, constitutive of this 'politics' itself? How far is the inscription of the discourse subverted in MPSF formative of the 'politics' to which Hindess and Hirst still address themselves?

On ideology

Working Papers in Cultural Studies No.10: On Ideology (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1977, 272pp, £1.75)

The tenth issue of WPCS, devoted to ideology, is a significant contribution to the recent explosion of work in the area. It is worth reading not only for its intrinsic merits but as a symptom of the current state of Marxist theory in this country, illustrating its advances and deficiencies in almost ideal type form. Above all it illustrates the profound influence of Althusser on British Marxism: the majority of theoretical papers find it necessary to define themselves in relation to his work and take their problems from it, but there is little in the way of a real attempt to come to grips with it critically, develop it systematically, or develop a coherent alternative.

The journal is divided into three parts, the first a series of critical expositions of theories of ideology. There is an intelligent and erudite survey of the sociology of knowledge, travelling from its origins in European philosophy through Marxism, Mannheim, Durkheim, Weber, structuralism and phenomenology, clearly defining the central issues. Then follows a brief account of Lukacs, reproducing standard oversimplifications and criticisms, a paper on Gramsci which is a useful complement to Perry Anderson's study, and an exposition of Althusser which is not always as clear as it might be and on occasions is incoherent (on p83, for example, we are told '... the definition of practice involves a labour of transformation which is none other than a determinate mode of production...' - this might just be a misprint, but in the context of the rest of the paper it is doubtful). The most interesting paper in this section is the beginning of a serious critique of Poulantzas which requires further elaboration and argument. Reprehensibly absent are accounts of the Frankfurt School and Sartre; even more reprehensible, there is no apparent recognition of the absence.

The second section is concerned with concrete analyses of ideologies. What is most immediately striking is its divorce from the first section: the theoretical sophistication vanishes and apart from the appropriation of some substantive points from Gramsci, there is little theoretical work at all. The first of the two papers in this part makes some fairly standard criticisms of mainstream sociological work on community and class consciousness, but avoids the empirical data produced by these studies. The second is much more impressive and useful: an account of the development of ideologies of education as they contributed to educational change and expansion in the 1960s. They are related to their institutional bases (the Labour Party, Academic sociology and the teaching profession) and traced through to the present crisis, which is seen as symptomatic of a more general crisis in social democracy.

The third section returns to theory, this time with the focus on subjectivity and individuality. The first paper here is a useful 'situating' of the work of Lacan and Kristeva in relation to more conventional Marxist theory, although I suspect it presupposes some initial knowledge of the theorists and issues concerned. The authors end with the outline of a theory of subjectivity which sounds to me suspiciously like a crude pragmatism combined with a theory of human nature and dressed up in a discourse not usually associated with such ideas. The final paper usefully examines Capital for clues to a theory of individuality and less usefully rehearses a critique of humanism.

The main strength of the issue is as a survey of existing work and its problems; but there are also the beginnings of serious critical advances in a couple of papers and the very useful critique of educational ideologies. What is most striking however is the sophistication and high level of most of the discussion - unimaginable even five years ago - and the absence of any alternative non-Marxist approaches with which the authors must contend (as opposed to seek ways of integrating). It is a sophistication to which the Centre for Comparative Cultural Studies continues to contribute; it is a pity that its critics have not yet produced work of equal intellectual worth.

Ian Craib

Allegorical remains

Walter Benjamin, The Origin of German Tragic Drama, trans. John Osborne, London, New Left Books, hc £7.25

The Origins belongs to the early Benjamin, the philosophical critic who speculated upon the origin of language and its relation to God's word in a reading of Genesis ('On Language in General and On Human Language'), who examined the question of the legitimacy of revolutionary violence when it opposes itself to the institutional violence of state law which derives its sanction from divine law ('Towards a Critique of Violence'), and who, after describing history as a tension between profane and messianic tendencies, claimed that the task of world politics was to achieve the messianic through nihilism ('Theologico-Political Fragment'). The later Benjamin, the converted Marxist, is already familiar to us through the Illuminations and the writings on Brecht and Baudelaire. An examplary piece of this later period is 'Paris Capital of the 19th Century', a dialectical materialist study which moves from a theory of the artificial ornamentation of the 'modern style', to a psychology of bourgeois interiors and of the decadent wanderer in the city, to a meditation upon technology in the service of the coercive state as one sees it in Haussmann's anti-barricade boulevards. That the 'late Benjamin' never left his 'early' version entirely behind is evident in 'Theses on the History of Philosophy', one of the last pieces Benjamin wrote in 1940 before killing himself. There, he attributes to revolutionary classes the property of breaking the temporality of history and suggests a comparison with the Talmudic conception of time whereby each moment becomes a narrow gate through which the Messiah might pass. Conversely, the later Marxism is implicit in the earlier Origin, particularly in Benjamin's reflection on the psychology of the reactionary, princely intriguer. The great difficulty of this book lies in the cohabitation of these two contradictory tendencies - the 'early' religiosity and the 'later' politicized point of view.

The book, a dissertation on 17th-century German baroque drama, a genre whose writers - Gryphius, Lohenstein, Opitz - remain relatively unknown, consists of three long chapters: 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue', 'Trauerspiel and Tragedy', and 'Allegory and Trauerspiel'. In the Prologue, Benjamin sets forth a theory of philosophy as representation (Darstellung) which justifies his own digressive method as well as his eccentric choice of subject. It insists upon the primacy of representation, of external form and language, to Ideas: 'The basic task of philosophy' is 'the representation of Ideas.' Truth has nothing to do with systematic completeness which affords full knowledge. Rather, since 'Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars', truth can only be apprehended in the discontinuities, the apparent incompleteness, the fragmentariness of external form. For Benjamin, the study of external form in literary texts is equivalent to the philosophical study of the forms the Idea takes and he rejects the deductive method which seeks to reduce the multiplicity of texts to broad generic categories such as tragic or comic. He proposes instead to study the becoming of texts, 'their history and their subsequent development', what he calls 'philosophical history, the science of origin'.

'Origin' (Ursprung) is an historical category which accounts for the dialectic of singularity and repetition in Benjamin's subject, the baroque Trauerspiel, or 'Mourning play'. It was singular in relation to Greek tragedy, but repetitive in terms of the Medieval mystery play. Its imperfect and incomplete form suits Benjamin's theory of representation which privileges the eccentric, the extreme, and the fragmentary, since the 'authentic - the hallmark of origin' can be revealed in 'the most singular and eccentric of phenomena'. The exaggerated theatrical setting and the arbitrariness of language in the Trauerspiel, while they had seemed mere deviations from classical tragedy, become, for Benjamin, keys to a more accurate account of the specificity of the German Baroque.

In the second chapter, Benjamin sets out to distinguish Trauerspiel from tragedy. The subject of the first is history, of the second, myth. In Trauerspiel, detail triumphs over the whole, as does a nature deprived of grace over sacred transcendence. While tragedy escapes the world of things - physical nature- through transcendence, Trauerspiel is dominated by that world of 'realia'. In Hamlet, for instance, an exemplary Trauerspiel according to Benjamin, the hero is killed accidentally by a piece of stage property, a poisoned rapier, rather than by divine decree. The classical unities, as well as the tragic eschatology whereby the individual's sacrifice renews the community and its laws, are absent from the Trauerspiel. The intention of baroque drama is focused, rather, 'on world history in the manner of a chronicle. Inasmuch as it became absorbed in the microscopic examination of details, it progressed no further than the painstaking analysis of the calculations of political intrigue. Baroque drama knows no other historical activity than the corrupt energy of schemers.' Instead of the tragic resolution into Law, one encounters endless litigation. In place of a decisive ending, the Trauerspiel gives us an adjournment and the repetition of the same juridical stereotypes.

The epoch of the Trauerspiel is the Thirty Years War and the Counter-Reformation. Its ideology, therefore, is reactionary. Its characteristic gesture is not revolution, but rebellion against a tyrannical 'state of emergency'. 'In none of the countless rebels who confront a monarch frozen in the attitudes of a Christian martyr, is there any trace of revolutionary conviction. Discontent is the classic motive.' The typical hero is the combination of tyrant and martyr. The setting of his court grasps the movement of history in a timeless spatial image, just as the Machiavellian sovereign intriguer, who is 'all intellect and will power', tries to regulate history like a clock, thus making it calculable and 'spatially measurable'. 'The sovereign ... is constantly intervening directly in the workings of the state so as to arrange the data of the historical process in a regular and harmonious sequence which is, so to speak, spatially measurable... Spirit - such was the thesis of the age - shows itself in power, spirit is the capacity to exercise dictatorship. This capacity requires both strict inner discipline and unscrupulous external action. Its practice brought to the course of the world an icy disillusion which is matched in intensity only by the fierce aspiration of the will to power. Such a conception of perfect conduct on the part of the man of the world awakens a mood of mourning (Trauer) in the creature stripped of all naive impulses... The disillusioned insight of the courtier is just as profound a source of woe to him as it is a potential danger to others, because of

the use he can make of it at any time.' The prince is the paradigm of the mournful, melancholy man whose pensive gazing into the abyss of evil, whose disciplining of his own emotions in order to be capable of manipulating the emotions of others, separates him from his own body, which in turn separates him from the world of objects. The living, self-expressive objects of nature become dead objects (literally: the tyrant kills at random), and the prince takes them up, internalizes and encrypts them in the process of mourning. Mourning allows the tyrant to preserve the dead object inside himself, but the object is now cut off from its original, creaturely freedom and becomes subject to the meaning the prince imposes. The objects are debased as natural objects but preserved and monumentalized as artificial emblems of hidden knowledge on the part of the prince. Death allows this generation of new, 'unnatural' meaning to take place. Only a dead object which has lost its self-expressiveness can be made to mean something other that what it is. Benjamin calls this process allegory, and he says the role of the tyrant is to provide corpses for allegorical meaning-making. He thus gives both an historical account of a specific genre - baroque allegory - and a narration of the structure of the production of allegory in general as it is recounted in the Trauerspiel.

In the third chapter, Benjamin places baroque allegory against the Romantic symbol, as he has already placed Trauerspiel against classical tragedy. The butt of his polemic is Romantic aesthetics, which, in the symbol, found a non-dialectical, organic totality, a theological unity of form and content residing upon the immanence of divine morality in the world of beauty. The Romantics' mistake was to declare every "'manifestation' of an 'idea'" a symbol. Whereas the Romantic symbol served merely as a periphrasis of the concept it manifested, a detour to the truth for which it was only a vehicle, baroque allegory places the figural vehicle at the centre of the process. The emphasis is on the figural representation itself, the object which comes to mean something it is not (a knife signifying jealousy, for example, or a crown the sovereign state). No more transcendence; no more sacred totality; no more manifestation of the divine. 'In contrast the baroque apotheosis is a dialectical one. It is accomplished in the movement between extremes. In this eccentric and dialectical process the harmonious inwardness of classicism plays no role.' For this reason, Baroque, not Romanticism, is the opposite of classicism.

Allegory is made of objects in dispersion, fragments of the natural world, which, for a moment (the historical moment - jetzt - not the symbolic, mystic moment - nun), take on significance and are then discarded by the allegorist. This law of collection and dispersion resides upon an awareness of the transience of the human state, its subjection to death and decay. For this reason, Benjamin relates allegory to writing, which, as Derrida argues in the Grammatology, is the traditional figure for death in relation to the expressive, living fullness of speech, something Benjamin places with the symbol. As script is the ruin of voice, history-become-nature is the real ruin which is the habitual setting of the Trauerspiel. The ruin is the figure of allegory itself, like writing, a purely external representation which fatally expropriates the supposed organic interiority of symbol and speech. As in mourning, the allegorical figure, the ruin, takes life out of the object and simultaneously preserves it. Unlike the symbol which contents itself with a momentary revelation of the sacred, the allegorical ruin acknowledges godless transience, but by that very token, desires and seeks permanence.

The scriptural allegorical fragment works against the organic totality of symbol by allowing anything to mean anything else. Rather than conceptual revelation, it involves a technique of arranging models and conventions whose dialectical counterpart is expressive, speculative interpretation. Once the natural object is separated from the sacred, and once the word is separated from its original meaning, they become open to multiple interpretation. The damming up of creaturely expression in the rhetorical manipulation of conventions gives rise to mourning for lost freedom of expression. The obstacle to free expression is the meaning imposed by allegorical interpretation. The organic fullness of voice and symbol is broken up, and this allows allegorical meaning to be imposed on the remaining fragments from without. Benjamin relates this theory of the generation of meaning in allegory to the cruelty and sadism of the age, as it is reflected in the violence of the Trauerspiel, especially in the tyrant's will to power over history. The courtly intriguer is a master of meanings whose blocking of free expression through linguistic manipulation (as it is reflected in the 'forced logicality' of the alexandrine form of verse in the plays) is 'of a piece with the violent distortion of history'.

Benjamin concludes on the double note (Marxist as well as religious) I attributed to him in the beginning. On the one hand, he anchors baroque allegory in history by showing its derivation from Medieval Christian allegory. The 17th century reacted against the 16th-century humanist revival of antiquity by desacralizing the ancient gods, stripping them of their original, intended meaning, and making them mean something altogether different (Venus, for example, becomes the emblem of profane, bodily love). On the other hand, he conceives of this godless spirituality (signification everywhere but no God behind it) as a continuation of the Christian fascination with evil. At its limit, evil dispels itself and becomes redemption, according to Benjamin. It exists only as allegory, and allegory loses itself, because it is by nature fragment, private hermeneutical knowledge, the arbitrary rule of the dead object, the infinity of a world without hope. Allegory always means the non-existence of what it presents (the knife is not really a knife; the preserved object of mourning, the ruin, has already ceased to have any real life), hence, the non-existence of evil. Evil only exists in the eyes of melancholy as the arbitrary imposition of meaning on things. It has no objective existence, but is instead the triumph of subjectivity. 'Ultimately in the death-signs of the Baroque the direction of allegorical reflection is reversed... Its ultimate objects, in which it believes it can most fully secure for itself that which is vile, turn into allegories... The intention does not faithfully rest in the contemplation of bones, but faithfully leaps forward to the idea of resurrection.'

There isn't space enough to describe Benjamin's brilliant linking of the representational mechanics of the Trauerspiel to his theory of allegory, without which the theory can easily be mistaken as being too esoteric. John Osbourne should be congratulated for his impressive and accurate translation of an enormously difficult book. George Steiner's introduction is dispensable.

Michael Ryan

The tale is told of you

Portugal: The Revolution in the Labyrinth, edited by Jean-Pierre Faye, from the papers of the Russell Committee for Portugal. Translated from the French edition by Sue Kortlandt and Micki McCarthy. Spokesman Books, 1976, 231pp, £2.95 pb

In the autumn of 1975 the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation set up a Committee for Portugal to inquire into the current political situation and in particular the threat of an imminent Spinolist/right-wing military intervention with fascist backing from Spain and Brazil. It seemed on the cards that Portugal might become a second Chile. The Committee's preparations were soon overtaken by events. A 'coup' in Portugal on 25 November 1975 was quickly recognised there and abroad as bringing the Revolution to a close and ushering in an era of political 'normalisation' which since then has been steadily consolidated under the government of Mario Soares and the presidency of General Eanes. The reports produced between January and June 1976 by the Russell Committee delegations in Portugal became concerned primarily with unravelling the momentous events of November 25. The resulting book is, among other things, an extraordinarily gripping political thriller, taking the form of a 'diary of investigation' interwoven with the narrative of preceding events which it gradually uncovers and pieces together, the crucial episode of which is 'an event manufactured in such a way that differing versions of it are circulating before it happens, and even as it happens'. One could say that this is the type of detective story in which the essence of the crime is its own disguise and the spiriting away of its victim.

> 'The "days" of 25 and 26 November 1975 have turned the page on the Revolution in Portugal. So any research on it is doubly outdated. Firstly because it is already "past" in fact. Secondly, because there really is no longer a Revolution there: any new light cast on the disappearance or the strangling of this Revolution is thus unimportant, since that very event has taken it out of the "news".
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> 'Thus the authors of its disappearance have succeeded in two senses, in the contest of "Western" ideology. Having spirited away the Portuguese Revolution, they killed off at the same time any interest people had felt in it, simply because it figured day after day in the newspapers...'

As well as the record of this central investigation, the book contains a number of separate reports and documents: an interview with Otelo de Carvalho, principal organiser of the April 1974 revolution, together with a poem by him written from prison in January 1976; reports on the successes and defeats of Agrarian Reform and Workers' Control; reports on the Left political prisoners taken after 25 November and the shooting of demonstrators outside Custoias prison in January 1976; the main documents of the crucial political debates in the Armed Forces Movement (MFA) in the summer of 1975; an interview with Philip Agee on the CIA and Portugal; and an account of the making of President Eanes in 1976. The Committee and its two delegations were made up of trade unionists and other political activists from Britain, France and Spain. The British members were Tom Litterick MP, Audrey Wise MP(1), Joe Burke and Ray Ellis, regional NUM leaders in Derby and Kent, Chris Goody of the Institute for Workers' Control, Ken Coates and Chris Farley. The French novelist, historian and political writer Jean-Pierre Faye, who went with the first delegation in December 1975, is largely responsible for the overall structure of the analysis of November 25. The method employed here is closely linked to that of Faye's earlier monumental study Langages Totalitaires, which showed how under the Weimar Republic the complex ideological and political configurations of the German Right converged towards engendering the acceptability of National Socialist rhetoric and policies. In Theorie du Récit, his theoretical preface to Langages Totalitaires, Faye argues that political ideologies are formed essentially of narrations, and that the dialectical interweaving of these ideological narratives feeds back into real history by making certain political events possible, acceptable and thinkable. Faye is thus suggesting narration as a category for investigating and theorising the interaction of truth and fiction which constitutes the reality of politics. (He writes of the necessity for a 'semantics of history' and a 'sociology of languages'. His position is summarized in an article translated in Economy and Society, Spring 1976 issue.) One of the central themes of The Revolution in the Labyrinth is 'how the narrative function can work to the advantage of a very definite political operation, and prolong the political duel or the class war by other means.' (p63) It is not a question of mere theoretical speculation, but of concerted and proven political technique. On this point the book cites a study by Armando Uribe of the counter-revolution in Chile, which speaks of the 'preparation of programmes of information about the facts for circulation, released in accordance with a deliberate plan, earlier enough before these facts have occurred, with different versions of each piece of information, for them to be circulated without delay, and even in certain cases in anticipation of them, so as to create confusion, uncertainty, disorganisation, an isolation and a terror which make it possible to eliminate enemies and destroy all possibility of resistance.'

The Russell Committee's main conclusions about what took place on 25 November 1975 are broadly as follows. Three simultaneous and apparently unconnected sets of events took place during the night of 24/25 November.

1 The Council of the Revolution moved towards giving majority support for the move to dismiss General Otelo de Carvalho as Commander of the Lisbon Military Region. This was a sequel of the campaign of debate and consultation in the MFA in which the intransigently radical positions of COPCON (the revolutionary defence force of the MFA, set up in April 1974 and headed by Otelo de Carvalho) were rejected in favour of the more 'moderate' line of the Group of Nine (Melo Antunes and others).

2 The association of agricultural landowners set up blockades on the supply routes from Lisbon to the north, under the slogans 'cut off Portugal from Moscow' and 'sack Otelo'. In response, the COPCON units took up defensive positions at their

1 See her Eyewitness in Revolutionary Portugal, Spokesman Books, 50p pb

bases and on the northbound motorway outside Lisbon.

3 A regiment of paratroops based at Tancos, near Lisbon, from which its officers had disappeared en masse two weeks previously, was duped by a right-wing conspiracy involving both Ramalho Eanes and their own officers into an apparently senseless adventure, the occupation of a string of Air Force bases, thereby presenting the simulacrum of an attempted left-wing putsch.

During 25 and 26 November, while COPCON and Carvalho pursued a policy of political conciliation (in concert with President Costa Gomez) and military non-aggression (fearing to unleash a civil war), a commando force led by the conspiracy of the Right began a series of attacks on both the bases held by the Tancos paratroops and the bases of COPCON. Actual fighting was spasmodic; there were a total of eight casualties. Within a few days, COPCON was disbanded and many of its cadres arrested. Carvalho resigned his military command and in January was himself imprisoned. The official report or 'narration' of 25 November, issued in January, contrived to associate COPCON, because of its state of alert adopted on the night of 24/25 (2 above) with the adventure of the Tancos paratroops who were under the regional command of Carvalho (3 above), in a supposed attempt to restore by military force the hegemony of Carvalho and the Left over the course of the Portuguese revolution (1 above).

A fascinating analysis is presented here of this narrative fabrication, which rapidly became the authorised version in the international news media - the abortive Left putsch suppressed by 'moderate' forces - and unleashed a counter-revolutionary offensive against the workers' movement in Portugal The real interest lies perhaps not so much in the techniques of falsification used, which are neither original nor unfamiliar, as the interweaving of the 'false' history of 25 November with the 'true' events. It was the conjunction of contrived events (itself also arguably contrived) which made possible the fabricated interpretation and its consequences; and the story of a COPCON putsch was in turn already presupposed by the commando offensive of the 25th and 26th. The Russell Committee also drew attention to two particularly striking aspects of the narratives at work in this episode: the theme of the ending of the revolution which saves the revolution, and the slogan of 'social-fascism'. On the first point, they compare a communique issued by the military command of the Right on 26 November with the proclamation issued by Bonaparte's henchman Fouche on the 19th Brumaire. The first: 'It is becoming apparent that the military insubordination created in this country was manipulated, provoked and inspired by counter-revolutionary forces.' The second: 'The Councils met at St. Cloud to deliberate on the interests of the Republic and of liberty, during which time General Bonaparte, having come to the Council of the Five Hundred to denounce counter-revolutionary manoeuvres, almost perished in an attempted assassination. The spirit of the Republic saved this general.' They comment:

> 'The November proclamation, that Fouche had read out in all the Parisian theatres at about 10 o'clock in the evening, places under the sign of the spirit of the Republic that General who is at the very heart of the anti-republican plot. It concludes with the solemn announcement made by the letter on 25 December of the same year, 1799: "Citizens, the Revolution is fixed ... it is finished."
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> 'By denouncing as "counter-revolutionaries" the men of the April revolution, the men of 25 November and their shadowy operational command have well and truly achieved the disruption that the conservative social forces, internal as well as external, had so hoped for.'

The theme of 'social-fascism' is linked with the singular role played in Portugal by the extreme left Maoist party, MRPP. The Committee establishes beyond doubt the complicity of the MRPP with the military Right before, during and after November 25th. The catalytic function of this numerically insignificant joker in the political pack recalls Faye's previous exploration of what might be called the semantic mobility of the language of party ideologies in Weimar Germany. In this case moreover there is a direct link between the two periods at the level of language. "The ideological operation in which the MRPP has become strangely entangled has ... produced a decisive effect on the strategy of language. The term social-fascist was used as a term of abuse for social democracy by the German communists in the Thälmann-Neumann League around 1930, and was a contributory factor in the division in the forces of the left which allowed the Nazis to sieze power - this term now, turned against the Portuguese communists by the 'Marxist-Leninists' of the MRPP, has been introduced by them into the circles of the military and political right - PPD, CDS. Soon, the insult 'social-fascist' will be used ... against the Group of Nine and the Antunes wing of the Left simply because they advocate keeping communists in the government...

"In December 1975 - January 1976, every wall in Lisbon is covered with a red and yellow pseudo Chinese style poster, in which a crowd of 'peasant-soldiers' point an accusing finger towards the words: 'Against the social-fascist coup of 25 November - Contra el golpe social-fascista do 25 Novembre.'

"So the language of the German KPD is stood on its head, transformed into a lynching operation aimed at the Portuguese Communist Party, escalates into a violent smear campaign, and finally results in the revolutionary left being sent to the prisons where the military right detains them.

"That is the kind of effect the MRPP slogan produces in operation..."

Here we have the 'relative autonomy' of political discourse at work with a vengeance. This book is of course by no means a complete historical analysis of the defeat of the Portuguese Revolution, and assumes a grasp of the social configuration in Portugal in its class, cultural and economic structures - the frameworks valorised in traditional Marxist analyses. (For an overall history of the revolution, the highly praised Portugal: the impossible revolution?, published by Solidarity, should be consulted.)

But, conversely, it is not sufficient to plot the disposition of the political chessboard and the major pieces while neglecting the combinations and strategems of actual play. One of the exemplary merits of the Russell Committee's intervention is to reinsert what is commonly termed investigative journalism into the focus of political reflection. Faye's concept of 'narration' is more than an avant-garde rebaptism of propaganda, because it challenges the dominant polarities in Marxist theory of essence and appearance, class and ideology, reality and deception (one might add: Capital and Eighteenth Brumaire). Moreover, this kind of in-

vestigation is, as the Portuguese experience demonstrates only too well, not just an instrument for historians but a necessary component of political practice.

The series of investigations published by Spokesman of which this book is one deserves on this account to be more widely known and read. Spokesman will shortly be publishing a work which Faye has cited and drawn inspiration from, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman's Counter-Revolutionary Violence: Bloodbaths in Fact and Propaganda This text, as reported in RP9, was suppressed in 1973 by its American publishers; since then it has been translated into French, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian. It documents the massive efforts invested by the American government in the fabrication of narratives of the Vietnam war and other third world conflicts. A revised and updated edition is planned to appear next year.

Colin Gordon

Neither / nor

Bernard Bykhovskii, Kierkegaard, B.R. Grüner, Amsterdam, 1976. H.fl.30

Here comes a book on Kierkegaard by an 'eminent' Marxist, 'an uncompromising thinker and critic', who will reveal Kierkegaard's 'sociohistorical motivation', 'his actual historical relations', and 'the real significance of his thought'. It can't be bad, surely?

It can, and it is. Bernard Bykhouskii turns out to be a dogmatic Russian communist of the narrowest kind, an Official Philosopher par excellence. On the penultimate page we learn that, now nearly 80, he has faithfully applied the party line all the way from Descartes to neo-pragmatism, from Berkeley to Feuerbach. Moscow rang to his 'Enemies and Falsifiers of Marxism' in 1933: by 1943 it hailed him as 'laureate of the USSR State Prize'.

We might have guessed. The very first chapter is preceded by this illuminating quotation from Kierkegaard: 'What I am standing on, my head or my feet, I do not know'. Kierkegaard might not know but BB does. BB knows everything: you can trust good old professor B. He doesn't only know; he is absolutely certain, and he's here to tell us. Kierkegaard is a subjective idealist, irrationalist, bourgeois fideist, etceteraist, etceteraist. Which means that all we can do with his thought is distinguish it, scientifically, from 'Schellingianism' (p15), Scheiermacherism, Schopenhauerism, and various other rightist tendencies of decadent idealist irrationalism. This is purely a problem of taxonomy. Further, we must say repeatedly (at least once per paragraph) that Kierkegaard was a Bad Thing, and slip in a quote to prove it. Our philosophical writing thereby fulfills its social function.

What appalls me most about this pointless exercise is its mindless authoritarianism. It is not just philosophy gone wrong: it is the perversion of philosophy. It does not search for truth: it claims only to reveal it. It does not provoke thought: it suppresses it. It speaks only to believers, to tell them what to believe.

Bykhovskii neither understands nor even seeks to understand anything Kierkegaard wrote. It is utterly incomprehensible to him how anyone could think as Kierkegaard did, or how anyone could get anything out of his writings except material for ridicule. So what Bykhovskii gives us is page after page of monotonous put-down and lots of references to Kierkegaard and secondary authors - presumably to display erudition and increase his authority.

The only interesting thing about this book is that Marvin Farber, a man who devoted years of his working life to a meticulous exposition of Husserl's 'Logical Investigations', should enthusiastically sponsor so crude an attack upon idealism. He is obviously no better judge of marxists than he is of the 'actual historical relations' he apparently found in the book.

Roger Waterhouse

Story of the school

Émile Durkheim, The Evolution of Educational Thought - Lectures on the Formation and Development of Secondary Education in France, trans. Peter Collins, 354pp, Routledge and Kegan Paul, £7.50

'By some strange illogical process, whereas political systems interest us and we argue passionately about them, educational systems inspire indifference in us, or even a kind of instinctive aversion.' So Durkheim, in the first of these twenty-seven lectures on the history of French secondary education, originally given in 1904-5, and at last translated into English. The Durkheim we meet in these readable and informative pages is not so much the 'founding father of sociology' with his famous conception of 'social facts as things'. Rather it is the Durkheim who has been brought to life in Steven Lukes's study (Emile Durkheim, Penguin Books) - a social reformer seeking to make French secondary education, especially the philosophy class, an agent for the creation of a rational, secular and morally unified France.

The book shows an extraordinary command of the lecture series as a literary form, akin to story-telling. It begins with an account of the birth of the protagonist - the school - in terms of the early Christian practice of grouping teachers together in a single place. ('Antiquity had nothing like this. It had teachers, but it did not have genuine schools' - p31). Then we have descriptions of the successive phases of the hero's life, each characterised in such a way as to define some ideal model of what education should be. Durkheim distinguishes four phases: the age of grammar (8th-11th centuries), the age of logic (12th-16th centuries), in which we see the rise of school discipline and of examinations; the age of classical education (16th-19th centuries) in which the aim of teaching is to produce an elite of politely cultivated gentlemen, but which also involved the almost sadistic oppressions practised in the Jesuit colleges, and especially the imposition of enormous burdens of written work on the pupils; and finally the modern 'realist' phase, which had a brief flowering at the French revolution, and which Durkheim was trying to revive.

Durkheim uses this periodisation of the development of the school to suggest that there is a basic conflict between 'formalist' and 'realist' education. The distinction is fundamentally Kantian, between the education of faculties which deal with man as subject - grammar, logic and the classics respectively in the first three phases of the history of the school; and ones which deal with the natural world and with man as an object. The history of the school, for Durkheim, is the story of gradual groping towards an understanding of 'realist' educational

ideals. And the history of nineteenth-century schools was a tale of sad confusion, in which the 'realist' ideals of the revolution were eclipsed following Napoleon's reactionary policy in setting up the lycee system.

Durkheim's whole enterprise rests on the rather dubious assumption that the hero who unites the story - 'the secondary school' - has kept an identity over the twelve centuries. And it is only the assurance with which Durkheim relates his tale which gives this assumption any plausibility. The main institution he describes as secondary schooling before the end of the eighteenth century is the university arts faculty teaching for the examination for the degree of bachelor of arts; and whilst this education has plenty of continuities with secondary schools (especially in France), it also has many continuities with institutions of higher education. The whole point about modern secondary education is that it comes between a compulsory rudimentary education and an optional, purely academic, higher education. Alcuin, Anselm and Abelard were certainly not quite like teachers in higher education; but nor were they simply precursors of the secondary school teacher. Durkheim's moral tale of the school, in other words, tries to impose categories which belong to modern configurations of educational institutions in situations which they simply do not fit.

There is a second general flaw in the way Durkheim structures his argument. It is that he assumes that the histories of schooling, of educational theory, of thought in general, and of society, are, as it were, concentric, so that the same gradual rational progress is registered in each. Given this way of mapping out the history of education, there is no way of taking note of any dislocations or conflicts between them: everything, including Durkheim's agitation for educational reform, comes to be treated as a natural and harmonious unfolding of the potentials of 'the social organism'.

But this book is by no means unwelcome. In spite of being out of date in much of its scholarship, it is remarkably informative; moreover Durkheim does try to relate the development of academic life and institutions to the development of the knowledge they harbour - for instance the development of forms of classroom discipline and the development of logic, dialectic and classics. No doubt, Durkheim offers only the broadest hints of how to understand such relations; but his hints have scarcely been superseded by later writers.

Jonathan Rée

Husserl

Sang-Ki Kim, The Problem of the Contingency of the World in Husserl's Phenomenology, Grüner, Amsterdam, 1976. 102pp, H.fl.30

This work is a serious, closely argued critique of the logic of Husserl's developing idealism, particularly through his middle period. It concentrates initially on the untranslated 'Erste Philosophie', Husserl's abortive attempt in the early twenties to systematize his ontological position, and deal with the problematic relationship between the transcendental ego and the world.

Sang-Ki Kim's thesis is that the contingency of the world for Husserl is not only symptomatic, but central. It follows inexorably from the absolute status accorded to the subject and leads inevitably to a reactionary and world-denying idealism. The middle years during which Husserl did not publish were not ones of steady progress in phenomenological research; they were a succession of real blind alleys which eventually issued in the false solutions of the life-world and the idealist non-history of the 'Crisis'.

The book reads like a PhD thesis, with all the merits and demerits that implies. Its reading of Husserl is close in parts but sketchy and even tendentious in others. It quotes rather too extensively from a wide variety of authorities and in its anxiety to establish its credentials sometimes falls into irrelevance and pedantry. On the other hand a lot of work and thought has gone into this book, and it can in no place be dismissed as careless or trivial. A main defect is that, although always briefer (the whole text is less than 100 pages) than Husserl, it is not always clearer. Only gradually does the implicit ground of its criticism emerge: a sort of Marxist Hegelianism with extensive debts to Marcuse and the Frankfurt School.

Roger Waterhouse

The language of morals

Arnold Wesker, Words as Definitions of Experience, Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 75p

This book contains the short title article by Arnold Wesker and a slightly longer afterword by Richard Appignanesi. Wesker's article takes the form of a proposal for the introduction as a core subject in the school curriculum the study of certain keywords. The children would be taught to use certain keywords 'effectively' which would enable them to 'understand' certain patterns of behaviour - 'of what is being done to one, and what one is doing to others'. There is no list of keywords given, but it is clear that they are to provide a framework of ethical acceptances and condemnations: 'evil must be carefully measured and accurately named'.

The keywords are to be drawn from the current ethical vocabulary and, as the meanings of the words are taught, so the schoolchildren will come to identify the patterns of behaviour that correspond to the appropriate concepts, and will be able to name these patterns as good or evil.

Wesker's proposal is both conservative and reactionary. It is conservative because it seeks to preserve, reinforce and enshrine a range of ethical norms that have become institutionalized: schoolchildren should be able to identify pre-given patterns of behaviour and thereby to act accordingly. Wesker states that 'these are difficult times in which not to be confused', they are difficult, by implication in Wesker's view, because the patterns of behaviour are beginning to dissolve. The reactionary riposte to this is to call for a strengthening of the patterns, a call for intellectual and moral law and order. This is the call of Wesker's proposal.

Wesker locates himself on the left and correspondingly rehearses appropriate gestures and adopts suitable poses. This facade should be recognised as hollow: the central proposal of the book should be recognised as the Trojan Horse for conservative and reactionary views that it is.

Arnold Wesker should recognise that the frameworks of concepts that determine individual and social action and which constitute social and found political institutions, are firmly embedded in those institutions. Three possibilities present themselves in relation to these frameworks. Bourgeois criti-

cism accepts the frameworks and sets against each other various ingenious ramifications of their categories. An early-Sartrian possibility is to recognise the falsehood of the frameworks, but to recognise an Absurdity beneath them. Left criticism must involve a project of positive deconstruction of the frameworks: this is a project to which Foucault is contributing - it involves a recognition of the structures common to the frameworks of concepts with their archaeologies and the web of institutions (in a sense of institution wide enough to include such institutions as the essay, the lesson etc). Such a deconstruction is not anarchistic: it merely involves a radical restructuring of the society-knowledge unity that removes a situation where it is wrongly thought that bodies of knowledge are autonomous in relation to society and to each other.

GC

Main Street Marx

W. L. McBride, The Philosophy of Marx, Hutchinson hb £5.50 pb £2.75

A book on this subject appearing in 1977, and claimed by its publishers to present 'for the first time a serious and systematic assessment of Marx primarily as a philosopher', must be something rather special - and indeed we are not disappointed. It is arguably the most complacent piece of 'sympathetic' and eclectic appropriation to which Marx has been subjected for many years.

I will try to be brief, for it is not worth being anything else. All the old standard, shallow objections to misunderstood or travestied theses in Marx are rehearsed yet again, yet without any life in them, without any intellectual thoroughness. But McBride himself seems to think, for example, that four flaccid pages of academic cliches on Lenin's materialism amount to his having 'devoted considerable attention to a critique of Lenin's conceptions of "matter" and "materialism" and to his reflection theory of cognition'!

Since he blandly supposes that 'underlying Marxist assumptions ... can ... be successfully separated from the remainder of his thought, to the advantage of the latter', the tranquillity of McBride's crude empiricism/idealism is not disturbed by its encounter with Marx. Thus, 'These laws (of the natural history of human society) are presumably nothing but accurate high-level generalisations concerning a wide range of phenomena.' And '... the value of (Marx's) method ... can only be vindicated by checking the results obtained through its use against the perceived empirical data.'

Trapped in an idealist conception of the relation between theory and reality, McBride is obsessively concerned about the adequacy of Marxism as a crystal ball full of predictions for modern society. So one third of the text is assigned to Marx's alleged vision of the future, despite McBride's own admission that he can find no more than a few sentences on this topic in the whole of Marx's mature opus!

McBride writes incomprehensibly about Marx's 'career', and has no conception that any respectable 'social scientist' might intervene directly in the processes of social change. That is, to secure his packaging of a nice, neutered Marx for Mid-West Main Street consumption, McBride treats him 'a-politically', and the result is a monstrosity. For instance, he is politically incapable of seeing how Marx could both write and think towards a communist future, and accept as far more urgent a present in which political and philosophical struggles were (and remain) far from over, and in which it was (and is) still necessary to fight on the proletarian, materialist side.

Nor does McBride show the intelligence and imagination which has sometimes enabled the best bourgeois commentators to cross the political gulf between themselves and Marx, on this and other topics. All he achieves is to criticise Marx for not writing like an idealist, that is, for not having taken up the pose of 'seer' which McBride ineffectually requires of him.

There are several basic works on Marx's philosophy, some by non-Marxists, which would be more help to beginners than this one. For example: L. Dupré, The Philosophical Foundations of Marxism; S. Hook, From Hegel to Marx; R. C. Tucker, Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx; B. Ollman, Alienation.

Luckily McBride's book is too expensive and has a lousy cover. As a phenomenon, it represents little more than the necessity under which any self-respecting educational publisher is nowadays obliged to have 'something' about Marx on their list. That's all. Now forget it.

RIPB

A state philosophy

Victor Cousin, Défence de l'Université et de la Philosophie, with a preface by Danielle Rancière, Paris, Solin

The key philosophical institution in France is the teaching of philosophy in the final year of the lycée; philosophy courses in higher education exist primarily to train teachers for these secondary school courses. Theoretically the lycees provide a general human education, taking over the arts curriculum which led to the BA in medieval and classical universities; and they define themselves as having nothing to do with professional or vocational training. Philosophy plays an important part in their conception. It is a final year subject, 'connecting with all the others and epitomising them, it completes the young man's education' (p41).

These words came from a booklet first published in Paris in 1846, reproducing the addresses made in defence of lycée philosophy teaching by Victor Cousin. Cousin was a philosopher who wrote influential textbooks which advocated 'eclecticism', and, under the July monarchy, he was the chief architect of the institutions which determine the character of French philosophy even today. In these addresses, Cousin was defending philosophy teaching against the charge that it subverted religion. His defence was twofold. Philosophy, he said, is 'the best intellectual gymnastics', inculcating 'virile mental habits'; and secondly, it teaches the universal truths which are the inherited accumulated wisdom of mankind. In these ways it was essential to the training of the dominant elite.

The booklet is reprinted now as the first in a series of 'Limping Philosopher's almanacks' planned by the magazine Doctrinal de Sapience (see RP16 p9). The series is designed to contribute to the history of philosophy as an institution, and to 'disturb' the institution. This reprint introduces

Cousin's defence of philosophy into a modern contro versy, sparked off by the Réforme Haby, in which philosophy is again under attack - though now from a technocratic rather than ecclesiastical point of view. The prefatory material by Danielle Rancière suggests how this reprint might contribute to the current discussion. Its purpose is to show that the current idea that philosophical education in France has two virtues - promoting independence of mind and expounding a body of wisdom called 'philosophy' - can be traced back to Victor Cousin's own defence of philosophy. But the text shows that Cousin's defence rested on statist political motives. Cousin wasn't interested in (German) ideas of academic freedom: 'I cannot accept that the faculties ought to be given complete freedom, as though they were not part of a public service.' Cousin personally undertook the surveillance of lycee philosophy teachers suspected of betraying the French State. So if we take Cousin's text at its face value, it follows that, in Rancière's words, 'the question of philosophy is inseparable from that of the unity of the state in the face of the diversity of interests and ideologies amongst the different fractions of the dominant class.' (p7). The implication is that philosophical instruction, along with the justifications it gives of itself, forms part of the statist conception of education embodied by Cousin.

I have my doubts about this explanation. It is not surprising that such connections between philosophy and the state should be made by Victor Cousin, a philosopher and politician, when giving evidence to a government inquiry; but there is little reason to suppose that the connections Cousin argued for were real. And there is a good reason for doubt: namely that whilst the relation of the state to education is very different in other countries, a similar conception of philosophy and its justification exists in them all. And if we are really to disturb and disquiet the institutions of philosophy, we need to penetrate beneath the conscious political attitudes of those who presided over its birth.

Jonathan Rée

NOTE: MARX ON VALUE

RP17 contained a review of a book entitled Value: Studies by Karl Marx, translated and edited by A. Dragstedt (New Park, 1976). Wal Suchting (University of Sydney) draws our attention to deficiencies in the translation of one of the texts viz the appendix to the first edition of Capital on 'The Value-Form'.

'Of its many faults, which I won't attempt to list here, the worst is that it simply omits a significant portion of Marx's text without any indication and clearly without any justification. Two whole paragraphs are left out and one sentence is so truncated as to render it totally meaningless.... We have not examined any other part of the book in question, but naturally we have some grave doubts about what would be found out about it if this were done.'

The omissions in Dragstedt's edition occur on pages 49, 51, 57, 63 - corresponding to lines in Marx's text pages 262, 264, 274, 279 (Kleine Oekonomische Schriften Ein Sammelband, Berlin 1955)

Books received

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R. Dyer, ed., Gays and Film, London, BFI, 1977, pb 75p

Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Mausoleum, New York, Urizen Books, 1977, hc £5.40 pb £2.70

J. Fraser, Introduction to the Thought of Galvano Della Volpe, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1977, pb £3.00

B. Gibbs, Freedom and Liberation, London, Sussex UP, 1976, hc £4.00 pb £2.25

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C. C. Lougée, Le Paradis des Femmes, New Jersey, Princeton UP, 1977, hc £12.70

S. Lukes, Essays in Social Theory, London, Macmillan, 1977, hc £8.95 pb £3.95

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G. H. R. Parkinson, Georg Lukacs, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977, hc £4.95

R. S. Peters, Education and the Education of Teachers, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977, hc £4.95

D. L. Phillips, Wittgenstein and Scientific Knowledge: A sociological perspective, London, Macmillan,