

# REVIEWS

## RAISING THE TONE

### Henry Bernstein

(*Economy and Society*, Vol. I, 1972, Routledge and Kegan Paul, annual subscription £4.50)

The impact of *Radical Philosophy* has registered in the efforts of many students and teachers to break out of the deadening narrowness of vision and purpose prevailing in philosophy departments. For information about this I rely on my friends in philosophy, and if only half of what they say is true the scene sounds grim indeed.

In sociology things are different, and the waters far muddier. The hallmark of sociology is eclecticism - it encompasses several major traditions and has given rise to new divergent trends in recent years. In Britain there is the further complication that classical sociologies are cultural imports (despite the heritage of political economy and attempts to bring back Herbert Spencer). Sociology students find Marx, or bits of Marx, on a number of courses from 'sociological theory' to 'industrial societies' and political sociology. These like 'alienation', 'ideology' and 'class' provide a staunch weekly essay fare. The staple literature consumed ranges in its treatment of Marx from ignorance (most American sociologists), to shoddy distortions (Dahrendorf), to more or less subtle revisions (Ossowski, Bottomore and others). Even sociologists of the last category, generally those more knowledgeable about and sympathetic to Marx, draw on his work in relation to issues thrown up in the course of professional debate. This takes the form of stressing, for example, power and conflict relations, and even economic 'factors', against the harmonies of functionalism and the bourgeois apologetics for which it has provided a theoretical prop - support your local social structure.

Therefore unlike the situation in (British) philosophy radicalism in sociology is well established. It has some honourable roots as there are circumstances in which to name oppression takes courage and commitment as C. Wright Mills showed in the USA of the 1950s. Some years on, however, the looseness of the designation 'radical' is evident. Radical sociology now had its own abstracted empiricists, to use Mills' term, who do not go far beyond using their computers to contest official statistics on the distribution of wealth, the extent of poverty etc. On the other hand, and especially in the heady air of the American movement of the '60s, radical sociologists clustered around political slogans exhorting 'consciousness' (a frequent signpost to phenomenology and social psychologies of liberation), community power, and so on.

Despite their vitality, attack and style (exemplified in Martin Nicolaus' harangue of the 1969 convention of the American Sociological Association [1]), they have not succeeded in injecting a more coherent intellectual core into radical sociology.

1 Reprinted in Trevor Pateman (ed.), *Counter Course*, Penguin.

The new journal *Economy and Society* declared its stand under the banner of serious scholarship. Its editorial statement noted that 'The search for new orientations (in social science) has led to a revived interest in Marxism, Structuralism, and Phenomenology in its various forms, to attempts to create a 'critical' theory. These 'new interests, however, have tended to be unsupported by serious scholarship and have consequently too often degenerated into blind dogmatism, confused eclecticism or mere polemic'. (Aspiring radical philosophers, take note!) To this list of targets are added empiricism, piecemeal approaches and 'current ideological modes of defining reality'. So far, so good. Positively *Economy and Society* is 'committed to a theoretical approach which is wholistic and which concentrates on systems of production and the division of labour, and on the related systems of domination and control, as the primary or core sectors of society. Such an orientation attempts to define and analyse developments in other social structures and social groups in their relationships to these core sectors of production and domination'. This is indeed a carefully framed statement and would be difficult to better as a pragmatic manifesto for a Marxist sociology journal, i.e. defining its concerns as Marxist but in a way that maintains points of contact with the work of some academic sociologists at least. Of course the conjunction of Marxism and Sociology has a thorny history raising issues which I shall come back to.

I think that the editors of *Economy and Society* are right to keep their options open in this way, and their policy is vindicated in the range and quality of articles contained in the first four issues. (The contrast with a typical number of the *British Journal of Sociology*, is instructive). Because of the range individual readers will be more interested in some pieces than others. In terms of my interests, exemplifying the journal's intentions about the contribution it should represent are two excellent pieces of original analysis by the French anthropologist Claude Meillassoux on the socio-economic structure of primitive societies (in no.1), and by Harold Wolpe on apartheid in relation to the difficulties of South African capitalism in reproducing cheap labour power (no.4).

Another group of articles illustrates that side of editorial policy which faces sociology - in a way they are less distinctive from the viewpoint of *Economy and Society's* aims and might have appeared in one of the better sociology journals like *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. These are on economic and political activism in Islam by Sami Zubaida in no.3, and on pre-industrial political movements in Ireland, the Gold Coast and Bolivia by Peter Gibbon (no.2), Terry Johnson (no.2), and Andrew Pearce (nos.3 and 4).

A curious and striking feature about the first volume of *Economy and Society* is the juxtaposition of the kind of work I have mentioned with a number of articles by Althusserians. A by now familiar pre-occupation and tone runs through three of the four review articles, a discussion of the place of the *Grundrisse* by Ben Brewster (no.3), and attacks on the sociology of Alfred Schutz and radical deviancy theory by Barry Hindness and Paul Hirst respectively (both editors of the journal and both articles in the first issue). Hirst's article is particularly interesting - not only is he a careful and very clear

writer - but his was the only piece in the first four issues which drew a return fire.

The typical procedure of Althusserians is to specify the object of knowledge of a theory and to decide whether it is scientific or not. Hirst's position (also clear in his review of Giddens and Gouldner in No.2)[2] is that Marxism and Sociology are not comparable as their theoretical objects are different. 'The objects of Marxist theory are specified by its own concepts: the mode of production, the class struggle, the state, ideology, etc. Any attempt to apply Marxism to this pre-given field of sociology (i.e. crime and deviance) is therefore a more or less "revisionist" activity in respect of Marxism' (p.29). Hirst in fact avoids citing any radical deviancy theorist and devotes his attention to an erudite summary of the treatment of law, crime and morality in the successive stages of Marx's thought.

This provoked a reply from Ian Taylor and Paul Walton who felt that they were included in the nameless ones under attack and also felt stung by being told in effect that they had not 'read' Marx properly and occupied a different 'terrain' from the one they thought they did - or perhaps, more precisely, were attempting the scientifically impossible stance of straddling more than one 'terrain' by trying to construct a Marxist sociology of crime and deviance. They defended their project by the importance of 'establishing theoretically the potentiality of a classless, human and non-criminal society' (p.233) [3]. Hirst had the last word, reiterating his epistemological position against 'a specific form of an empiricism which considers that a theoretical problematic can be applied to externally "given" real objects' (p.351). He subsequently went on to say that 'All societies outlaw certain categories of acts and punish them. The operation of law and custom ... is a necessary condition of existence of any social formation'. (p.353)

Now, any first year student who has dipped into an elementary sociology textbook will recognize a statement of the 'all societies ...' type (and hopefully will recognize its intrinsic conservatism). That Hirst should make such a statement is both curious and symptomatic, I think. The major concern of Althusser and his followers has been to establish the specificity of Marxism, above all at a philosophical level. The way they go about this has had some paradoxical effects which are reflected in Hirst's comments. The task of specifying what the scientific Marx is about has produced a kind of high-priest syndrome in Althusserians. Through their particular brand of exegesis they know what it is all about, and what it is *not* about. Apparently then Taylor and Walton can pursue the sociology of deviance as long as they realize that they are involved with a 'practico-social ideology' and refrain from attempting to use Marx. By the same token, as sociology and Marxism do not confront each other on the same terrain, safeguarding the purity of the latter allows the possibility, in principle, of giving the former carte blanche to do its own thing. The objection to this would be that the criteria used to designate Marxism (or parts of it) as scientific can be employed to decide whether there is, or can be, a scientific sociology. (In his review article, Hirst expresses doubt as to whether academic sociology can produce scientific knowledge, but leaves the question open). Here we arrive at the end of the debate for those of us who cannot see nor accept that Althusser has produced a definition of scientificity that we can use in this way.

2 A Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory*, Cambridge, 1971; A W Gouldner, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*, Heinemann, 1971

3 'When I hear the word "human" I reach for my gun' L. Althusser?

So the Althusserians' Marxism would seem either to deny all to sociology, or to allow it all. The latter possibility is reinforced when it comes to any empirical analysis. If sociology has no scientific theoretical object we may need it all the more to give us descriptions of 'real' objects - as demonstrated in Hirst's statement about 'all societies ...', and in the juxtaposition in *Economy and Society* of Althusserian interventions with some good more or less straightforward sociological analyses of concrete phenomena.

I have suggested that what the Althusserians do amounts to warning us off (potential distortions of Marx) but not turning us on. All the articles by them in *Economy and Society* are concerned with exposition and *criticism*. (There is a very useful non-Althusserian exposition by Geoffrey Pilling of the law of value in Ricardo and Marx in no.3). The preoccupation with theory seems to me to be very often a highly formal one. Thus Hindness, for example, uses Husserl as a stick to beat Schutz who is seen as distorting the former's transcendental phenomenology. However idealist Husserl is, the implication is that he has a purely philosophical respectability which Schutz lacks. Hindness says that Schutz is not phenomenological (the criteria being derived from Husserl) but takes as his starting point Weber's preoccupation with the subjective meaning of individuals' actions. I would argue that such a concern has a legitimate place in a Marxist sociology although it would not constitute its point of departure. In fact, more generally we still lack a Marxist *critique*, rather than straightforward denial, of the major sociological thinkers.

A more concrete point relates to the educational practise of sociology, or perhaps political education in sociology. By drawing the boundaries of Marxism so rigidly and then retiring within them, practically one is leaving an open field to academic sociology to monopolize analysis of crime and deviance, the family, 'race relations', 'underdevelopment', etc. This is not just a question of what reaches sociology students but of a far broader market for ideological consumption. Nor is it enough merely to point out the ideological nature of academic sociology's pronouncements on these issues.

*Economy and Society* has certainly raised the tone both in the quality of many of its individual contributions, and in providing a forum for the juxtaposition of the different kinds of scholarly work I have indicated. Although it may prove difficult to maintain the high standard set, *Economy and Society* needs to publish more analyses, and more concrete analyses, of advanced capitalist societies (barely represented in the first four issues). The editors should encourage more controversy and debate, should try to establish links with like-minded people (radical philosophers and psychologists, socialist economists), and should bear in mind that in being scholarly one must avoid becoming scholastic.

The pupils, whether or not they expected a philosophy that should give them ideals to live for and principles to live by, did not get it; and were told that no philosopher (except of course a bogus philosopher) would even try to give it. The inference which any pupil could draw for himself was that for guidance in the problems of life, since one must not seek it from thinkers or from thinking, from ideals or from principles, one must look to people who were not thinkers (but fools), to processes that were not thinking (but passion), to aims that were not ideals (but caprices), and to rules that were not principles (but rules of expediency). If these philosophers had wanted to train up a generation of Englishmen and Englishwomen expressly as the potential dupes of every adventurer in morals or politics, commerce or religion ...no better way of doing it could have been discovered

(R.G.Collingwood)

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# PIAGET ON STRUCTURALISM

S.W. Gaukroger

*Structuralism* by Jean Piaget, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971, 50p

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Piaget's short book is one of the most easily accessible introductions that we have in English to a school of thought that has already been responsible for profound changes in several disciplines. I intend to give only the very briefest account of the book and to make one or two preliminary criticisms, since my purpose in reviewing it is to bring it to the attention of anyone who has not yet read it (particularly students), rather than to offer a full critical exposition - which would indeed be a task, given the extensive area it covers.

Structuralism takes its start from the observation that the phenomena of the external world which we perceive have the characteristics which we attribute to them because of the way our senses operate and the way the human brain is designed to order and interpret the stimuli which are fed into it. An important feature of this ordering process is that we cut up the continua of space and time into segments so that we are predisposed to think of the environment as consisting of vast numbers of separate things belonging to named classes, and to think of the passage of time as consisting of separate events. By examining how we apprehend the world we can discover crucial facts about the mechanism of thinking. Defining structuralism is well nigh impossible, but distinctive features of the various structuralist approaches can be isolated, two of the most important being: (i) that the structures of any system are self-sufficient, and to grasp them we do not have to make reference to all sorts of extraneous elements; (ii) despite their diversity, structures in general have certain common and perhaps necessary properties. A structure is a unified, self-regulating system of transformations: the point of introducing this notion is, very generally speaking, to oppose the (atomistic) account of systems purely in terms of their elements. Systems are dynamic, self-contained entities, the structures of which are governed by laws of transformation. The structures never yield results external to the laws nor do they employ elements that are external to themselves.

In mathematics, the concept of a 'group' - a system consisting of a set of elements (e.g. positive and negative integers), together with an operation or rule of combination (e.g. addition) and having certain properties [1] - has been

- 1 These properties being (1) performed upon the elements of the set, the combinatory operation yields only elements of the set; (2) the set contains a neuter or identity element such that, when it is combined with any other element of the set, the latter is unaffected by the combinatory operation; (3) the combinatory operation has an inverse in the system such that, in combination with the former, the latter yields the neuter or identity element; (4) the combinatory element is associative. (cf.p.18)

When discussing 'weaker structures', Piaget gives as an example (p25) the semi-group defined as the structure resulting from the deletion of conditions 2 and 4. He implies, although the sentence is ambiguous, that the natural numbers greater than nought constitute such a semi-group. However, surely 2 and 3, and not 2 and 4, would constitute such a semi-group? Nothing hangs on this.

particularly successful. The concept is obtained, not, as is usual, by deriving properties from *things*, but from our way of *acting on things*. A group structure is a self-regulating system, and the self-regulation corresponds to the application of the basic principles of rationalism: the principle of non-contradiction, which is incarnate in the reversibility of the transformations; the principle of identity, which is guaranteed by the permanence of the identity element; and the principle that the end result is independent of the route taken. It is because the group concept combines transformation (a group is a system of transformations) and conservation that it has become a basic constructivist tool. Piaget examines the work of the Bourkaki group to apply structuralist principles to the whole of mathematics and then goes on to consider logical structures.

From the structuralist perspective, the logician's formal systems are wanting in at least two respects. In the first place, they are fabricated *ad hoc*. The structuralist project is to discover 'natural structures', some structuralists having tried to refer to an ultimate rootedness in human nature, others to a non-human absolute to which we must accommodate ourselves. In the second place, a logical system, though a closed whole with respect to the theories it demonstrates, is nevertheless only a relative whole; it remains 'open' with respect to those formulae which, though recognised as true when someone goes 'up' to the meta-theory, are nevertheless indemonstrable as long as one stays 'in' the system; and since the primitive conceptions and axioms have all sorts of implicit elements, the system is 'open' at the 'bottom' as well. 'Logical structuralism' has chiefly been concerned with this latter problem, its announced objective being the recovery of what lies 'beneath' the operations codified by axioms. Fully-fledged structures not just analogous to the major intuitive structures employed by mathematicians but identical with some of these turn out to furnish the underpinnings of logic, so that logic becomes part of the theory of structure which is today called general algebra.

Reflection upon logical structures is a particularly effective deterrent against 'formalism'. Gödel's work was important in undermining the formalism of Whitehead and Russell, according to which mathematics was reducible to logic and logic could be exhaustively formalised. He established definitively that the formalist programme cannot be executed, by showing us, in this case, (i) that no consistent formal system sufficiently 'rich' to contain elementary arithmetic can, by its own principles of reasoning, *demonstrate* its own consistency, and (ii) that any logical system that might appear capable of serving as foundation for mathematics is 'essentially incomplete'. From Gödel's conclusions there follow certain important insights as to the limits of formalisation in general; in particular, it has been possible to show that there are, in addition to the formalised levels of knowledge, distinct 'semi-formal' or 'semi-intuitive' levels which wait their turn, so to say, for formalisation. In short, the limits of formalisation are vicarious. At each level, formalisation of a given content is limited by the nature of this content.

Piaget provides us with similarly stimulating accounts of structuralist developments in the biological and physical sciences, in psychology, and in the social sciences. In the case of the biological and physical sciences, the study of 'biological wholes' and self-regulating systems, though these are 'material' and of physico-chemical content, enables us to understand the connection between 'structures' and 'the subject', because it is the latter which is the organism's sources. In psychology, the problems of the intellectual growth of the child, for example, in terms of the way in which he meets conflicts

at the various modes of representation at his disposal (speech, images, action-schemes), can most adequately be dealt with either by some 'copy' of reality, or by 'structures' as co-ordinations of all instruments of representation. Or, to take an example from the social sciences, the history of intelligence is not taken simply as an 'inventory of elements' (as this review is tending to become) but rather as a bundle of transformations, not to be confused with the transformations of culture or those of symbolic activity, but antedating and giving rise to both of these.

In the chapter on linguistic structuralism the discussion revolves around the work of Chomsky, but there is mention of Sassure and Jakobson. [2] An important general feature of linguistic structuralism is the departure from the diachronic study of isolated linguistic phenomena which prevailed in the nineteenth century, and a turn to the investigation of synchronously functioning, unified language systems. It is instructive here that Piaget makes no mention of the various criticisms that have been made of the concentration on synchrony [3], but his objections to Chomsky's theory that man has a unique language-specific mental structure are illuminating. Chomsky can give no adequate account of how we come by such a structure- how could it be contained in the genes? 'If ... the genes responsible for language must transmit not only the capacity for learning a language, that is, the ability to acquire it "from outside", but a fixed innate scheme that forms language from *within*, the problem becomes so complex as to seem beyond solution'. (*Structuralism*, p89) In fact, a possible solution to this could be sought in terms of Waddington's 'genetic assimilation' theory, which is discussed earlier, and it is a particularly attractive feature of Piaget's book that so much is brought to light by considering the relationship between apparently autonomous disciplines.

The first thing examined in the chapter 'Structuralism and Philosophy' is the criticism made by Lévi-Strauss, in *The Savage Mind*, of Sartre's *Critique de la Raison Dialectique*. Lévi-Strauss is critical of theories, such as Sartre's, which assign a privileged status to history; he does not want to abolish history but considers that the changes brought about by history do not affect the human mind itself. [4] Lévi-Strauss claims that Sartre attaches too much importance to the distinction between history - as a record of actual events which occurred in a recorded historical sequence - and myth, which simply reports that certain events occurred, without special emphasis on chronological sequence. History records structural transformations diachronically over the centuries; ethnography records structural transformations synchronically across the world. The intelligibility of the diachronic transformations is no greater and no less than the intelligibility of the synchronic

2 Considering Lévi-Strauss's indebtedness to Jakobson, it is surprising that more isn't made of the latter's contribution. Indeed, it is even stranger that this indebtedness isn't mentioned by Piaget, since some commentators have argued that Lévi-Strauss's work is undermined by the fact that he relies on a Jakobson style linguistic model that is no longer viable (having been superseded by Chomsky's).

3 cf. particularly Merleau-Ponty's criticism in 'Phenomenology and Language' (in *Signs*) where he questions Sassure's rejection of diachronic structures.

4 cf. *The Savage Mind*, p262: 'History leads to everything, but on condition that it is left behind'.

transformations. Lévi-Strauss implies that the only way to make sense of history is to apply his own method of myth-analysis to it.

Piaget defends Sartre's constructivism, despite Lévi-Strauss's objections to it, but denies that constructivism is peculiarly philosophical and alien to science. He points out that Sartre's depiction of science is almost entirely derived from positivism [5], making the extremely important point that not only is positivism, a movement in *philosophy*, not the same as *science* (of which it gives a systematically distorted picture) but even in their prefaces.

Piaget is also highly critical of what he considers to be Lévi-Strauss's underestimation of dialectical reason (which the latter regards as 'something additional in analytic reason'). For Piaget, in the domains of both abstract and concrete structures, the dialectical attitude is essential to the full working out of structures; dialectic is both complementary to and inseparable from analytic, even formalising, reason. It substitutes 'spirals' for the linear models with which we start.

We next move to the 'structuralism' of Althusser and Godelier - Piaget considers them in his book notwithstanding the fact that the former has sharply criticised what he calls 'structuralist ideology', and the fact that the latter would doubtless also subscribe to this view. Piaget describes Althusser's project as an attempt 'to subject Marx's work, despite the essential role he assigns to historical development in its sociological interpretations, to structural analysis.' (*Structuralism*, p125). The debate as to whether Althusser is a structuralist or not has been a long one. The emptiness of the debate borders on banality: quite simply, in some respects he could be considered a structuralist, in others he couldn't. Structuralism constitutes something of a 'family-concept', and there are central and peripheral cases: Althusser is one of the peripheral cases (Foucault being another). The general type of objection that can be levelled against, say, Lévi-Strauss, whom we may take as a central case, cannot necessarily be levelled against Althusser - indeed, it is quite possible that any objections to Lévi-Strauss's work could be wholly inapplicable to Althusser's (other than coincidentally), and vice-versa. Nevertheless, while there should be no doubt that Althusser's work should be treated on its *own* merits, and not on the merits of structuralism, a reading of Althusser is helped enormously by a reading of Lacan, Foucault, and Bachelard etc.

Having said this it must be pointed out that Piaget's description of what Althusser is doing is at best misleading. Contrary to what one might think from reading Piaget's statement at the beginning of the last paragraph, the notion of *history* plays a very important role indeed in Althusser's work. Taking Piaget's example of 'overdetermination' [6], it is the *historical circumstances* which determine whether an 'over-determined contradiction' be determined in the direction of a historical inhibition (e.g.

5 It is worth noting that this criticism is applicable to all those humanists, including Lukács, who assert that the philosophy of Marxism is specific to the human world and that it defines a *methodology* for the science of history.

6 It is extremely difficult to explain the meaning of this concept - which is originally derived from Freud - without giving lengthy examples. The translator of *For Marx* defines it thus: 'The overdetermination of a contradiction is the reflection in it of its conditions of existence within a complex whole, i.e., of the other contradictions in the complex whole...'

Wilhelmine Germany) or in the direction of a revolutionary rupture (e.g. Russia in 1917) [7]. Furthermore, we can see from this why Althusser's work is a particularly distant 'relative' of the central cases of structuralism. Piaget explicitly states that a distinctive feature of structuralism is that the 'structures are self-sufficient and that, to grasp them, we do not have to make reference to all sorts of extraneous elements' (p4.5) and again that 'the structure is preserved or enriched by the interplay of its transformation laws, which never yield results external to the system nor employ elements that are external to it' (p5). It wouldn't be too difficult to argue that history is just such an 'external' or 'extraneous element'.

Piaget's book ends with a rather savage attack on Foucault - occasioned by Foucault's rather savage attack on Structuralism in *The Order of Things*. Piaget accuses the latter of not offering (i) a constructive critique of the human sciences (Foucault regards man as 'a kind of rupture in the order of things' and the human sciences as 'a mere wrinkle in our knowledge'), (ii) an intelligible account of his notion of *episteme* (according to Foucault, since the nineteenth century, but not before then, the *episteme* has been the human sciences), (iii) an argument that would justify his restrictive conception of structuralism (which, according to Foucault, 'sets itself the task of purifying the old empirical reason by constructing formal languages'). The first two criticisms are at least dealt with, albeit rather obscurely, in Foucault's *Archeology of Knowledge*, a work published after the appearance of Piaget's book, where Foucault goes to great pains to question and criticise the method he has used in previous work - rejecting, in the process, a lot of what he had written earlier. Not much of an introduction is given to Foucault's work, and this is sorely needed, but this criticism is not true of Piaget's book as a whole.

Why read Piaget's book?

I don't think it is very outrageous to say that there has been no major philosophical work produced in this country since 1959 (the date of publication of Strawson's *Individuals* and Hampshire's *Thought and Action*). More than anything else this single fact reflects the state of intellectual paralysis in contemporary British philosophy. There are at least two ways one could go about trying to root out this malaise. Firstly, one could try to examine the methods and subject-matter of contemporary British philosophy from *within* this philosophy; but if there is something *fundamentally* wrong, and I suspect that there is, then working within the currently accepted procedures is not going to get you very far. A second approach might be to look elsewhere, at what other people are doing (successfully), and to compare what you find with the state of affairs here. In France alone the output of philosophical material has been prolific in the last fifteen years, and this includes works which have been received on the continent as a whole, in the USA, and, to a lesser extent, here, with the highest critical acclaims: Foucault's *Histoire de la Folie* (1961), *Les Mots et les Choses* (1966), *L'Archeologie du Savoir* (1969); Sartre's *Critique de la Raison Dialectique* (1960), *Question de la Methode* (1960); Althusser's *Pour Marx* (1966), and (with others) *Lire de Capital* (1968) as well as numerous works by Lévi-Strauss, Canguilhem, Ricoeur, Lecourt etc.

7 Irrespective of whether one sympathises with Althusser's general position, it must be admitted that the notion of 'overdetermination' is a particularly powerful reply to the half-wits who still maintain that Marxism is only 'inverted Hegelianism'.

Now if, not being a Piaget yourself, you have no objection to reading commentaries before reading difficult texts, as most of those discussed by Piaget are, then his book is a very helpful, generally reliable, and (taking the complexity of the subject-matter into account) clear introduction. He deals with much more than contemporary French philosophy of course - Structuralism is a very fertile school of thought which is international and interdisciplinary in its constitution. However, there are direct philosophical implications in almost all the forms structuralism takes.

This brings me to the final point. Piaget's whole approach to the wide range of disciplines he deals with undermines the pre-occupation of some British philosophers with sharply delimiting their subject-matter and methodology. A remark of Piaget's is apposite here: 'Let us start by considering ... two disciplines whose boundaries are becoming increasingly fluid (as can be said of all demarcations that depend more upon a desire for professional autonomy than upon the nature of things)'. (*Structuralism*, p99) At a time when the distinctions between philosophy and sociology, and philosophy and history of ideas are the current concern of some professional philosophers, maybe at least some of us can realise the profound stupidity of this approach, which is not unrelated to the hiatus in philosophical thinking in this country at this time.

Piaget's book is not a cure for, but it is certainly one of the first parts of the treatment of, our current intellectual paralysis.

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HOW TO SUCCEED AS A PHILOSOPHER WITHOUT REALLY TRYING

"For my next 7 terms I was working for Greats in ancient and modern philosophy, and in Greek and Roman history. I do not recall being at all worried by the non-integration of our Roman history with our modern philosophy; or even of our Greek history with our Greek philosophy, which happened to belong to different curricular 'periods'. But I did think that the Academy mattered more than the Peloponnesian War... "In my fifth year I worked for the new school of Modern Greats. Though my time was short and heavily pre-empted by unacademic avocations, I managed, without over-industry, not only to accumulate an adequate stock of Economics and Politics, but also to teach myself a smattering of scholastic philosophy. I did this partly from inquisitiveness and partly as a strategic move against my examiners-to-be, who would get from the other candidates nothing but post-Cartesian pabulum..."

(Gilbert Ryle)

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# WADHAM WARDEN

## WARNS WORLD

### Tony Skillen

(Stuart Hampshire: 'Morality and Pessimism', Leslie Stephen Lecture, Cambridge University Press, 1972. 30p; also in *New York Review of Books*, January 25, 1973)

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Stuart Hampshire's fight for the gentlemanly virtues has been a long one. The stiff upper lip had to be insisted on against primitive tendencies to uninhibited expression and gratification (*Thought and Action*). Reason had to be defended against its outside agitator Passion (*The Freedom of the Individual*). Now it seems there is a new enemy to decency - Utilitarianism.

*Brutilitarianism.* Utilitarianism, Hampshire grants, was once an 'honourable, even glorious school', with great social achievements (presumably Modern Britain, the British Raj etc) to its credit. But now, (in Modern USA from which Hampshire has now returned, we may surmise) 'making rational calculation of consequences the sole foundation of public policies has so far favoured and is still favouring a new callousness in policy, a dullness of sensibility and sometimes moral despair, at least in respect of public affairs.' In other words Utilitarianism is behind the accepted atrocities and casual brutalities that abound 'in our time'. (Hampshire never once descends to a concrete case such as the Indo-China War.)

Hampshire's 'Utilitarianism' appears to amount to a principle of 'the greatest happiness of the smallest number'. His claims hardly apply even to Benthamite philistinism, let alone to any view which aspires to a deeper understanding of the conditions of human happiness and misery. Certainly there is no evidence that the US rulers are concerned with anything much besides the power and profit of the ruling class (see, for example, the *Pentagon Papers*). In any case, with the abstracted concern for 'the age' characteristic of the isolated *philosophe*, Hampshire makes no attempt to examine the *real* foundations of public policy. Nor does he bother to distinguish the kind of 'rational calculation of consequences' that would be made by a self-seeking thug (like Nixon) from the kind that would be made by people with some concern for and understanding of humanity.

*Civilisation and its Discontents.* As always in Hampshire's writings there is a pervasive sense of primordial, barbaric menace, held back by the floodgates of gentlemanly decency. Formerly this decency was seen under the aspect of 'rationality'. Now, perhaps in harmony with the ordered routines over which he now presides in Wadham College after being caught up in the turbulence of angry US campuses, Hampshire's vision has grown more explicitly conservative. Invoking Burke, he seeks his moral foundations in a 'number of moral prohibitions', in 'generally respected barriers against impermissible conduct' (welling up from 'human nature') - a quite capitalist model of Man is at the root of Hampshire's 'pessimism'.

Hampshire gives some examples: barriers against killing, against betrayal of friends. But then it emerges that it is not specific rules that he is concerned with; as long as some prohibitions are accepted: 'one does not expect (who's 'one'?) that every one should recognize the same moral necessities; but rather than every one should recognize some moral necessities...'

At this point in the lecture Hampshire's taboo-formalism grounds itself in two points of polarity characteristic of bourgeois thought - 'the Individual' and 'Society'.

- 1 The individual's moral beliefs, says Hampshire, are constituted by his 'more considered practical choices', and these in turn will be a function of 'the way of life aspired to' by the individual agent or '... some order of priority of interests and activities in the kind of life he praises and admires and that he aspires to have, and in the kind of person that he wants to become' (John Wayne?) Name your personally favoured way of life - you've got morality!
- 2 'Prohibitions in general' (?) are 'artifices that give human lives some distinctive, peculiar, even arbitrary human shape and pattern'. Thus Hampshire bemoans 'the draining of moral significance from ceremonies, rituals, manners, and observances' (High Table? the Coronation? Parliamentary Debate?). Hampshire does not ask what the moral significance of these drained rituals was. Nor does he have anything to tell us about the difference between a symbolism which puts a pompous cloak over oppression and a symbolism which expresses real human mutuality. For Hampshire's conventional formalism, as long as there are some accepted patterns and taboos 'morality itself' rather than 'any particular set of prohibitions is safe'. Name your laws - you've got morality!

*The Mongrel-Categorical Imperative.* Formalists, such as Kant, have often been criticised for not seeing that items on any list of supposedly 'categorical', 'absolute' or 'necessary' 'prohibitions' could conflict with each other (to avoid betraying a friend, for example, you may have to lie to the cops). Hampshire, in attacking Utilitarian would-be cannibals, makes much of their callous contempt for the 'absolutely forbidden'. When he comes to develop his position positively, however, we find there are *degrees* of necessity, absoluteness etc (contingent necessity? relative absoluteness?). Actions 'normally forbidden' have to be performed, 'unconditional necessities' have to be 'overridden'. A formalism of a higher order! One which transcends the limitations of concern with consistency! Must logic be (ritually) sacrificed to preserve the appearance of absolutist piety while its substance is abandoned (to none other than the rule-utilitarians)?

The moral universe of Stuart Hampshire is one of 'prohibitions' and 'barriers', of 'force and authority' of 'family duties and obligations and the administration of justice according to the laws and customs of the given society'. Should these break down, we stand before 'fearful' 'human nature' and a 'relapse into a state of nature'. Yet, as we have seen, Hampshire, like Hobbes, tries to ground his authoritarianism in the aspirations of individuals. In short, we have the well known Anglican-Tory syndrome, complete with frequent appeals to what 'we' think, feel (disgust etc) and expect (decency etc). All this is reasserted, pulpit-dowager fashion against modern barbarity, whether it issues from the makers of public policy or their irreverent opponents.

What Hampshire says is of course related to reality: public policy in the imperialist metropolises is becoming more starkly brutal especially as international setbacks force chickens home to roost. Moreover, with this overt collapse of official decency (e.g. Watergate) the drift toward cynicism among those who are coming to 'see through' official morality and its rituals but who are unable to see beyond it, accelerates. An examination and critique of this situation is needed, but it would not be in the idealist terms Hampshire works with. Nor is there any hope in Hampshire's return-to-the-repressed remedies. The alternative to capitalist barbarism is socialism, not bourgeois moralism.

# MONTESQUIEU & Co.

John Jervis

*POLITICS AND HISTORY: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hegel and Marx* by L. Althusser, New Left Books, 1972

Half of this book consists of an essay on Montesquieu, originally published in 1959, and most of the rest consists of an essay on Rousseau, dating from 1967. There is a final short chapter entitled 'Marx's Relation to Hegel', dating from 1968: this is really a summary of Althusser's own work.

Montesquieu is presented here as the founder of the science of politics. He is awarded this accolade on two principal grounds: (1) The old conception of law as commandment gives way, in his work, to the conception of law as a set of immanent relations of which men may be unaware; (2) He is the first to develop the idea of totality as inner unity:

*In this idea of the totality of the nature and the principle of a government, Montesquieu is in fact proposing a new theoretical category ... the State is a real totality and all the particulars of its legislation, of its institutions and its customs are merely the effect and expression of its inner unity.*

This 'inner unity' is the relation between the 'nature' of a government (who holds power, and how it is exercised) and the 'principle' (the attitudes and dispositions of members of the society):

*The republic will only 'go', to coin a phrase, on virtue, just as some motors will only go on petrol. Without virtue the republic will fall, as will monarchy without honour, despotism without fear.*

And in the last instance, it is the principle that is determinant; the nature is really purely formal. Although the law of this totality and its unity is supreme, this does not imply that the unity need be adequate: if the state is 'impure' then the unity will be contradictory, e.g. Rome after the first period is a republic losing its principle, and such a state will necessarily perish.

In developing this analysis, Althusser is led to make interesting criticisms of the common view that Montesquieu was a proponent of the liberal myth of the judicial separation of powers, rigorously separating judiciary, executive and legislature, and suggesting instead that Montesquieu saw the problem as the political one of relating two 'pouvoirs' - executive and legislature - and three 'puissances' - king, nobles and bourgeoisie - so that the nobles are shored up as a bulwark between king and people, maintaining the system of government that Montesquieu saw as ideal in contemporary society: a limited monarchy.

Althusser's account seems plausible enough. Interesting philosophical issues are raised but not pursued; but since Montesquieu is not read as a philosopher anyway, this hardly seems to matter. With Rousseau, however, the case is different, and Althusser's narrowly political focus introduces distortions - distortions which may, after all, affect political practice itself. Derrida and Lévi-Strauss have recently thrown an interesting light on the relation between politics and philosophy in Rousseau, and some hitherto neglected works, such as the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, have been re-examined for their relevance to contemporary theoret-

ical debate. None of this comes over in Althusser's treatment; his Rousseau is clearly something of a museum piece. We are instead given a series of four 'discrepancies' (décalages) in Rousseau's theory of the social contract, progressing from internal discrepancies in the theory to a hiatus in the relation between theory and the world; as a result of theoretical inadequacy in the former, we find ideological practice in the latter. Althusser makes a mysterious comment about how we could just as well go the other way, starting from the point at which Rousseau's philosophy is articulated onto the judicial ideology of his society:

*By this procedure it could be demonstrated that the classical difference of and opposition between the external and internal criticism of a philosophical theory are mythical.*

But merely to show that one can proceed in either direction, from A to B or from B to A, hardly establishes the non-existence of the distinction between A and B. And what we are actually given here is a dose of rather crude empiricism: Rousseau is reproached for concealing the real existence of groups by a play on words (groups are perceived as individuals in relation to the general will); but what is relevant at this point is not the empirical existence of groups but the nature and possibility of mediations between mirror opposites (individual/general).

The 'discrepancies' that Althusser points to are interesting enough, certainly; but he is in such a hurry to label Rousseau 'ideological' that he misses the opportunity to mount a rewarding discussion of the problem of origins (which is at the root of discrepancy 1: how the community can be a party to the contract that constitutes it), the relation between exchange and equality (discrepancy 2), and the relation between particular and general (discrepancy 3). All these problems are crucial in understanding both French social thought after Rousseau, and the Marxist tradition.

Part of the difficulty may be that neither of Althusser's definitions of philosophy - the early one (philosophy as theory of theoretical practice) and the current one (philosophy as political intervention in the field of theory) - can adequately account for the distinctive nature of philosophical problems. Unfortunately the concluding essay in the book does not help here, since it contains no discussion of the topic. (The interested reader would do better to consult Althusser's reply to John Lewis, part II, in *Marxism Today*, November 1972: although this hardly solves anything). However, the concluding essay is useful in two respects: it gives a concise account of how Althusser sees Hegel's philosophy, and it says a little about the role of the (Freudian) unconscious in Marxist theory.

One wishes that Althusser or one of his acolytes would reply to the serious criticisms that have been made of his theory, instead of wasting time on hacks like John Lewis. As it is, those who have doubts about Althusser will not have them lessened by this volume.

"Perhaps we are not sufficiently proud of that of which we have a right to be proud - the gradual evolution of a form of government that a rational man can accept. But acceptance is not enough; we have to learn to participate more actively in it with zest and humility. We may then stake off myths about our past and illusions about future, and come to realize that the most worthwhile features of political life are immanent in the institutions which we in fact have. Our problem is to convince ourselves of this as well as to convince our children."

(R.S. Peters: *Ethics & Education*)