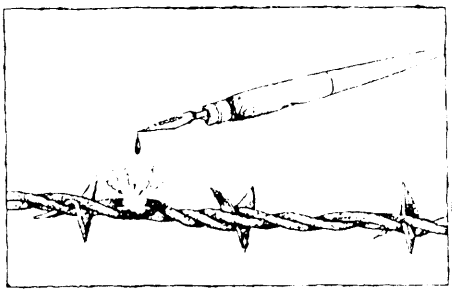
REVIEWS



THE HISTORICAL MATERIALISM DEBATE

S. H. Rigby, *Marxism and History: a Critical Introduction*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1987, 314pp., £29.95 hb.

Derek Sayer, *The Violence of Abstraction: the Analytic Foundations of Historical Materialism*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1987, xiii and 173pp., £22.50 hb.

Alex Callinicos, *Making History: Agency, Structure and Change in Social Theory*, Oxford, Polity, 1987, xiii and 275pp., £27.50 hb.

In the ten years since the publication of G. A. Cohen's *Karl Marx's Theory of History: a defence*, the critique of re-vamped 'orthodox historical materialism' (Sayers' and Callinicos' term) has grown from a stream of reviews to a flood of chapters and books. The three works under review contain forceful rebuttals of Cohen's 'productive forces determinism' (Rigby's designation), but before outlining them, it is worth noting again the significance of Cohen's intervention. For one thing, it is undeniably a defence of the kind of historical materialism prominent in the Second International. The magisterial Oxford analytical mode cannot disguise the extensive replay of themes and positions of, for example, Plekhanov's *Development of the Monist Theory of History*. This parallel in itself is interesting. The recognition that people like Kautsky and Plekhanov were considerable Marxist thinkers is overdue after decades of condescension on the part of academic 'western marxists'. Indeed, the current questioning of Third Internationalism generally is forcing marxists to take a less teleological attitude to their own history. Surprisingly, Cohen managed to rescue some of the Second International concerns by keeping party politics *out* of his philosophical exposition.

Secondly, Cohen was uniquely clear in his perception that if 'productive forces functionalism' (my term) was *not* Marx's main thesis, and if it could not be independently defended, there was no marxist theory of history in any strong sense. The citation of Plekhanov is germane here, since what is at stake here is a *monist* view of the historical process. Cohen may have been moved by the realization that once elements of explanatory pluralism enter into the body of marxism, the 'logic of disintegration' runs deep. Only if a single developmental account can be reaffirmed can this invasion be checked at the outset.

A side-line in Cohen's work which turns out to be vital in this regard is his demotion of the marxist political rhetoric of class struggle. Unsupported by a more fundamental logic of progress, Cohen implied, class struggle explanation is just another name for the acceptance of historical contingency (and further down this line, pluralism is waiting).

The central contrast here (monism/pluralism) is mine rather than Cohen's, but the logic of his thinking is usefully seen in these terms. The decade of debate since the appearance of *KMTH* has shown that if marxists decide not to go along with productive forces functionalism, a number of ambiguities, contradictions and optional 'perspectives' become part of the fabric of the modern marxist tradition. The trouble is, if trouble it be, that whilst Cohen's style and precision have been admired (even the sternest critics often come out *sounding* like him), virtually no-one actually believes in the 'strong' theory of history that he offers and that he says is Marx's.

Indeed, Cohen himself doesn't really believe in it. As indicated, *KMTH* was very much spinning a line in following up a political sympathy – and in worried anticipation of theoretical chaos. *If* marxism is this, he seemed to say, marxism is distinctive. And *if* the theory of history can be squared with real history in some very broad sense, it is viable. However Cohen as well as his critics began to ask whether mere viability was enough. Is orthodox historical materialism *true*; can we *believe* in it? Here the answers have been emphatically negative. Substantively, Cohen confessed in a later article that he wasn't sure how to decide the truth of theory.[1] And, in a further piece, he altered the main thesis of how it is that growth in the productive forces generates social change.[2] He has also hedged his bets somewhat on the nature and strength of the philosophical centre-piece of the argument: functional explanation.

The contributions of Steve Rigby and Derek Sayer neglect these amendments, preferring to return to an examination of *KMTH* to dig out what is wrong with the original statement. The tone is therefore generally strident and sometimes a touch pompous, which is a pity given the familiarity of their criticisms and the comparative skimpiness of their own alternatives. Alex Callinicos is more sensitive to uncertainties and complications, though he too is highly critical of Cohen. (His book is, I should say, more than a commentary on Cohen: it is a general engagement with the analytical marxist current generally, Anthony Giddens, and the 'orthodox conception of action' in mainstream philosophy. His overall aim is to defend a marxist approach to the dualism of structure and agency. As a whole, *Making History* tries

to cover too much ground and the outcome of the 'dialogue' is sometimes rather predictable. But the path taken through a series of relevant, difficult debates is consistent and knowledgeable.)

The three critiques are similar in taking substantive points from recent historiography in order to undermine Cohen, whilst philosophically, Marx is exonerated from the functionalism and reductionism which the commentators see as Cohen's main deviation from Marx's method. Cohen stated that the productive forces (materials, technology, science, etc.) were distinct from, and dominant over, relations of production (forms of ownership and possession of the means of production and surplus product). The forces also tend to develop through history, creating immanent pressures which 'select' particular sets of appropriate relations, which in due course come to 'fetter' the former. Then begins an epoch of social change.

A major point of critical attack is that Cohen's theory – which is said to amount to technological determinism – is not Marx's own. The critics cite many instances where Marx talks in terms of the social character of the productive forces, and the productive powers of social attributes and relations. They tend to reject the broader separation Cohen makes between material and social properties: Marx's concrete analyses of the indivisibility of these qualities in concrete labour processes are referenced.

To challenge the separation of forces and relations at the level of definition and concept is already to undercut the alleged primacy of the forces. But none of the critics – in my view anyway - is able to demonstrate that Cohen's Marx is pure fiction, only that it is a controversial construal. They also therefore try to show that the primacy and development theses are untenable in their own right. Cohen maintains that the primacy of the forces resides in the facilitative role which the relations play with respect to the growth and development of productive power. In other words, it is the functional relationship between the two categories which is crucial. Sayer rejects the very form of functional explanation, regarding it as a species of positivism, whereas for him marxism involves a philosophy of 'internal relations'. Rigby and Callinicos allow the legitimacy of functional statements, but echo Jon Elster's point that unless ordinary causal mechanisms can be identified in the process of elaborating the functional claims, the latter remain at best unproven.[3] And Cohen does not elaborate in that crucial way.

In the work of Marx and subsequent historians, by contrast, the emphasis does seem to be the other way round. Productive forces change as a consequence of changes in relations of production. The literature on the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the industrial revolution, and that on pre-capitalist formations generally, is plundered to support this view and not Cohen's. We are alerted to the looseness of the notion of 'fettering' as a way of conceptualising concrete social crises. Cohen's functional interpretation of the 'base and superstructure' metaphor is also rejected as effectively denying the constitutive role of ideas and politics in the appropriation of the surplus product in most historical epochs. Above all, as Rigby points out most emphatically, the primacy thesis itself depends on the development thesis, so if the latter falls, so does the former. And there is no evidence, he says, for perceiving the sporadic fact of growth as some kind of inherent historic tendency. Cohen's own schema roots the general tendency to growth in a basic, transhistorical human rationality, and this too is criticised as revealing a questionable universalism at the heart of Cohen's 'history'. Finally, Cohen's conception of the development of the forces as an *optimising* process – and it is not entirely clear that that *is* what he asserts – also seems impossible to demonstrate.

These are each important considerations, and all three books illustrate them well. Although none of the critics mention this, I was struck in reading them how central, and how neglected, the opening chapter of *KMTH* is to our assessment of Cohen's project. There, Cohen tries to show how Marx's image of history differed from that of Hegel. He does this by reworking the traditional idea that Marx *inverted* Hegel's order of explanation, and then makes a distinction between a (valid) theory of history and a (speculative) 'reading' of it. But Cohen's customary lucidity in demonstration lapses into allusion and suggestion in this case, possibly because his productive forces functionalism at bottom is such a reading of history rather than a theory of it. He does not deny, for example, that the relations of production can take causal and temporal precedence over the forces in historical transitions; they are also acknowledged to govern the pace and rate of change. The point is only that these are different ways in which the relations facilitate the overall development of the forces. Indeed, the very fact of prior changes in relations of production is a signal that immanent pressures are building up.

As Cohen now admits, it is simply hard to see how these general theses could be demonstrated as true or false. For example, from Cohen's vantage point a 1000-year 'stalling' of productive growth by virtue of the interim dominance of social relations can be seen as a temporary blockage. And for all the complaints of more historiographically-minded marxists, no set of empirical accounts can 'refute' this grand picture. But there surely does come a point, as Sayer insists, where Marx's preeminently historical categories are being inordinately pressed into the service of the kind of transhistorical philosophy that he and Engels warned against.

In spite of all this, there may still be some validity in orthodox historical materialism. Cohen has since suggested that it may be the use of the forces rather than their development which is central. The question also arises as to whether it is the current *level* of the forces, or their potential *growth* that the relations fetter. Phillippe van Parijs has proposed in schematic form versions of the primacy and development theses which do not require functional explanation (though Parijs is not one of those who derides functionalism as a mode of explanation).[4] His reconceptualisation involves seeing a slow dynamics (forces controlled by relations) embedded in a faster dynamics (relations adapt to forces). Whether this idea can be given a plausible non-technical elaboration remains to be seen. But we may conclude that we have not yet seen the last of the attempt to retain productive forces growth as the key (or one key) to historical materialism.

Meanwhile, what is the alternative? Here, things get complicated, since each of the critics reviewed has a different suggestion, and these raise hard issues not only about 'orthodox' historical materialism, but about any marxist theory of history.

On definitions, Rigby holds the relations to be always dominant over the forces. This creates problems (as it did for Etienne Balibar[5]) about whether there is *any* consistent causality in history, and about the source of change in particular historical transitions. He develops the standard notion that 'the class struggle' provides the mechanisms for change; but detached from a theory of tendential development, this amounts to an essentially contingent approach. Rigby reinforces this impression by building into his definitions an irreducibly 'subjective' element and an emphasis on exploitation as domination rather than appropriation in any strict economic sense. He therefore sums up his view of historical materialism as the empirical investigation of concrete hypotheses (p. 13). But by this stage, we must wonder what the theoretical grounding of the hypotheses actually involves in classical marxist terms.

Derek Sayer develops a similar line, though he does not support the idea of the relations having primacy any more than the forces. He also rejects any significant distinction between base

and superstructure. These abstract separations, he says, and any posited causal or functional relations between them, are examples of the kind of reified abstractions Marx derided. But Sayer's preferred conceptual apparatus tends to become ambiguous and amorphous. Forces and relations cannot be separated, yet he allows they are not quite the same. Base and superstructure simply cannot be distinguished – 'at least as conventionally drawn' (p. 73). These get-out clauses are not followed up, and we must wonder why they are retained, because Sayer goes on to maintain that superstructural and basic relations form a dialectical totality, the components and trajectory of which must be defined in strictly historical terms. Somewhat cryptically, he asserts (p. 22) that to define a social phenomenon is to write its history. To regard the economic base, therefore, as in any sense separate from, and primary over, other social relations is legitimate, if at all, only for the historical period of capitalism, and maybe not even then.

Sayer's picture of Marx's method is consequently one which discourages functional propositions, transhistorical categories, and analytic distinctions. The categories of historical materialism are for him 'empirically open-ended'. In spite of the 'rescuing the best Marx' tone which Sayer adopts, he does in fact suggest that Marx's historical materialism, broad and open though it is, is still not broad enough. Marx concentrates on the bounds of social life as determined by the production of material goods. A more adequate historical materialism, for Sayer, must be concerned rather with the 'production and reproduction of real life' (p. 78). This formulation implies that 'class struggle' too is an inappropriately narrow angle on history – gender and age (and other social relations?) must also be duly credited as causally efficacious.

A good deal is left undeveloped in this proposal. Some of the polemic against Cohen could usefully have given way to a more positive elaboration of the alternative analytical foundations promised in the subtitle of the book. In the event, some serious questions must be posed. I have never really understood the argument that forms of exploitation or appropriation cannot be termed 'economic' just because they have political and ideological conditions of existence. Nor is it clear just what the denial of transhistorical categories and the assertion of empirical openness actually amount to. We can agree that the *contents* of concepts, as Sayer insists, change over time (p. 21), but this need not rule out general definitions. Sayer does in fact accept the need for a 'minimum' of *a priori* theorizing for history – but how much is that? It is said that 'rigorous and determinate' concepts are required for specific substantive analysis, yet the overall impression is that these will always be purely heuristic.

Summarizing, Sayer claims that marxism involves no more and no less than the empirical and critical analysis of the production and reproduction of real life. As it stands, though, this does not appear to sketch any very rigorous set of concepts, nor would many non-marxist historians and sociologists find much to object to in it. Callinicos, I think, sees the dangers of empiricism in this kind of position, and whilst critical of Cohen, is careful not to go quite so far down the pluralist road. As against Cohen (but also, arguably, against Marx) Callinicos views a mode of production as a combination of forces and relations. Together, these define the form of surplus appropriation for any epoch. There is certainly an 'impulse' for the forces to develop over time, though it is 'weak'. Nonetheless, this is sufficient to create a 'fettering' mechanism of some significance, giving rise to social crises. The transition to a new phase of correspondence between forces and relations is by no means guaranteed in these circumstances. Much depends on the class capacities of human agents, capacities which may or may not be stimulated by the given character of the forces-relations mix. Class struggle can be decisive where class capacities are developed, but active class struggle is not (as some marxists assert) built into a marxist notion of exploitation. Social change is not inevitable, but nor is it, in the end, indeterminate.

In another assessment of these issues, Andrew Levine has classified the various 'retreats' from the Cohenesque view as running from 'weak' to 'quasi-' to 'non-marxist' historical materialism, thence to a descriptive materialist sociology.{su6} According to that schema (which I think does less than justice to materialist sociology), I would designate Callinicos a weak historical materialist, whilst Rigby and Sayer are 'quasi', bordering on materialist sociologists. In all three versions, the claims to be following some classical image of Marx is somewhat gestural. This is partly, in my view, because the complex ground in which marxism and pluralism wrestle is too much the contemporary reality to resurrect the imagery of heroic victory over deviations, which to varying degrees mars each of these able authors' reflections.

Historical materialism today, it emerges, offers a vaguely-marxist research agenda. Perhaps, as many people assert, and as I believe, this is still a considerable and distinctive contribution to social understanding. But it could not reasonably be denied that such a general formulation looks progressively less like the kind of doctrinal basis from which to confidently launch swingeing critiques, whether of pluralist alternatives or reworked orthodoxies. The personal side of this intellectual predicament is important too: there is a kind of existential abyss which threatens to engulf marxists when the prospect ahead is that of increasing convergence or coexistence with competing and overlapping perspectives. Understandably, the temptation is strong here to turn to defensive rhetoric, and to keep hold of at least a piece of the monist conception of social and historical explanation. In that light, the contrivances of these writers are far from uninteresting, as they are each striving to retain a necessary element of system in their recognition of complexity. Yet that systemic emphasis does not always appear to be decisively marxist in character, nor is the weakening of historical materialism visibly halted as a result. I suspect that subsequent reflections will prove to be that bit more open-ended.

Notes

1. G. A. Cohen, 'Forces and relations of production', in B. Matthews (ed.), *Marx: 100 Years On*, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1983.
2. G. A. Cohen, 'Reconsidering historical materialism', in J. Chapman and J. R. Pennock (eds.), *Nomos XXIV: Marx and Legal Theory*, New York, New York University Press, 1983.
3. J. Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 27f.
4. P. van Parijs, 'Marxism's central puzzle', in T. Ball and J. Farr (eds.), *After Marx*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984.
5. E. Balibar, 'The basic concepts of historical materialism', Part Three of L. Althusser and E. Balibar, *Reading Capital*, London, New Left Books, 1970.
6. A. Levine, *The End of the State*, London, Verso, 1987, Chapter 5.

Gregor McLennan

FEMINISM AND THEORY

Diana Coole, *Women in Political Theory*, Brighton, Wheatsheaf, 1987, £32.50 hb, £12.50 pb.
Andrea Nye, *Feminist Theory and Philosophies of Man*, London, Croom Helm, 1987, £25.00 hb.
Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell (eds.), *Feminism as Critique*, Oxford, Polity Press, 1987, £25.00 hb, £8.50 pb.

What is, or what should be, the relationship between feminist thinking and action, and the sorts of theories of human nature, politics, language and the self which have been produced by male Western thinkers? How is feminism to use or appropriate such theories, while at the same time recognising their frequent gender blindness or bias? Of could there be some autonomous feminist theory which simply rejects male traditions of thought as androcentric? These three very different books engage with these questions; and all subscribe to the view that the project of an autonomous feminist theory is an incoherent one and that there are no easy answers to questions about the relationship between feminism and those male-produced theories which it both uses and criticises.

Diana Coole's *Women in Political Theory* is organised as a conventional chronological account of political theory, beginning with a discussion of Greek thought before Plato and Aristotle, moving through Plato and Aristotle themselves to women in medieval thought, the political philosophy of Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau and Wollstonecraft and J. S. Mill. An extremely welcome feature of the book is its discussion of the socialist tradition. In her history of Owenite socialist feminism, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, Barbara Taylor noted now often the history of feminism is written as if, after the apparently 'lone' figure of Wollstonecraft, nothing much happened of interest to feminism until around 1850 and the beginnings of 'Victorian' feminism.

Feminist critiques of political theory have tended to concentrate on the central figures of classical liberal political thought. Coole provides an interesting discussion of the work of William Thompson and Anna Wheeler, of the views on marriage of Robert Owen himself, and of the French Utopian socialists, Saint Simon and Fourier. She discusses Hegel, Marx and Engels, but also Bebel's writing on women and socialism, and the ways in which Clara Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai tried to negotiate the problematic relationship between socialism and questions about the situation of women. Coole notes in the introduction how Western political thought has often been orientated around a series of dualisms such as nature/culture, mind/body, reason/passion, and how the female is usually also aligned with the second term of these dichotomies. But she notes as well that it is within the socialist tradition, including that of Owenite socialist feminism, that the most serious, though often unsuccessful attempts have been made to break down these dichotomies.

The problems of selection in a book such as this are acute. The book does not attempt, as Coole herself notes, to encompass all 'major' political thinkers up to the present, hence it omits such influential contemporary figures as John Rawls. Instead the last chapter is devoted to a discussion of feminist approaches to political theory which have emerged in contemporary feminist writing since Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*.

It suffers, inevitably, from brevity (only a paragraph, for example, on French feminism), and can really not do much more than point to some of the directions feminist thinking has taken, and suggest where one might turn to read more. But the project of systematically looking at 'dominant' political theories and also looking in depth at the writings of women is one in which there is no easy balance to be achieved. Diana Coole's book should be very useful to those teaching or studying political theory and philosophy, and it might be that its somewhat conventional arrangement will facilitate its use on rather conventional courses on which it is difficult to raise issues about gender.

Andrea Nye's book, *Feminist Theory and Philosophies of Man*, provides a more detailed discussion of feminist thinking since the time of Rousseau and Wollstonecraft, and the problems that women have faced in trying both to use dominant theories of language, politics and the self in theorising feminist practice, and at the same time in recognising the androcentrism of those theories.

Nye argues that the philosophies that men have put forward have tended to take as their problematic the activities which have been paradigmatically those of men, and have excluded or marginalised those of women, or consigned them to a realm of 'nature'. Thus she writes (p. 230):

> In democratic theory, women's life in the family became the natural 'private sphere', subject to patriarchal will. In Marxism, women's work became regressive non-productive activity. In psychoanalysis the mother became an inexpressible mystery hidden behind a wall of repression. In structuralism, the feminine became a residue of animality cast out of society.

Nye discusses nineteenth-century liberalism and women's rights, the problem of women and Marxist theory, Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminism and contemporary radical feminism, feminism and psychoanalysis, both Freudian and Lacanian, and looks at the idea of a 'woman's language' that has been developed in some French feminist writing. In all cases her conclusion is that an unmodified version of the theory in question cannot provide an adequate basis for feminist theory or, more importantly, for

feminist praxis and politics. Given these problems, why, she asks, should feminists bother to wrestle with Marx, with Derrida, with Lacan?

Sometimes, it seems as if we have simply 'learned how finely worked and deeply woven is the fabric of sexist culture' (p. 230). But the progression through Marxism and post-structuralism to feminist critiques has produced a deep questioning of the stability of male culture, and a recognition of the ways in which we have heard, in many theories, the voices of men in response to conflicts between and within men.

Nye raises, but does not answer, the question of whether it is possible to retrieve from those excluded or marginalised 'spheres', concerns or activities of women a new vision of work, of non-alienated relationships, or of human well-being. This question is a central theme in the collection of essays edited by Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell, *Feminism as Critique*. The editors distinguish between what they call the 'deconstructive' project of feminism, by which they mean the demonstration of the many ways in which the Western intellectual tradition has been gender-blind or gender-biased, and the 'reconstructive' project, which they see as that of showing more clearly how aspects of theory and methodology might be altered by taking the experiences and situation of women into account.

The essays in the volume are centred around four main themes:

1. The problem of the primacy of production in orthodox marxist theory.

2. Theories of modernity and the differentiation of public and private.

3. Critiques of the notion of the 'atomistic' unencumbered self in liberal theory.

4. The question of gender identity.

Linda Nicholson, in her essay 'Feminism and Marx', argues that there is a paradox in marxist theory. On the one hand, Marx emphasises the historical nature of the capitalist mode of production, and provides a powerful tool for feminist analysis of the 'de-familialization' of production. On the other hand, she suggests, there is a tendency in Marx's philosophical anthropology to offer an *ahistorical* approach which results in a narrowing down of the concept of production. Marxism has therefore not been able to provide an adequate account or understanding of female activities such as domestic labour and child bearing and rearing.

Nancy Fraser, in the essay 'What's Critical about Critical Theory', argues that in his theory of modernity, Habermas fails to see how some of the central categories of his social theory, such as the social identities of individuals as workers, citizens, consumers etc., are also *gendered* identities. And he fails, too, to see the extent to which the private/intimate sphere of the family is often the site of coercion and violence, as well as of exploitative exchanges of service, labour, cash and sex. Feminist theory needs to be critical of the distinction between public and private on which much social theory has rested.

Seyla Benhabib, in 'The Generalized and the Concrete Other', looks at the Kohlberg/Gilligan controversy and discusses the contribution that feminism might make to moral philosophy. The liberal myth of the 'atomistic', disembodied, disembedded self has dominated a great deal of moral and political philosophy from seventeenth and eighteenth century conceptions of a state of nature through to Rawls' 'veil of ignorance' and Kohlberg's view of the morality of justice. Benhabib argues that this myth not only generates an epistemic incoherence in universalistic moral theories, but is also based on an implicit politics which defines the domestic intimate sphere as ahistorical, unchanging and immutable, thereby removing it from reflection and discussion.

In the introduction, the editors note the ways in which 'situated' visions of the self can also sometimes be a problem for feminism. Such visions sometimes come close to a sociological conventionalism which does not distinguish between the self and its roles, and such a position, as the editors say, 'reinstates the very logic of identity that feminists have sought to criticize in their examinations of the psychosexual constitution of gender'. The papers by Isaac Balbus, Judith Butler and Drucilla Cornell and Adam Thurschwell explore the relevance of psychoanalytic theories for understanding the constitution of gender. Isaac Balbus defends the psychoanalytic approach of Dinnerstein and Chodorow. Judith Butler explores Monique Wittig's challenge to essentialist accounts of gender differentiation, and argues that Wittig's call for multiplicity can find support in Foucault's *Introduction to the History of Sexuality*. Drucilla Cornell and Adam Thurschwell argue that the structuralist psychoanalytic account, as exemplified by the work of Lacan and Kristeva, belies its own insight into the intersubjective constitution of the subject by reifying the gender categories thus produced. They quote Derrida as follows:

What if we were to reach ... the area of a relationship to the other where the code of sexual marks would no longer be discriminating? ... I would like to believe in the multiplicity of sexually marked voices.

The collection of essays documents, rather than resolves, as the editors note, a tension in feminist theory. Should we be seeking a radical transcendence of all binary oppositions, in the manner suggested by Cornell and Thurschwell? Or can we find 'prefigurative' traces of future modes of gender relationships in present forms of gender constitution?

All three of these books are useful contributions to feminist theory and discussion. Those by Coole and Nye presuppose less in the way of familiarity with theories. *Feminism as Critique* is the most rewarding volume for those who already have some familiarity with Marxist theory, the work of Habermas, and post-Freudian psychoanalytic approaches. Some of the essays seemed to me less useful or more problematic than others, but overall the depth and subtlety of much of its discussion is well worth the reading, even where the outcome is disagreement.

Jean Grimshaw

THEORIES FOR A DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM

Richard Norman, *Free and Equal: A Philosophical Examination of Political Values*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987, 178pp., £19.50 hb, £6.95 pb.

Paul Q. Hirst, *Law, Socialism and Democracy*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1986, 167pp., £15.00 hb, £6.95 pb.

The political context of these books hardly needs rehearsing. Where the market is the supreme model of sound organisation, political purposes at odds with self-centred competitiveness automatically seem unrealistic, backward-looking or small-minded. If the logic of the market is that some wind up with a lot more than others, the argument runs, so be it: the supply-side of the market has to be sustained at all costs; the rich must have the carrot of tax reductions and the poor the stick of tougher rules for benefits and working conditions imposed from above. It's a small price to pay for increased aggregate wealth and freedom. Norman steps into this ideology with a key counter-claim: equality, properly understood, is the essential condition of freedom.

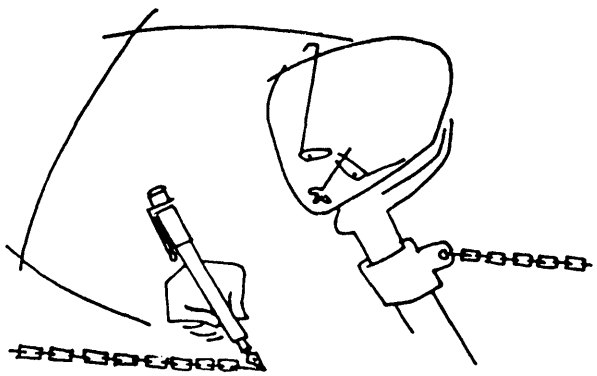
The theoretical context of Norman's work is complex. On the one hand, market-based arguments, following Hayek, have sought to demonstrate that egalitarian aims undermine the principles upon which society is founded, such as law or rational choice. On the other hand, arguments reviving the rationalism of the natural-law tradition have arrived at the view (in Nozick) that all communal interference in property (widely understood) is wrong, or alternatively (in Rawls) that a degree of inequality is implicit in the rational founding of a liberal society – how much is a matter of dispute. In place of formal argument of this kind, Norman has a style of exposition intended to give political ideals such as freedom and equality 'authentic content ... rooted in human experience' (p. 7). He persistently rejects arguments on the grounds that they abstract so greatly from ordinary human life as to be either inapplicable or unconvincing for real human society. On the other hand, he does not reject the fruits of abstraction, seeking rather to obtain from positions adopted by other philosophers – natural-law advocates included – a view that is both coherent and also grounded in common sense.

In the debate over freedom, for example, Norman's strategy is to demonstrate that the notion cannot be made coherent unless the cooperative nature of society, and the value of equality that this implies, are expounded. This argument takes off by considering the long-used counterposition of negative and positive freedoms. According to Norman, neither version has been able to determine the relationship between freedom and our involvement in social life. The one (in Mill) fails to grasp the degree to which individual life is inherently social; the other (in Aristotle, Bradley, Bakunin, Hegel, Engels, and especially T. H. Green) breaks down at the point where it attempts to extrapolate from everyone's society-dependent freedom some necessity for each to sustain the freedoms of others. After a full and sympathetic discussion of thinkers in both traditions, then, Norman turns to equality as 'a natural candidate' for 'a positive principle of distribution' of freedoms (p. 55).

When it comes to equality, the style of argument is the same. Formal defences, such as the claim that equality is justified by its universalisability or utility, are rejected as merely formal and flawed in application to real social life. Rawls's theory fares rather better. For, though Norman endorses criticisms of its notion of rational self-interest in a hypothetical 'original position', he also extrapolates from it more down-to-earth 'principles of justice .. appropriate to a cooperative organisation' (p. 69), which are to be cornerstones of his own argument. Inherent in the manner and the content of decision-making and any real cooperative association, he claims, are equality in the distribution of power and of benefits and burdens (pp. 72–73). These notions do not have to be reached by the obscure paths of abstraction; they can be demonstrated through a real-life example such as apportioning the tasks in a household, because they are implicit in the character of any cooperative group. It follows that equality is the condition of a society where freedom may exist at both the individual and the societal level.

Of course, though that may establish the credentials of equality, it does not dispose of all the difficulties of interpretation. But Norman's brevity and incisive organisation leave him with half the book remaining to attend to this. He considers principles (pp. 79–88) such as 'To each according to his need, ... his work, ... his merit', etc., and the supposed need for incentives. But he argues that these are either forms of 'compensation' for extra burdens (which merely spell out how equality can be measured in practice); or are cases of recognition perfectly compatible with equality; or are in any case of doubtful necessity for social life. Then (chapter 5) he counters those who might use one of two escape hatches. One is to say that society is simply not 'cooperative', so equality need not apply. Here, Norman attempts to bring Kant's respect for persons down to earth as a principle actually implicit in all social life - including that of the 'world community' - though occluded in actual societies. Or it might be said that equality just leads to sameness. This requires a rather lengthier case (in chapter 6) to distinguish and give a just weight to different areas of equality: in power (a need for democracy); in material goods (qualified by the egalitarian principle of 'compensation' for unequal work burdens); and 'cultural and educational equality' (the opportunity for all to develop their abilities, plus a measure of provisional positive discrimination). To preserve cooperation, Norman insists, equality of power has to take precedence.

Norman's final chapter of 'utopian speculations' leads him towards the ground explored by Hirst's book: the possible principles and mechanisms of power in a democratic socialist society. For Norman discusses various devices to walk the tight-rope over the pitfalls for democracy: the limits of practical possibility and competence, and the tendency for the majority to dominate. He gives credit to small-group democracy, referenda, decentralisa-



tion (with or without a pyramidal structure of mandated representatives to refer decisions upwards), and an extended use of the jury. However, he does this without the concepts of political theory, with its peculiar way of extracting principles, such as sovereignty and law, that underly evolving political structures in the real world.

It is principles such as these, which belong to the real existence of modern political society, rather than common sense, that have given us the ideological values that persuade in political life. They have a long lineage in the modern European state; but Hirst thinks their obsolescence, at least in their inherited form, leaves space for a radical re-drawing of political ideals that is needed if ideas of socialism are ever to look feasible and politically attractive. Up to now, socialism has risen in the modern world on the back of big government.

Now, socialists can go in one of three directions: wait indefinitely for apocalyptic collapse to overthrow the whole social order; be saddled with the opprobrium and scepticism attaching to centralised bureaucracy; or fight on the given ground of politics with definitions of desirable constitutional forms of democracy as the foundation stone of a renewed appeal.

Thus, whereas Hirst's early commitment to a structuralist account of society as a whole implied 'a populist variant of marxism' (p. 5) which expected nothing from any revision of the capitalist state, here we find him considering the categories of political and social organisation more widely from an evolutionary point of view. In the evolving context as he sees it, then, he advocates a democratic socialist pluralism which would radically modify the sovereignty of the modern state (as Weber recognised it), and reinterpret the concept and practice of the law that it has always implied. It would, for example, admit the inevitability of a plurality of centres of legitimacy in society (both individuals and organisations) and recognise their authority over given areas of activity, coordinating them through corporatist institutions.

All this Hirst tries to explain in an introductory chapter to orientate the reader in this collection of papers published in various places during the 1980s. These include a lengthy critique of Pashukanis' marxist theory of law arguing that the received concept of law, natural partner of the traditional notion of sovereignty, projects rights onto a 'constitutive and unitary subject'. This has the result that 'social relations become impossible' and the very notion of rights comes 'to privilege the claims of one category of [real] subjects' (p. 62) – usually, the most powerful or wealthy, of course. It follows that a species of legal positivism is called for in which we may legislate for 'a realm of differentiated agents' (p. 18). There is then a discussion of Tom Campbell's *The Left and Rights*, accepting Campbell's contention that rights are not intrinsically attached to competitive capitalist society, but insisting – legal positivism again – that there cannot be a purely technical or moral system of laws so well founded upon rational legitimacy alone as to avoid all coercion.

There are also two new chapters about extending democracy, which revive from G. D. H. Cole criticisms of the limits of representative democracy and advocacy of pluralistic self-management. But for Hirst, these have to be coordinated by a continuing specialist management function in the economy, together with improved representative institutions controlling a central administration. It is a matter for conjecture whether this sort of proposal would have an appeal in the political arena, up against the (albeit specious) Thatcherite idea of 'democratising' by handing things over to the consumer in market. One area of doubt must certainly be registered. Hirst is somewhat bland about the well-known drawback of legal positivism: the apparent impossibility of appealing to anything beyond the law as given. He claims simply that 'legislation must be discussed on grounds that go beyond the existing rules of law' and argues that the alternative notion (natural rights which attach to an abstract subject) actually makes such a discussion impossible (p. 63). At this point in his argument, one could wish for Richard Norman's argument to find a direction for law in the common-sense of life in a community.

Noel Parker

BRITISH BARS

David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland*, Manchester University Press, £5.95.

Cultural radicals in the advanced capitalist societies are an easy prey to self-doubt: the first move of a materialist critique, after all, is to remind us just how non-central our professional field of enquiry is. Radical cultural critics are far more likely to fall foul of corrosive self-ironising than of some megalomaniac delusion that *Paradise Lost* is what it all comes down to. If this self-doubting scepticism is justified in one sense, it is remarkably ethnocentric in another. The relations between poetry and politics may seem a little oblique in Macclesfield, but they are hardly so in Manila.

You don't need a couple of stiff lecture courses, in the so-called third world, to press the case that culture and politics are profoundly interwoven; it's far easier to grasp the intricacies of discourse theory if somebody has been trying to rob you of your native speech. Ireland, it could be argued, emerged from third world status only in the middle decade of this century; and for the last few centuries 'culture' in Ireland has been a political battlefield, a bone of religious and class contention, an idiom in which questions of social identity and affiliation, political alliances and antagonisms, have been richly articulated. If 'culture' has mattered to the Irish, it isn't, as Matthew Arnold thought, because they are a peculiarly imaginative, high-minded race, but because people like him have been saying such silly things about them for too long.

The British must be at all costs guarded from the realisation that the present struggles in Ireland actually have a history; if the Irish have to keep remembering their own history, it is because the British keep forgetting it. This is one reason to welcome this excellent little introduction to the fraught history of Irish cultural politics, a book which might be roughly characterised as Fenianism plus Foucault. 'Dublin Castle' and 'Episteme' stand incongruously cheek by jowl in its useful Glossary, indicating well enough the kind of theoretical conjuncture it represents.

After a preliminary Foucaultean reflection on colonial perceptions of 'difference' and 'otherness' in Ireland, Cairns and Richards leap mysteriously over most of the eighteenth century to provide invaluable packaged accounts of a whole array of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Irish cultural thinkers, from Ferguson and Thomas Davis to Standish O'Grady, Synge, Yeats, contemporary writers and a good few others. Writing about the Irish from a British standpoint is always a delicate business; but Cairns and Richards are gratifyingly more delicate than the poet Edmund Spenser, whose Elizabethan report on the country calmly

recommends the extirpation of their entire culture as in the best possible interests of all.

The book distils an impressive range of historical research, and packs an admirable amount of detail into its modest compass; but this means also that it's forced to maintain a low theoretical profile. The authors continually raise fascinating general issues which, in the absence of an Introduction and Conclusion, they never spell out in so many words. Perhaps one might state some of those questions in the following, surreally curtailed terms, taking a cue from the empirical research which *Writing Ireland* provides. Few national histories respond more instructively than that of Ireland to Gramsci's celebrated distinction between 'organic' and 'traditional' intellectuals, one often touched on, but never fully explicated, in this study.

What we witness from at least the early nineteenth century onwards in Ireland is a curiously repetitive series of attempts on the part of the traditional intelligentsia - members of the Protestant Ascendancy – to wrest for themselves spiritual and political hegemony over a peasant Catholic society. (Jonathan Swift, who doesn't turn up at all in this book, would be here a signal precursor.) Since the Ascendancy was in fact damagingly identified with both landlordism and Protestantism, its only hope for such hegemony was to shift the terms of political debate to 'culture'. The cohering national ideology will be Gaelicism, not popular radicalism or Roman Catholicism. This strategic ploy was both necessary and doomed: necessary to displace real class and religious divisions; doomed because the consequent cultural ideal was hopelessly synthetic and starry-eyed, not to say at times virulently racist, chauvinist and essentialist.

The whole project, from Ferguson and Davis to O'Grady, O'Leary and Yeats, is at once impressively resourceful and deeply obtuse, its high-toned altruism farcically imbricated with plain class interest. 'Betrayed', so it felt, by Westminster since the 1800 Act of Union, the Ascendancy was always a second-class ruling class, besieged and bereft, British in Ireland and Irish in Britain. Much of its visionary cultural politics is an imaginary resolution of this deeply unsettled social identity.

It might seem logical, then, to turn to another Irish narrative altogether: the long history of radical popular struggle from O'Connell and the Sinn Feiners to the Irish Republican Brotherhood, Michael Davitt and the Land League and the men and women of 1916. If the Ascendancy has the culture, this lineage has the politics, which is why it has to take something of a back seat in Cairns's and Richards's primarily cultural-political frame of reference. Yet a moment's reflection on this alternative history suggests how beautifully the contrast between it and the cultural politics of the Ascendancy doesn't work. The latter heritage can't be written off quite as easily.

If the internal emigrés or rogue sons and daughters of the Anglo-Irish were capable of perpetrating cultural ideals of unparalleled silliness, they were also, like many emigr{acute}es, capable from time to time of taking up a perspective beyond the tribal in-fighting and dreaming of a pluralistic, open, ecumenical nation. If that dubious heritage includes the ridiculous Sir Samuel Ferguson and his fancy friends, it also encompasses Charles Stewart Parnell and the Fenian Maud Gonne. In a sense, the two traditions, upper-class-cultural and radical republican, converge in the Irish Revival/Easter Rising: Yeats, after all, was for a while a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and several of the executed leaders of 1916 were poets or playwrights.

If the Ascendancy lineage can't be entirely dismissed, neither can the popular-radical tradition, with its largely organic rather than traditional intellectual leaders, be unequivocally celebrated. It, too, was deeply contaminated all the way through with racism and Romantic essentialism, to culminate finally in the spiritual disaster of De Valera's far-from-Free State. If James Connolly kept open the lines of communication to the revolutionary republican internationalism of Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen, he did so against the grain of a benighted, bigoted, inbred Romantic nationalism which is still alive and kicking in Ireland today. His socialist internationalist compatriot, James Joyce, was driven from the island by just this philistine orthodoxy, with Samuel Beckett hard on his heels.

It would be interesting to see Cairns and Richards return some time to ponder these wider theoretical and political implications of their theme. Meanwhile, they have done a fine job in reminding the British that the Irish have a history; and meanwhile that squalid history rolls on. There are those who believe that the six men recently imprisoned for the Birmingham bombings are actually innocent. But what does it matter which particular bunch of Paddies is behind bars?

Terry Eagleton

BOURGEOIS NOUVEAU?

Michael Taylor (ed.), *Rationality and Revolution*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, 27app., £25.00 hb.

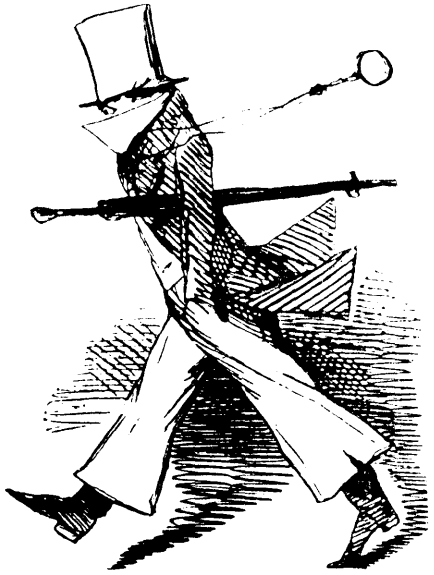
Yet another volume in the 'Marxism and Social Theory' series advocates 'rational choice theory' and 'methodological individualism' in social analysis. The book is divided into two sections, 'empirical' and 'theoretical', with four essays in each. The common theme is the need to provide 'structuralism' with micro-foundations, by applying neo-classical economic theory to socio-political phenomena. As such, the book draws heavily on the work of Mancur Olsen's *The Logic of Collective Action*, and, implicitly, on *Making Sense of Marx* by Jon Elster, who contributes an essay entitled 'Marx, Revolution and Rational Choice'. Other contributors in this tradition include John Roemer, Raymond Boudon, Michael Wallestein and Adam Przeworski.

The author's aim is to show how 'rational choice theory' can elucidate revolutions in both pre-capitalist and capitalist societies, which, they assert, have hitherto been considered 'irrational' responses to social crises. The question of who considers revolutions 'irrational' and on what basis, however, is largely ignored. Central to the debate is the attempt to overcome the difficulties posed for rational choice theory by the problems of 'free riders' and 'counterfinality'. This is done by examining the role of 'community relations' and 'political entrepreneurs' in the revolutionary process.

Michael Taylor argues that it was because the collective action of peasant revolutions had its basis in community problems, that it was rational for peasants, as self-interested individuals, to participate in collective revolutionary action. He goes on to argue that the fact that participants neither intended nor foresaw the revolutionary consequences of their action in no way undermines the role of intentional action in explaining revolution. This 'thin' theory of rationality is then extended to explain collective action where community and community-based groups have

been superseded by interest groups and associations.

The main target of attack is Theda Skocpol's anti-voluntarist methodology in 'States and Social Revolutions'. Although Michael Taylor argues that structural, functional and psychological explanations are not incompatible with intentional explanation (indeed, he argues that rational choice in pursuit of the individual's material self-interest is an unacknowledged assumption of her work), this is hard to reconcile with some of the book's substantive conclusions. For instance, Popkin's chapter on the Vietnamese revolution concludes that the Viet Minh, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai and Catholic priests' 'yielding of a revolutionary surplus', through their actions as 'revolutionary entrepreneurs', was in fact 'creating something from nothing'. This is a view of socio-political



change that many historians of twentieth-century Vietnam will have difficulty in accepting. If this is 'rational choice theorising in action', its results are not particularly illuminating. However, it is stressed that the book's primary purpose is to show the validity of rational choice theory in analysing collective action (in part as a response to the criticisms made by Martin Hollis in *Models of Man*), rather than to provide concrete socio-historical analysis.

The 'theoretical' section's contribution to our understanding of social change and social theory is also questionable. Once more Jon Elster treats us to a reading of Marx which, whilst having the merit of being more widely based than his earlier attempts, is still selective in intent. Marx's theory of history is considered, rather inevitably, too teleological. Further Elster, along with James Tong, views Marx's attempt at analysing pre-capitalist societies as blatantly anachronistic; the irony here being that all the chapters dealing with 'peasant' revolutions apply categories derived from neo-classical economics, considering the individual peasant as the archetypal *homo economicus*!

The results of such method reach their nadir in John Roemer's 'Rationalising Revolutionary Ideology: a tale of Lenin and the Tsar'. Whilst acknowledging the importance of the question of why the individualistic response of the 'Prisoners dilemma' is sometimes dropped by subjects in favour of collective mass action, he then ignores the problem and goes on to discuss whether rational choice theory can explain why individuals (in this case Lenin and the Tsar) subscribe to the ideologies that they hold. So far so good. However, after much mathematical mystification, he comes to the conclusion that Lenin, as a political entrepreneur, had more chance of yielding a revolutionary 'profit' if he held and espoused a 'progressive' ideology, advocating wealth redistribution from 'rich' to 'poor'.

Both the problematic nature of their a-historical conception of the individual, and their neglect of the limitations imposed on the efficacy of individual choice in the historical process, are brought out clearly in Michael Wallerstein and Adam Przeworski's essay, 'Workers' Welfare and the Socialisation of Capital'. Marx's analysis of the revolutionary potential of the proletariat under capitalism is 'undermined' by the assertion that capitalism is in fact a 'non zero sum' game. Workers, it is argued, as 'utility maximisers', can secure their maximum material welfare by way of the 'Social democratic strategy of "functional socialism" whereby the functions of capital ownership are brought under government control while leaving ownership untouched'. Neither the ethical desirability, nor the political constraints of such a strategy are considered in their analysis. This is brought home most starkly by their assumption that workers 'choose' their share of national income by way of wage demands made by trade union organisations. The new bottle contains some very old wine, which, it must be added, has not improved with age.

The saving grace of this book is Craig Jackson Calhoun's essay, 'The Radicalism of Tradition and the Question of Class Struggle'. It is only with this essay that the laudable aims outlined by Taylor in the book's introduction – namely the necessity of articulating methodologically both structure and subject, and applying this in socio-historical analysis – are in some way achieved. Calhoun's argument is that Marx was mistaken in assigning a potentially revolutionary role to the proletariat on the basis that 'they have nothing to lose but their chains'. It is precisely this fact, he argues, that prevents their transition from a 'class in itself' to a 'class for itself'. He concludes that it is only identifiable community-based groups, with existing traditions to defend (which then have those traditions and lifestyles threatened by historical development) that both possess and can realise a revolutionary potential. As such, it was those 'reactionary radicals', for instance the artisanate, that provided the bedrock of revolutionary groups from 1789 onwards. The theme once more, in keeping with the book's other essays, is that small communities with a strong social and ethical bonding can overcome the problem of 'free riders', individuals actually realising that collective action is in their own individual self interest. In the absence of such community relations the external coercion of 'political entrepreneurs' will be needed to counteract the 'free rider' problem.

Calhoun is familiar with other approaches and traditions, rather than the caricatured versions (especially of Marx) that are offered in the rest of this book. As for the book as a whole, however, and the methodology it espouses, I am not convinced. The political conclusions that are drawn from the above analyses are as predictable as they are old; 'once upon a time' it was rational for self-interested individuals to indulge in collective revolutionary action, butit is so no longer, not because individuals have changed, but because the rules of the game in which individuals operate have. What the above approach fails to realise is that individuals are both products as well as producers of social relations; only if this is realised will Taylor be able to show that structural and intentional modes of explanation are compatible. As a contribution to the 'newly rekindled debates about "structure" and "action" and their role in the explanation of historical change and the problematic gap between sociological and historical explanation' this book is left wanting.

Nigel Ambrose

MAKING WHOOPEE

Ernst Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1988, 310pp., £22.50 hb.

In one of the essays in this book, Ernst Bloch argues: 'Hope is not confidence. If it could not be disappointed, it would not be hope.' Hope is fragile yet essential if anything is to be changed. Hope guarantees nothing: it can only be daring, pointing to possibilities that will in part depend on chance for their fulfilment. The ambiguity of hope in Marxism is the subject of *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature*, and it is the pulse that beats at the heart of Bloch's work. Bloch is a difficult thinker; he is prone to digression and is sometimes wilfully obscure, but his project is ambitious and risk-laden and to read him is to engage with a remarkable, probing intellect.

Bloch was born in Ludwigshafen, Germany, in 1885; studied with Georg Simmel; was exiled no fewer than three times; and died in 1977, leaving behind an extraordinarily complex corpus of work. His *Geist der Utopia (Spirit of Utopia*, 1918) posited an 'inherent utopian tendency', inspired by Marx's proposed 'alliance between the poor and the thinkers' in order to create a messianic revolutionary philosophy in which we 'paint images of what lies ahead, and insinuate ourselves into what may come after us'. Bloch's early thought was still a Talmudic-German version of that Christian socialism that swept the Western world at the end of the century, and was laid to rest by the cataclysm of imperialist war and socialist revolution. Yet Bloch is here only just emerging: as he says, his book 'makes no peace with the world'; he is at the beginning of a quest for 'the *external* interpretation of the daydream, the *cosmic* manipulation' of the Utopian principle. Atheism (Feuerbach) opens up the place of the religious vacuum; Utopia (Bloch) fills the vacuum with the ideal of historical freedom – communism.

Bloch's three-volume *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (*The Principle of Hope*, 1954-59) was written during his exile in the United States. Following Simmel, Bloch sought social significance in the everyday action and the fragment as well as the general historical process. For Bloch, the master-works of art (including the tragic) are Utopian by nature: 'The permanence and greatness of major works of art consist precisely in their operation through a fulness of pre-semblance and of realms of utopian significance.' The space into which human beings had projected their inner longings must remain open 'for a possible, still undecided reality of the future'. Here, in the 'superstructure in the superstructure', is that terrain of '*what lies ahead*, the novum in which the mediated train of human purposes continues'. Crudely put, Bloch is concerned with the ways in which we articulate our feeling that life ought to be qualitatively better than it currently is. According to Bloch, 'truth is not the reflection of facts but of processes; it is ultimately the indication of the tendency and latency of that which has not yet become and needs its activator.' Literature and are contain the *Vor-Schein* ('anticipatory illumination') of that which has not yet become, and the role of the writer and artist resembles that of the midwife who enables latent and potential materials to assume their own unique forms.

Bloch mapped out the formations of the 'not-yet-conscious' as they take shape in daydreams, wish-landscapes, and religious, scientific, political and artistic events of signification. The signification can be traced in the anticipatory illumination and is determined by the manner in which it gives rise to hope within the cultural heritage. Songs, fairytales, plays, movies, novels and daydreams are where individuals have presentiments of what they lack, what they need, what they want, and what they hope to find. Bloch recognises in the manifold historical forms of crystallization of Utopian consciousness the embodiment of anticipation, the vision of the horizon, the dream of the space which must be filled, the presemblance of the dawn, the window of the future.

The Utopian Function of Art and Literature gathers together several important articles by Bloch previously unavailable in English (most are drawn from the two-volume *Ästhetik des Vor-Scheins*, 1974). For any student unfamiliar with Bloch, this volume is an attractive and impressive introduction both to his important themes and his highly distinctive style. The title given to Bloch's conversation with Adorno – 'Something's Missing' – makes explicit the sense of longing that runs like a thread throughout this collection. Three essays (written during the period 1930–1973) address the nature, manifestation and practical uses of utopianism in Marxism – that repository of new values whereby one summons up a sense of how things could, and ought to, be otherwise. All of the pieces in this volume, whether their subject is architecture or cinema, dreams or detective novels, devote themselves to the same basic concern: 'something better', a 'homeland' that is more humane, more just. The interest is in the *process* of hoping, yearning for the other, the new; like a movie, the 'not-yet' can only be understood when allowed to unfurl itself through time and space.

According to Bloch, genuinely utopian works have an *Uberschuss* (a surplus or, literally, 'overshot'). The creative, gifted artist tries to go beyond her – or himself in projecting subjective wishes and needs, and thus the creation contains not only what the artist consciously meant but more – the surplus that continues to contain meaning for us today because of its anticipatory illumination. Historically, argues Bloch, the surplus of a work of art

enables us to comprehend the conditions and tendencies of the times in which the artist worked, for it critically formulates what was lacking and needed during its period of conception and realisation. This surplus is also the objectification of shared human values and possibilities that provide us with the hope that we can realise what we dimly sense we are missing in life.

For Bloch, philosophy begins in lived experience itself and in its smallest details, in the body and its sensations, at the very sources of the word as it comes into being. This accounts for the presence in Bloch's work of those minute expressionistic sketches which regularly alternate with the more formal philosophical disquisitions, as though repeatedly to return us to some more primordial renewal of thought in astonishment itself. Walter Benjamin described Bloch as the master of the German avant-garde essay, and George Steiner places pages of Bloch's mature style alongside Hölderlin and Nietzsche for their 'subtle brightness'. Bloch employs images, comparisons, connotations, provocations, aphorisms, fables and anecdotes to form and reform philosophical categories. Like other expressionist artists and writers, Bloch wished to shock his readers into an awareness of their own inner needs, so that they would break down those reified conditions that prevent communication and collective action. Reading Bloch is thus a remarkable experience: at times exhilarating, at other times exasperating. One can appreciate Adorno's wry description of this style as '*grosse Blochmusik*' (punning on the word *Blechmusik*, meaning brass band music).

All of Bloch's mature themes and techniques are evident in *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature*, making it an invaluable collection for students of modern German social theory. Art, as the filament which has stored up our capacity to 'dream ahead', awaits release of its energies by renewed contact with a revolutionary audience; if the thread were to be severed, not-yet will become never. Bloch's principle of hope aims to reverse the diminishing belief in the value of art, of love. Closed off from the memory of love, we cannot recover love. Bloch's philosophical aesthetics is an antidote to that pessimism and helplessness often expressed by the intelligentsia in both the East and West, where the creator as the subject of art apparently no longer counts. Bloch returns our gaze to the tensions and mediations between the intender, tendency, and intention in the reception and use of works of art. His argument is a powerful defence of human vulnerability and individual hope. As Bloch quotes from Oscar Wilde: 'A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not even worth glancing at.'

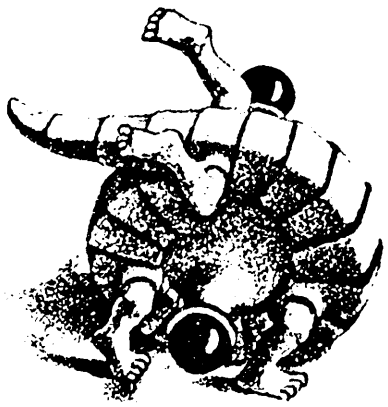
Graham McCann

GESTATION

Geoffrey Bennington, *Writing the Event*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1988, 189pp., £22.50 hb.

Lyotard's fame in the English-speaking world rests almost exclusively on his authorship of that seminal text of the postmodernist movement, *The Postmodern Condition*, but there is also a large corpus of work (mostly untranslated) stretching back to the forties to be taken into account. Geoffrey Bennington's book represents a gesture towards the wider picture, briefly examining as it does a range of Lyotard texts such as *Economie Libidinale, Discours, Figure* and *Le Différend.*

I say gesture because this is an essentially modest study, which makes no great claims for comprehensiveness of coverage. While adopting a largely retrospective standpoint– presenting the earlier books in the light of the later, as Bennington puts it– it does so with only minimal reference to *The Postmodern Condition.* Since *The Postmodern Condition* is the basis of Lyotard's international reputation this seems slightly perverse. *Writing the Event* will not serve as a general introduction to its subject's thought, therefore, but it will fill in some gaps and suggest some new lines of enquiry for those already on the Lyotard trail. The copious quotation from Lyotard's work will serve a very useful function in this regard.



Bennington's thesis is that Lyotard is fundamentally a political thinker: if one notably lacking in political 'solutions'. That political concerns inform Lyotard's thought in general will probably come as little surprise to readers of *The Postmodern Condition*, but lest they feel this supplies an answer to their remaining exegetical problems they might like to ponder the following: 'It remains to be seen whether Lyotard is aestheticizing politics or politicizing aesthetics, or whether those two terms are sufficient for what is at stake in this work' (p. 165). Now we might argue the case for the first two positions reasonably enough, but as to what might lie *beyond* – for a philosopher apparently primarily concerned with politics and aesthetics – we might declare ourselves puzzled. Lyotard drops hints throughout his oeuvre as to what else might be at stake, and they have more than a touch of intellectual playfulness about them. The philosopher simply discounts his audience: 'When you're trying to think something in philosophy, you don't care less about the addressee, you don't give a damn. Someone comes along and says, "I don't understand a word of what you say, of what you write": and I reply "I don't give a damn. That's not the problem. I don't feel responsible towards you"' (p. 105).

Whatever else is going on here, be it politicizing or aestheticizing, it is certainly not debate (which some of us might argue is an essential component of philosophical discourse nowadays), and Lyotard's entire project begins to take on an unwholesomely self-regarding air. Not giving a damn about your audience is the kind of thing that gave *modernism* a bad name, and if postmodernism can offer us nothing better in the communication stakes we might just wonder whether the enterprise has any point at all. The cause of philosophy will gain little from such an anti-social stance, which only too easily plays into the hands of its detractors.

Bennington claims the existence of significant discontinuities over the course of Lyotard's work (Lyotard is 'no unifying ground' for the texts 'bearing his signature'; p. 5), but it is not difficult to find recurrent themes and concerns in the material under scrutiny: a suspicion of systems ('metanarratives'); an anti-

foundationalist orientation ('I have a dream of an intellectual who destroys self-evidences and universalities', p. 7); a desire to opt out of binary thought patterns (the capitalism/Marxism opposition, for example); a fondness for rhetoric as a mode of argumentation. All these are to be found in both the early and the recent work, no less than in *The Postmodern Condition*. If the latter text is different from other Lyotard then it is in its relative accessibility. Elsewhere Lyotard shows he can wield an obscurantist pen with the best of the Derrida generation. Bennington recognises this stylistic discrepancy and talks of *The Postmodern Condition's* 'broad and simplifying categories' (p. 115), but in most other respects it appears perfectly consonant with Lyotard's other writings.

Despite the lack of sustained coverage of *The Postmodern Condition*, and a worrying tendency to cut short detailed exposition and critique when the going appears to get rough (Bennington is rather too prone to take the 'too complex to summarise here' option), this is nonetheless a valuable text for students of recent French philosophy. If it fails to map out the complete field of Lyotard studies, it does succeed in pointing out the routes by which the required mapping can, and no doubt soon will, be conducted. With several other Lyotard texts due to appear in English translation in the near future, this makes *Writing the Event* worth consultation.

Stuart Sim

STRUCTURALISM REVIEWED

Howard Davies, *Sartre and 'Les Temps Modernes'*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, xiii + 265pp., £27.50 hb.

The cleverness of the choice of cover for this book - reproducing the cover of the 1966 'Problemes du structuralisme' issue of *Les Temps modernes* – could generate a review in itself. It neatly dramatises the key component of Howard Davies's narrative, namely the tensions, contradictions, convergences and exchanges in *Les Temps Modernes's* relationship to structuralism; and it dramatises even more neatly one of the principles underlying the Sartrean project of synthetic anthropology, the presence of the observer to the observed; and it also, and most immediately, dramatises its ironic denial of that most persistent of origin myths, in this country at least; structuralism's heroic overthrow of 'existentialism'.

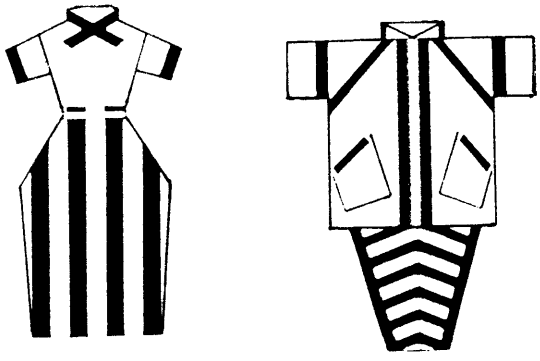
Within a chronological framework, Davies traces the development of the project of *Les Temps modernes*, namely the construction of a synthetic anthropology in contradistinction to academic anthropology. Questions of the nature of and boundaries between variously constituted bodies of knowledge therefore lie at the heart of Davies's analysis. The synthetic anthropology itself might perhaps be described as a political/philosophical problematic, where the politics is furnished by anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, anti-racialism, the philosophy by a synthesising dialectic of individual and group informed by phenomenology. Davies also emphasises the importance of the ethical commitment to social transformation, the commitment to reflexivity, that is the awareness of the observer in the object of study, which is specifically a reflexion on ethnocentricity, and of the role of the synthetic, in the sense of a refusal of the all-encompassing overview, of context-free observation. And on all these counts, academic anthropology, which in fact means structuralist anthropology, is found lacking. The review is analysed across five periods, segmented according to the changing nature of the synthetic project which is shown to be in virtually constant dialogue with structuralism.

The fight is fought over the unconscious, over history and over politics, and is not waged by Sartre alone. One of the virtues of this book is the way it brings different contributors into focus, deftly marking out the originality of many working within and against the intellectual fields represented by the iconic figures of Lacan, Levi-Strauss and Sartre (who are themselves *actants* as well, of course), through the fifties, sixties and seventies.

The figure of Sartre himself ends up curiously fragmented. This is not to deny the force with which his participation and energetic defence of the synthetic project are presented, nor the frequently illuminating readings of individual works. Davies's analysis of *Words* in the light of the notions of reflexivity and generosity is particularly noteworthy, and Sartre the anthropologist is a welcome addition to the better-known figures (the existentialist philosopher, the writer, etc.) already installed in the pantheon. But what is strange is the way that Sartre the traditional Cartesian philosopher emerges more and more strongly as a figure in the very criticisms addressed to him from the structuralist camp, to the extent that their debts to him are masked as he is conflated with and comes to stand for the positions they are attacking. Davies does not criticise these criticisms, yet they sit uneasily at times with the discussion of the synthetic anthropology. In the light of the growing number of voices which are beginning to argue against the traditional reduction of Sartre to the apologist of consciousness and freedom, it would have been helpful for Davies to have clarified his position.

One major benefit, which guarantees the usefulness of this study for anyone working with 'French theory', is that it is not possible to read it and still believe in the powerful cultural myth that in 1966 structuralism opened the way to the articulation of marxism, ideology, culture and psychoanalysis, slaying the dragon of bourgeois humanist subjective philosophies in general and the existentialist guard dog in particular. Because it is not true. Andit is indeed ironic that in order to argue for a materialist understanding of subjectivity and culture, ideas have tended to be lifted from their 'structuralist' context with little thought for their history or politics. Certainly the structuralist concern with universals, synchrony, and cultural pluralism stamp it as far less radical a philosophy than Sartre's which, with its sophisticated anticipation of the debates around orientalism in the analyses of the political and ideological discourses of colonialism, emerges as a much more far-reaching critique of humanism, for example. The resonances of these debates for contemporary concerns are immense, and it must be a matter of real regret that quotations have not been translated. One can only hope that this will not restrict its readership to specialists.

Margaret Atack



FUTURE IMPERFECT

E. A. Grosz et al (eds.), *Futur Fall: Excursions into Post-Modernity*, University of Sydney and Futur Fall, Power Institute of Fine Arts, 1986, 167pp., £5.95 pb.

Conferences, by their very nature somewhat shapeless beasts, do not always translate very well into book form. What in the flesh may have seemed a stimulating and intellectually-challenging enterprise (all those papers, all that conviction, all that earnest debate) can look curiously flat and episodic in cold print. *Futur Fall* suffers more than most from such translation. It is based on a selection of papers presented at the first Australian Conference on Post-Modernism held at the University of Sydney in 1984, and given the general lack of agreement as to what postmodernism really *is* (perhaps more a state of mind than a movement *per se*) it was always going to be a difficult exercise to make it work as a book.

The project suffers from yet another major drawback. As the editors point out in their introduction, much of the conference involved a dialogue with the work of two of its participants: Jean Beaudrillard and Gayatri Spivak. Baudrillard's typically provocative sentiments on hyperreality and simulacra make their appearance in his paper 'The Year 2000 Will Not Take Place', but Spivak's contribution was not available for publication in this collection. Since Spivak's concern was apparently with the crucial issue of the politics of postmodernity – posing the question 'whose postmodern?', and asking at whose expense the postmodern is produced – this is a great pity. The collection is thus severely imbalanced, and there is little doubt that the inclusion of Spivak would have given this book much more impact and thematic unity.

What remains is a wide-ranging collection of papers, bravely attempting to encompass as much of contemporary culture as possible. There are three broad categories of material in the text: on the visual arts; on social, political and literary theory; on the 'present' – that is, on current conjunctions in art, theory and lifestyles. Other than the interior dialogues with Baudrillard and the absent Spivak, there is in fact little continuity of theme in the text. It is instead, as George Alexander puts it, 'a quick zig-zag through the moonscapes of Post-Modernity', although many of the contributions are in themselves interesting enough. Rex Butler's analysis of third-world debt is thought-provoking in its application of poststructuralist theory to economic crisis (when it comes to debt repayment, deferral is certainly an operative concept). Tony Thwaites's piece on Thomas Pynchon's novel *The Crying of Lot 39* successfully transfers Baudrillard's theories to textual analysis. Paul Patton registers some interesting observations about ethics in a postmodern world, where universally acceptable criteria for making value-judgements are conspicuously lacking.

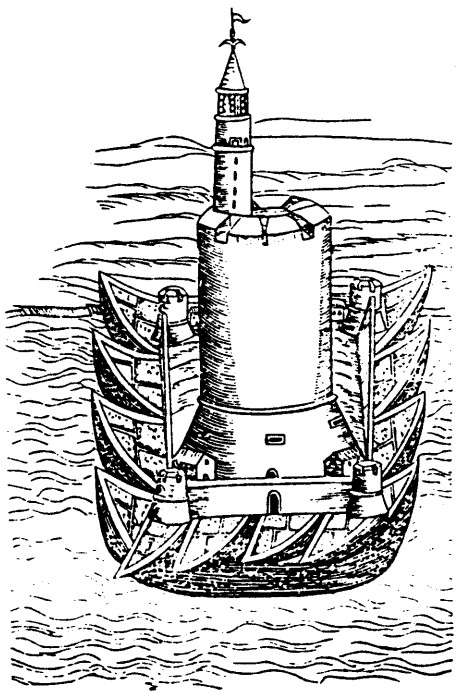
When it comes to popular culture, however, there is a sharp decline into pretentiousness and the automatic writing mode: 'Rhythm creates form by connecting various levels of reality, by throwing bridges across various reservoirs of information, different tracks of time. Instead of the dying light of Western civilization, perhaps Ishmael Reed's "swinging hoodoo cloud"?' (George Alexander again). There is also the problem of the ephemerality of the subject: 'Breakdancing is unquestionably the most awesome sign of the Eighties' (Adrian Martin and Gerard Hayes). Suddenly, 1984 seems a long way away.

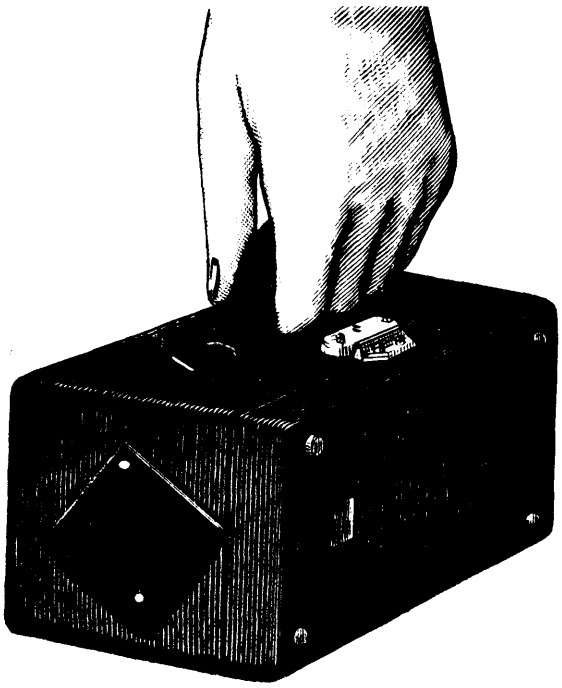
Then there is the case of Baudrillard: truly in a class of his own when it comes to making intellectually outrageous statements. He has a good line in the apocalyptic too: 'mental and intellectual structures are collapsing'; 'history is finished'; 'we only contribute to the end of history'. It is all delivered with great panache and a mean eye for the provocative: abolish history and thereby abolish alienation being one of his more startling claims. The reasoning here is at least ingenious. We are only alienated *in* history – right? So history must be the problem. Therefore, abolish history. Perhaps we should give Baudrillard the benefit of the doubt, however, and see such sequences as examples of the irony we are constantly being assured informs the postmodern sensibility (but irony at whose expense?).

As a collection it does not really add up; but then in the stricter sense it never tries to, making a virtue out of necessity in this regard. Faced with a disparate group of papers and topics? Call it a 'celebration of multiple perspectives, positions, viewpoints, in the face of a demand for a singular, cohesive, unified position of consensus'. If *Futur Fall* has a value it is in that oppositional stance to the stifling consensus of late '80s Western culture, with its political and aesthetic authoritarianism. And that is also where the doubts about projects of this kind start to intrude. Just how effective are such oppositions? Public spending cuts do not take place in the hyperreal: they take place in the all-too-real where human beings and not simulacra get hurt. Retreats into hyperreality, simulacra theory, pastiche, and generalised rhetorical cleverness are arguably more symptoms of cultural malaise than its cure.

Something political is going on here too in *Futur Fall*, no matter how much it tries to deny history and its processes; and what is happening is often depressing - as in Baudrillard's case, where both history and alienation are being trivialised. Irony and parody - those staples of postmodern discourse - can be the most empty of gestures politically, but perhaps Spivak would have redressed the balance. We shall have to await the publication of 'The Production of the Post-Modern' elsewhere before we can say. Still, the conference sounds as if it was a great lark and the contributors clearly enjoyed their excursions. 'Playing around has long been excluded from the game of philosophy', as Anna Munster notes in 'Playing with a Different Sex', and play a-plenty is what you will find in *Futur Fall* – if that is what you are looking for at the moment.

Stuart Sim





SOCIOLOGESE

Anthony Giddens and Jonathan Turner (eds.), *Social Theory Today*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1987, 428pp., £29.50 hb.

Who reads readers? Students read introductory compilations for a swift mapping of the area. This book is not for them, for it assumes too much background knowledge of long-running sociological debates. *Social Theory Today* advertises itself, on its dustjacket, as 'an authoritative statement on current trends of development in social thought'. But who, in an area which the editors admit 'is in intellectual ferment' (p. 10) is looking for 'authoritative statements'? The truth may be that very few are, but that library sales for well-timed state-of-the-art readers are a sufficient publishing incentive. Whatever real readership exists for such pronouncements, however, will find a feast here. For example, one of the co-editors, Jonathan Turner, tells us 'there is an external universe "out there" which exists independently of our conceptualizations of it; this universe reveals certain timeless, universal and invariant properties; the goal of sociological theory is to isolate these generic properties and understand their operation' (p. 156). Oh, well that's a relief. And if there are any nagging doubts about this ontological and methodological énoncé we can comfortably dismiss these, since 'it is not wise to delve any further into these philosophical questions' (p. 161). Not to be outdone, George C. Homans tells us that 'the covering laws of all the social sciences are those of behavioural psychology' (p. 69) and that social institutions 'can be analysed without residue into the actions of individuals' (p. 67).

Turner and Homans line up with Richard Munch (on Parsonian Theory) in 'defending logical positivism in some sense or another' (p. 6). There is more diffidence, as we might expect, from the 'soft sociologies' – Hans Joas on Symbolic Interactionism; John Heritage on Ethnomethodology – but the positivists don't have a monopoly on diktat. Anthony Giddens, for instance, begins his contribution thus: 'Structuralism, and post-structuralism also, are dead traditions of thought' (p. 195).

Always a risky one, this – though Giddens's argument about the failure of structuralism and its progeny to come to terms with human agency is very well made and constitutes one of the few really contemporary engagements in the book. (Incidentally, this essay also appears in Giddens's *Social Theory and Modern Sociology*, 1987, also from Polity and, what's more, available in paperback.)

The point of course is that, in this business, one person's authoritative statement is another's platitude or even gross distortion. If you really like some of the essays here, you're really going to hate others – unfortunately, the reverse doesn't necessarily apply.

There is, moreover, a deeper problem inherent in this sort of collection. The editors (an unlikely collaboration, it must be said, which may explain the rather stilted, Sunday-best style of the introduction) attempted in their selection 'to represent the diversity of viewpoints that exists' in social theory (p. 10). But, as they should surely know, there is no pluralism which is not at the same time exclusive. This, and the significance of the 'silences' in a text, are among the more useful insights of those moribund traditions, 'structuralism and also post-structuralism'. There are a few absences which bear heavily on what is 'represented' here.

First, and most obviously, women. Not only are all twelve contributors male; with the single exception of Ralph Milliband's essay on class analysis, gender simply does not figure as an issue worthy of discussion or even of *note*. It can only be inferred that gender-divisions and all that these entail are seen as merely part of the *object* of social theory and not as constitutive of that theory. This apparent failure in reflexivity is quite alarming, particularly in so sophisticated a theorist as Giddens – who has, elsewhere, recognised 'the challenge thrown down to orthodox sociological standpoints' by feminist analysis (*Social Theory and Modern Sociology*, p. 50). Perhaps a qualification in the title is called for: 'Male Social Theory Today'? Admittedly this loses some of the magisterial terseness of the original.

Then there is the question of the provenance of the contributors. We can more or less take it for granted that there will be no contribution from an Eastern bloc country – and, to be fair there may be practical publishing difficulties here. But why is there nothing from a third world academic? Immanuel Wallerstein contributes an essay – one of the best and practically the only one displaying any leaven of wit – on 'World System Anaylsis' - but this is not the same thing as a view from the third world itself. 'Western Male Social Theory Today' then? Well, not quite *this* even. The axis of the collection is exclusively Anglo-American – German. French social theory is entirely unrepresented, unless you count Giddens's obituary for structuralism.

In fact Giddens's essay, simply because it is the only one which discusses French thought, creates the unfortunate impression that structuralism and post-structuralism *are* French social theory. The neglect of, for example, Bourdieu and Castoriadis – both significantly closer to Giddens's own theoretical project than to the structuralist one– is both surprising and, in the context of a 'representative' collection, potentially misleading, if only by default.

Ultimately, whether you consider this collection representative of social theory today depends on your perception of social theory itself. On one interpretation, at least, 'social theory' is a deliberate distinction from 'sociological theory', and grasps a wider, more radical, politically self-conscious enterprise. The general balance of the titles in Polity Press's own 'social theory' list illustrates this distinction fairly well. On this interpretation, *Social Theory Today* tugs back towards 'sociological theory'. Perhaps in a curious way this *is* representative – at least of a certain level of academic practice. But I was left with the impression that the real party was going on somewhere else.

John Tomlinson

NON-COERCIVE STATES

Andrew Levine, *The End of the State*, London, Verso Books, 1987, 198pp., £9.95 pb.

The notion of the 'withering away of the state' is the most contentious proposal in the political thought of Marx and Engels. Castigated by sceptics as utopian, millennarian, hopelessly romantic, inevitably totalitarian, rarely clearly defended even by its votaries, the concept has now fallen generally into disuse. Especially after the failures of Maoism and Khmer decentralisation, it is rarely assumed that the abolition of centralised authority flows naturally from the fact of socialist revolution. Even the massed adherents of market socialism, while they presume a lesser degree of state intervention from the outset of socialist government than most of their socialist forebears, do not propose to extend this notion towards its libertarian extremes. Why then should we reconsider what can so plausibly be portrayed as an infantile and dangerous mistake better forgotten than flaunted?

There are two reasons for doing so. The first, chiefly historical, is that the latter view is in good part a misinterpretation of the political ideals of Marx and Engels: as the late Richard N. Hunt and others have recognised, what Marx and Engels meant by the 'withering' of the state was more a decline in overwhelming bureaucracy, corruption and class oppression, and greatly increased political and administrative participation, than the subversion of all organs of authority and abolition of all forms of social conflict. This was, therefore, a positive social ideal juxtaposed to a negative political conception, but it did not presume, as some of its socialist and other predecessors did, the perfection of mankind. The second is that an historical misinterpretation here can have considerable practical consequences.

Levine's contribution to the reinterpretation of Marx and Engels is twofold, being concerned initially to situate some of this debate in relation to Rousseau's political thought, and then to discuss the possibility of non-political group cooperation and to argue for the renovation of socialist ideals in the name of greater decentralisation. His exposition of Rousseau attempts primarily to reveal and defend Rousseau's conception of the general will, which he conceives as the only adequate vehicle for a superior form of cooperation, conceived in terms of a Kantian 'republic of ends', which is not based solely upon the meeting of private interests. Here, following Colletti, Della Volpe and others, Levine insists that much of what is valuable in Marx's political theory derived from Rousseau, or minimally that the gaps in Marx's structure can be fitted only with bricks moulded by Rousseau.

His aim in examining the latter is thus to draw out Rousseau's revolutionary potential rather than to provide an historical or analytical reading of his work. This is also accomplished in light of some of Rousseau's successors, notably Robespierre, whose Jacobin application of some of Rousseau's ideas is examined, and De Tocqueville and Burke, whose insights about the dangers of disregarding existing political life, it is argued, can be appropriated for revolutionary uses.

The second half of the book attempts to expose Rousseau's shortcomings (his utopianism) by wedding Marx's account of the historical state and class struggle to Rousseau's political thought. Other chapters examine Marx's theory of history, his concept of socialism, the role of the state in socialism, and the notion of democracy's transformative powers in light of the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The concluding chapters argue for a particular form of stateless society in which a relative absence of force, but not the abolition of all politics or forms of politics or organisation, underpins the wider achievement of individual autonomy.

Levine does not shy away from the use of 'utopia' to describe some of his ideals. A more robust defence of the possibility of full community of goods, rather than the mere assertion of its viability, would have lent greater credibility to his case. Levine's approach can be criticised from several other directions, too. His curt dismissal of ecologists' objections that abundance and thus 'growth' underlies the communist vision is blindly oblivious to one of the central problems of social and political thought. His belief that even a Marxian republic of ends requires governance by a simple 'general will', where this specifies substantially more than an acceptance of certain constitutional arrangements and rules of political succession, may be met with some scepticism. His definition of this will as 'genuinely free' and subsequent adoption of this qualification to define the 'republic of ends' is also debatable. His neglect of other sources of the ideal of the stateless society, including the natural law tradition and political economy, is unfortunate.

Levine nonetheless provides an interesting, readable and provocative re-examination of one of the key problems in Marx and Engels' political thought. The issues he raises are vital both to the history of political thought and to modern political theory, as well as to both socialists and liberals (for the state also comes close to self-abolition in a variety of forms of early and modern liberalism). Moreover, the ideal of the non-coercive state has many potential applications, for example to smaller organisations as well as federations of states, which have been far from fully explored.

Gregory Claeys

WORDS

B. Crick, *Socialism*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1987, 118pp., £17.50 hb, £4.95 pb.

M. A. Riff (ed.), *Dictionary of Modern Political Ideologies*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1987, 226pp., £27.50 hb.

The Open University Press is now well into a series entitled 'Concepts in the Social Sciences' and Bernard Crick's book on socialism is the latest in the line. The intention of the series is to tread the tricky path between a student and a general readership. One further aim of a series of this sort, obviously, is to treat the concept in an accessible manner. I have an excellent impression of the series as a whole, although sometimes it seems that the general reader has been sacrificed to the student. Crick's *Socialism*, in this context, is a skilful reminder that readability and erudition are not incompatible. Somehow he has managed to squeeze his wide reading and massive experience into a little book and told an intelligible story at the same time. The most refreshing aspect of this story, in my opinion, is that Crick firmly locates socialism in the modern world.

Too many authors of books on socialism rummage through the homilies of Jesus Christ, the speeches of Pericles and the tracts of Gerard Winstanley looking for socialist-sounding remarks without making Crick's distinction between socialism and its preconditions. Crick thus anchors socialism in modernity, and more specifically he writes: 'the necessary conditions both for the ideology and the attempted practice are bound up with the democratic theories and events of the French Revolution and the economic theories and events of the Industrial Revolution' (p. 6).

This seems to me to be absolutely correct, and it would therefore have been good to have seen him give as much space to the latter as he does to the former. Some might argue that commissioning an introductory book on socialism from a prominent figure of the left is a mistake, in that the necessary distance from the topic will not be achieved.

Leaving aside the sound objection that calls for such 'distance' are as loaded with ideological baggage as the original 'committed' text is likely to be, the positive advantage in Crick's case is that his own opinions lend a thread of consistency to his story of socialism which other books of this sort often lack. His favouring of what comes across as a communitarian, libertarian, humanist socialism provides a centre of gravity around which other forms of the ideology are discussed. In this sense the book is easier to read than, for instance, Anthony Wright's *Socialisms* whose title makes a useful point but which goes on to make little consistent sense of the plurality which it advertises.

Crick's answer, 'I think there is' to his own question, 'Is there a common ground core of meaning amid all these revolving and colliding concepts of socialism?' (p. 79) might be regarded as optimistic, but it enables him to write more informatively than the eclecticist. At the same time, Marxism is accorded its proper place in a text on socialism: central in historical terms but not dominant in practical terms, particularly in Britain. The unforgiving criticism of Lenin's use of Marx, though, annoys a little, and all the quotations used to illustrate the 'practice' of Marxism are selected for a Crickean defence of individual freedom within socialism. This is fine, but there are other stories to be told of the 'practice of Marxism': universal welfare stories, for example.

The major problem I have with the *Dictionary of Modern Political Ideologies* is the title: given the contents list, it would have been less misleading to have called them Political Ideas. In his introduction Robert Wokler argues, rightly I think, that ideologies make 'embracing claims about the whole nature of human life' (p. xiii), and it is therefore surprising to find Appeasement, Coexistence, Ecumenism and the Kuomintang (along with many other debatable cases) among the 42 subjects treated. Beyond the title, the Dictionary's best characteristic is its insistence on providing a historical context for each idea: this is a useful corrective to any theorists there might still be who argue that a political idea can be studied as if disembodied.

The fullest advantage of such an approach would have been achieved if it had been wedded more consistently to a political-theoretical analysis of the ideas in question: with notable exceptions, too little conceptual work has been done. A further drawback (in the context of a reference book) is that several topics appear without 'further reading' lists appended, while others (with the exception of 'Communism since 1917') have long lists with no breakdowns to help the uninitiated reader. I surmise that the publication problems referred to by Michael Riff in his preface contributed to some of these difficulties, and I think that the whole enterprise would have benefited from a thorough reappraisal of direction. In competition with Blackwell's *Encyclopedia*, for example, this one will probably struggle.

Andrew Dobson

Richard Schmitt, *Introduction to Marx and Engels: A Critical Reconstruction*, Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1987, xviii + 220pp., $38.50 hb, $12.95 pb.

Introductory works on Marxism now abound. Some claim to explain 'what Marx really meant'; others aim to provide an interpretive and critical perspective. It is clear that the present work is intended to be of the latter variety. In the 'Preface' we are promised a humanist as opposed to determinist reading of Marxism, which stresses the role of human agency. There is some evidence of this theme in the initial chapters, but it is soon forgotten. The book then settles down to give an introductory account of the main theoretical ideas of Marxism, with only the occasional attempt to locate the author's interpretation in relation either to other accounts, humanist or otherwise, or to political issues. The result is a curiously bloodless, disembodied, academic picture of Marxism: a 'reconstruction' from which all the fire and passion, the theoretical and human significance, of the original seems to have seeped away.

Nevertheless, for the most part the book provides a straightforward and reasonably accurate survey of the thought of Marx and Engels. The inclusion of Engels alongside Marx is noteworthy and welcome. The coverage of topics is comprehensive: there are sections dealing with the concept of human nature, economics, social theory and politics. The style of writing is clear and simple almost to a fault – at times it verges on being patronising. The treatment is introductory and elementary. There are some flashes of interest: for example, the distinction between public and private is deployed to good effect in the discussion of politics. Generally, however, the account is at a level which is too superficial to engage with or clarify any theoretical issues.

Sean Sayers

R. W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1987, xvii + 334pp., £27.50 hb, £8.50 pb.

The influence of feminist politics on socialist men is now beginning to bear fruit in the form of sophisticated texts written by men on feminist theory. Bob Connell's contribution is intended both as a textbook and an original work of theory.

He begins by presenting some empirical data on gender inequalities, and then sets the historical context of feminist and non-feminist theories of gender. He discusses a wide variety of social theories of gender and then offers a more detailed consideration of how the relation between the biological and the social have been theorised. Drawing on Bourdieu and Giddens to develop his theory of practice Connell outlines his own distinctive contribution through a critical synthesis.

This takes the form of three structural models which shape gender relations: the division of labour by paid work and unpaid work, in employment and in housework: the hierarchies of coercion, control and authority in state institutions, industry and the domestic sphere; and the structure of cathexis – the shaping of practices of desire in relation to objects: in short, the social construction of sexuality. Therefore institutions such as 'the family' are structured by a division of labour, a hierarchy of authority and a structure of cathexis. I found this a particularly useful and interesting way of conceptualising gender relations by breaking away from the empirical 'family-economy-state' mode of thinking, although it still retains some of the flavour of that type of theorising.

At a more concrete level the concepts of 'gender order' and 'gender regime' are deployed. Gender order attempts to grasp the specific patterns of gender power and forms of masculinity and femininity at the societal level, whilst gender regime refers to the balance of gender forces in a particular institution or workplace.

Connell uses considerable space discussing sex role, psychological and psychoanalytical approaches to gender relations developing quite a comprehensive critique based at certain crucial junctures on Sartre. An especially useful innovation here is the notion of 'hegemonic masculinity' which counterposes stylised forms of masculinity to subordinate forms of masculinity and 'emphasised femininity'. These cultural images of men and women underpin existing gender inequalities through an ideological process of 'naturalisation'. The final part of the book, examining ideology and politics, I found the least well developed and least satisfactory section. There is a rather descriptive account of recent women's and gay liberation at the end, but this remained rather untheorised, and I feel was rather too optimistic about the extent of these movements' successes.

Paul Bagguley

Mike Cooley, *Architect or Bee? The Human Price of Technology*, London, The Hogarth Press, revised edition, 1987, 193pp., £5.95 pb.

Mike Cooley has been at the centre of some of the most imaginative and innovative thinking about the impact of technology to have appeared in recent years: first, as one of the authors of the Lucas Aerospace shop stewards' 'Plan for Socially Useful Production'; then as Director of Technology at the Greater London Enterprise Board (GLEB). This book is a compilation of his lectures and talks. It was originally published privately in 1979. Despite the problems of distribution, it sold 7000 copies. A number of foreign editions appeared, and its ideas were widely quoted and discussed. It is good to have the book easily available at last. For this new edition, Cooley has added a quantity of new material, and there is a brief and rather gushing introduction by Anthony Barnett.

Unlike many recent writers on work, Cooley is not hostile to technology and industrial work *per se*. Certainly, he is aware of the dangers of deskilling inherent in technological development; yet he also argues that it need not necessarily have these effects. The new technology can be used to engage the skill and initiative of the worker. The Lucas Plan embodied these ideas; and the attempt was made to put them into practice in the London Innovation Network and other GLEB projects. A chapter added in the new edition describes these experiments; but unfortunately, it reads too much like a sales pitch. Cooley is nothing if not enthusiastic.

When the book first appeared, its ideas were new and unfamiliar. They needed enthusiastic promotion. Since then - partly due to Cooley's indefatigable flair for publicity - they have become well known. With the demise of GLEB, what is now needed is a more reflective and critical assessment of its successes and failures (such as Robin Murray's excellent discussion of the economic lessons of GLEB in *New Left Review* 164). No one is better placed to provide it that Cooley, but unfortunately that is beyond his scope in this book.

Sean Sayers

Leszek Kolakowski, *Metaphysical Horror*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1988, 122pp., £12.95 hb.

Leszek Kolakowski, *Husserl and the Search for Certitude* (reprinted with a new Preface), Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1987, x + 85pp., £7.25 pb.

Quite recently, Leszek Kolakowski's pithy book, *Husserl and the Search for Certitude*, was reprinted. *Metaphysical Horror* – published still more recently and every bit as pithy – represents, if in a somewhat different sense (since it is not specifically about the philosophy of Husserl, or of any other philosopher for that matter), Kolakowski's continuing preoccupation with the general theme of the search for certitude. This search 'matters', Kolakowski insists, 'for, however unsuccessful, it radically changes our lives' (p. 9).

There is a noticeably playful, indeed occasionally quite witty tone to this book that might from the outset lead some readers to question just how intent Kolakowski is on undertaking this search. What is equally noticeable, nevertheless, is that, dispensing with his more familiar role of philosophical exegete, Kolakowski in this context attempts specifically to present a series of philosophical speculations which can be read as his own reflections rather than as connected or indebted to some particular philosophical tradition.

The principal philosophical theme around which this book is structured is that of the ascent to the Absolute. For Kolakowski, two interrelated points can be seen to underscore the location of this theme at any particular juncture throughout the history of Western philosophy. First, he insists, the quest to discover the meaning of the Absolute is always, inevitably, governed by the wider cultural context within which that quest takes place. He places especial emphasis upon the role of language as a particular facet of culture, not only since 'every sentence we utter presupposes the entire history of culture of which the language we use is an aspect' (pp. 58-9), but also because language - as the medium through which philosophy must be expressed – has its peculiar limitations. Accordingly, the possibility of a philosophical 'metalanguage' (p. 4) appears, from the very outset, to be doomed to failure. As Kolakowski explains: 'philosophy has been searching for an absolute language, a language which would be perfectly transparent and convey to us reality as it 'truly' is, without adulterating it in the process of naming and describing. This quest was hopeless from the start, for to phrase our questions we necessarily employ the contingent language as we find it ready-made and not concocted for metaphysical purposes' (p. 11).

Hence the Absolute is always already rendered contingent by the linguistic apparatus that is required for its articulation (a particularly apposite illustration in this context would be Eugen Fink's critique of Husserlian 'transcendentalese'). Accordingly - and this is Kolakowski's second point – the Absolute must remain ineluctably elusive; and 'insofar as the absolute, in spite of its invincible elusiveness looms indistinctly on the horizon of all our possible languages, never pin-pointed, always gropingly sought, it cannot be, within the bounds of our wit, conceived of as a person or a god; no communication with it is possible or needed and it cannot be addressed "Thou"' (p. 55).

How, then, are we to articulate the ineffable? This is the 'horrifying metaphysical snare' (p. 36) within which modern philosophy is trapped. 'We cannot,' after all, 'return to pre-cultural, pre-linguistic, pre-historical – that is to say pre-human – cognitive innocence and still continue to use our philosophical idiom to depict it' (p. 66).

For me, the most striking feature about this book is its brevity. The economy of Kolakowski's presentation (marred slightly by

occasionally careless proof reading) is matched equally by the richness of its substance. *Metaphysical Horror* is an alluring portrait of the Absolute as a constantly recurrent, indeed inescapable theme running throughout the history of Western philosophy; and as such it is a book that should prove indispensable to anyone who is at all preoccupied with this theme.

Neil Duxbury

A. J. Holland (ed.), *Philosophy, its History and Historiography*, Dordrecht, D. Reidel, 1985, 335pp., £37.50 hb.

What *is* the history of philosophy? By what signs do you recognise a textual example? Is a conference on 'the history of philosophy' but a further opportunity for promoting one's philosophical researches? Can philosophy and its history be distinguished? Can the history of philosophy safely be left in the hands – or minds – of philosophers?

Various answers to the less subversive of these questions are implicit in the contributions made to the 1983 Royal Institute of Philosophy conference, at the University of Lancaster, from which this book arose. This was evidently a fruitful conference; it was one of the spurs to the formation of the British Society for the History of Philosophy (reported in *RP* 41, p. 43). As at the opening meeting of the Society, the paper here from Jonathan Rée is outstanding for its thoughtful engagement with the themes of the conference. Rée explores conceptions of the philosophical past, as they have changed through time and influenced philosophical work. The ensuing discussion includes helpful reflections from Anthony Manser on the analogies between the history of philosophy and the history of alchemy. Discovering what the histories of other disciplines, crafts or practices look like is a fruitful device for concentrating the mind, which could well be adopted more widely.

Certainly it is hard to imagine historians of other things turning to the grumpy disputation here between Mary Hesse and Philip Pettit, about the interpretation of Rorty, and emerging with a sense of enlightenment of fruitfulness. The wise judgement eventually reached by Philip Pettit seems not to have been read by the editor as a hint to be acted upon, unfortunately: 'The debate which Mary Hesse opens up deserves an early death' (p. 91).

The editor, Alan Holland, has done a good job, though, of presenting such variable material as a coherent and distinctive book, on a young subject which is still finding its feet. (As an explicit discipline, that is to say – philosophers have long told stories of their past, as Jonathan Rée points out.) The first, conceptual, part of the book is followed by two further parts in which the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are investigated. There are several valuable contributions here, though to judge from this array of papers historians of the seventeenth century are a livelier bunch than those of the eighteenth.

George MacDonald Ross and Simon Schaffer explore the fashionable field of seventeenth-century occultism with resonant good sense and perspicuity. In their hands, and indeed many of the contributors' to this part (notably Desmond M. Clarke, Richard Francks, and Stuart Brown), the history of philosophy sounds exciting and important. But of the eighteenth-century contributors only P. B. Wood, in an interesting discussion of Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart, has produced something which reads like history. One might be tempted to say that seventeenth-century historians have an advantage in working from a livelier century, but those interested in eighteenth-century philosophers do not help their cause – in the context of a conference or book on the history of philosophy – by producing narrow textual exegeses devoid of historical contextualisation or analysis.

Of course, it is a rare collection of conference papers that all address the theme of the conference, and in the spirit of the organisers' guiding hopes. All in all, this is a worthy addition to the literature. Can we learn from this how the history of philosophy will develop as a discipline? Only that if people take as paradigm the worst of these papers, the subject will be a dreadful waste of time; but that the best of them show an energy, vivacity and intellectual grasp which augurs well for the future.

John Fauvel

Christopher Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known*, London: Free Association Books, 1987, xi + 301pp, £25 hb, £9.95 pb.

Christopher Bollas is a psychoanalyst working within a combined theoretical and clinical tradition which has, over the years, come to be termed the 'British School' of psychoanalysis, and which is concerned principally with the analysis of both the object relations and the narrative content implicit within the discourse of the patient. Drawing both on his own experience as a clinical practitioner, and on the works of his forebears operating within the same field (in particular D. W. Winnicott, Marion Milner, and also Melanie Klein), Bollas presents a candid, ingenuous, and often very moving account of how, through transference and countertransference, the psychoanalytic patient relates to his or her early (childhood) experiences. Bollas' argument is that the unconscious ego of the individual is constituted by his or her childhood experiences of an 'object' which, though 'identified' by the patient as something that has affected his or her life, has not actually been conceptualised or determined psychically by that patient: that is, the object is, for the patient, an 'unthought known'.

Particularly interesting are Bollas' case presentations, which at various points throughout the book enable him to expand upon (without abandoning) Winnicott's discussions on paediatrics and psychoanalysis. If the book is lacking in any respect, then I would argue that it is in Bollas' position – or rather, lack of position – with regard to the work of the *Ecole Freudienne* and in particular Jacques Lacan. In a sense, Bollas' own project is very much a reiteration of Lacan's in that the idea of the shadow of the object is in many ways simply a retranslation of the Lacanian/post-structuralist idea that the signified is often something that is repressed. Yet although Bollas acknowledges 'the important contributions of the school of Lacan' he simply stops with this scant homage, instead of a developed discussion. Nevertheless, this is a minor point. More generally, and more importantly, this is a well-written book which should command the interest of the inquisitive reader as well as the specialist.

Neil Duxbury

Claude Levi-Strauss, *Anthropology and Myth: Lectures 1951-1982*, Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987, viii + 232pp, £25 hb.

These lectures were intended to report work in progress. The variety of subjects covered indicates a diversity on which it is difficult to impose a unity, other than by platitudinous assertions of recurring structuralist themes. Willis, in his translator's note, suggests that this book is a source of intellectual history. But, as

such, it is limited by the nature of Levi-Strauss's cursory, or rather ambiguous, treatment of his intellectual sources. There is much that is implicit, which calls for careful reading, and which also suggests that this volume is not an introduction to Levi-Strauss's ideas.

The substantive content unsurprisingly consists of the subjects which make up Levi-Strauss's main texts. Totemism, mythology and kinship are the major examples, all traditional anthropological concerns. The use of cross-cultural comparison is continual and very impressive in terms of range: an example of Levi-Strauss's ability to exploit indirect relationships and connections. But the breadth of issues and examples is achieved at the sacrifice of depth. Thus de Saussure's linguistic theory is present as a sort of totem itself, rather than as an analytical or technical tool. And gender is subsumed under Levi-Strauss's kinship concerns. There is very little new or radical in these discourses, especially for the philosopher.

However, though from the philosophical point of view these lectures may not be immediately stimulating, they are suggestive. Levi-Strauss's concern with totemism illustrates more general issues in psychology and linguistic theory. Such systems of metaphorical thought, displaying logical relations, utilising analogy for conceptual understanding, are important examples of 'indigenous philosophy' (p. 31). Levi-Strauss's project here is a theory of thought (which is to be found in his La Pensée Sauvage), and he calls on philosophers to aid the anthropologist in providing analytical understanding of these intellectual systems.

But this invitation to philosophers is made, in Levi-Strauss's view, from a position of strength. One main issue of these lectures – the subject of the first, but also present in several of the others – is the nature and role of anthropology. It lies, for Levi-Strauss, at an interstitial position: parallel to other disciplines such as history and philosophy, but far from subsumed by them. For anthropology is, or should be, continually extending the boundaries of human enquiry. The diversity of cultures and the intricacy of a culture are what the anthropologist brings to other disciplines, most especially philosophy.

It is most probable that Levi-Strauss would not intend that philosophers should start with these lectures in order to take up his invitation. There is little theoretical exposition at length in these discourses, they are overtly programatic. The anthropologist may find some interesting passages (the sections on kinship are useful, as is the lecture on Africa). But in order to understand Levi-Strauss's philosophical ideas his main texts have to be read. However, it is worth noting that the invitation concerns the intricacies of anthropology rather than merely those of Levi-Strauss's particular approach. This is not to denigrate the latter, for it has illustrated the reflexive potential of untamed thinking found in 'indigenous philosophy'.

Richard Montgomery