A paradigm too far?

Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, translated by Joel Anderson, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1995. xxi + 215 pp., £39.95 hb., 0 7456 1160 5.

Axel Honneth, *The Fragmented World of the Social: Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*, edited by Charles W. Wright, State University of New York Press, Albany NY, 1995. xxv + 343 pp., £25.25 hb., £15.95pb., 0 7914 2299 2 hb, 0 7914 2300 pb.

It is a cliché of modernity that where once there was continuity in the relations between generations, crisis now reigns. The experience of the Frankfurt School is no exception. Returning to Germany after the Second World War, it had not long established itself in the Federal Republic when the first such conflict broke out. Adorno may have mourned Habermas's early excommunication by Horkheimer (for grant-threatening radicalism), but his own work soon ceded its influence to Habermas's, as the main indigenous alternative to its increasingly unworldly negativism. By the time he came to relocate his mentors as anti-Enlightenment figures in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1985) – suspending them between Nietzsche and Heidegger – Habermas's writings had *de facto* become definitive of Critical Theory itself.

Axel Honneth's *Struggle for Recognition* (the article is a redundant invention of the translator) enters this terrain of Oedipal tensions, continuity by negation, and hopes for renewal, fraught with expectation. Touted as the harbinger of a new 'post-linguistic' paradigm for Critical Theory – to each generation a paradigm? – it promises Critical Theory a future without having to give up its Habermasian present. Yet for all the homage – 'six years of cooperation' – the threat of secession lingers.

Honneth's previous work, *Critique of Power* (1985; English translation 1991), was notable for its positioning of Foucault's writings within the problematic of the Frankfurt School, in opposition to Adorno's alleged 'repression of the social' and alongside Habermas's work, as an alternative 'rediscovery of the social'. Its critique of Foucault was, at one level, broadly Habermasian: Foucault fails to give normative considerations anything but a legitimating historical function, thereby undermining the political import of his analysis of power. (Or, to put it the other way around: in so far as there *is* a political side to Foucault's work, it is a 'crypto-normativism', unable to redeem its own presuppositions.) However, for all its orthodoxy, Honneth's treatment of Foucault was both more detailed than Habermas's own rather cursory one, and much more sympathetic to his motivation in focusing on power as a constitutive dimension of the social. For power is, crucially, something that Habermas's abstractly universal and overly consensual notion of communicative action categorically excludes, treating it only as an external, distorting influence upon discourse.

Critique of Power sought to reconstruct Foucault's approach by exchanging the purely strategic concept of discipline for a morally invested conception of social struggle. In this way, Honneth hoped to blend Foucault with Habermas so as to extend the sphere of communicative action to include the negative dimension of struggle. Foucault was to help fill the political gap in Critical Theory opened up by Habermas's critique of Marx, in which the baby of social struggle had been thrown out with the bathwater of instrumental reason.

Struggle for Recognition pursues this programme, with one important – indeed, dramatic – change. Resources for the extension, concretization and politicization of the Habermasian problematic are no longer to be sought in Foucault, however radically reconstructed, but rather in the very place in which Habermas found his 'original insight' into communicative reason, nearly thirty years ago in 'Labour and Interaction' (1968): Hegel's Jena *Realphilosophie* (1803–06). Honneth has turned his back on the French, to sup from his national source; but he still wants to go off in his own direction. Thus, whereas Habermas moved from the early Hegel's distinction between the 'communicative' logic of interaction and the 'instrumental' logic of labour, upwards, to a transcendental deduction of the normative presuppositions of communication in general (seeking an ethics in universal

pragmatics), Honneth heads downstream, in search of the normative forms which regulate actual social interactions, in so far as they involve experiences of recognition (seeking a politics in moral experience).

Hegel replaces Foucault in the genealogy of Honneth's project. Yet Foucault inflects Hegel, to the extent that it is the *conflicted* character of recognition in Hegel that Honneth picks up on, rather than the movement towards reconciliation, the justification of which was the motor of Hegel's development. Honneth takes recognition out of the systematic context of Hegel's thought, insulating it from his epistemological concerns, to concentrate on its role in the process of the formation of 'human identity'. He thus places it in direct relation to all those debates currently taking place under the confusingly interchangeable banners of the 'politics of identity' and the 'politics of difference', in a way that parallels Charles Taylor's influential essay of 1992, 'The Politics of Recognition' – the year Honneth's book was published in Germany. Clearly, recognition is an idea whose time has come. But what exactly does Honneth do with it?

First and foremost, he reconstructs its conceptual history in Hegel and Mead. Second, he takes over the early Hegel's identification of struggles for recognition as the dynamic of historical development (although this thesis is not discursively redeemed). Finally, and frustratingly briefly, he attempts a retheorization of three main forms of recognition, taken from Hegel – love, rights and solidarity – mirroring three distinct forms of disrespect, as the basis for what he calls 'a formal conception of ethical life'. In this way, Honneth hopes to negotiate the increasingly vexed problem of liberalism's relationship to substantive conceptions of the good.

In all of this, Honneth remains much closer to Hegel's text than did Habermas, whilst nonetheless claiming a greater concreteness for his approach, with regard to its sensitivity to the moral structure of everyday experiences of social conflict. This is taken to be Mead's contribution: to have 'naturalistically transformed' Hegel's concept of recognition in the direction of an 'empirically grounded' or 'empirically oriented' phenomenology – the equivocation is significant – consistent with the terms of 'postmetaphysical' thinking. Mead's weakness is seen to be his failure to distinguish sufficiently between substantial universalizations of social norms and the expansion of individual freedom made possible by the *formal* universalism of modern law; his failure to distinguish 'solidarity' from 'rights'. As a result, his recognition-based account of individualization concentrates too heavily on the growth of personal autonomy at the expense of a proper consideration of the conditions for self-realization.

In fact, this is a complaint levelled against all the post-Hegelian thinkers in whose writings Honneth detects the 'traces of a tradition' (Marx, Sorel and Sartre): neglect of the universalistic content of the sphere of modern law. It is the potential for the universal recognition of identity-claims that Honneth finds in law which makes it, for him, the privileged medium for their 'expansion'. Law is the key mediating sphere, holding together the network of intersubjective conditions for personal integrity (love) and the community-generating values of solidarity. Social conflict is taken to be the consequence of 'the violation of the implicit rules of mutual recognition', in which particular claims to identity are refused. Conflict progresses through the expansion of recognition-relations as different groups are forced to generalize their claims into legal concepts in order to introduce them into the field of 'societal confrontations'. This process both restructures the claims (by subjecting them to the constraints of mutuality inherent in the legal form of recognition) and transforms the content of the law.

Thus, despite the focus on recognition (as opposed to communication), the presupposition of a harmonious normativity still underlies Honneth's analysis: the harmonious normativity of mutuality within the law. Struggles for recognition are its (secret) agents; the form of 'modern' law, its (invisible) political hand. One begins to wonder whether the Hegelian presumption of reconciliation has been rejected after all, rather than merely displaced from the concrete universality of the Hegelian state onto the 'form' of modern law. This raises fundamental questions about Honneths's use of the concept of recognition; not least, about the validity of his attempt to separate its social dimension (conferring a certain status upon individuals or groups) from epistemological questions about what

it is which is *known* about the other, and how this affects the ontological dimension of recognition-relations as constitutive of the sociality of the self.

For Honneth, the objects of legal recognition are 'identity-*claims*', not social forms of subjectivity as such; presumably, because the latter must be the *results* of recognition (although Honneth shows little sensitivity to the paradoxically performative character of demands for recognition). Consequently, the contrary of recognition appears as 'disrespect' (failure to acknowledge the autonomy of the claimant), rather than 'misrecognition', as one might suppose. Oddly, Honneth gives no account of misrecognition at all. There is no sign of the way in which processes of recognition are mediated by cultural forms. Nor, surprisingly, is there any discussion of *desire* (Hegel's 'return from otherness'): the very thing which, for Hegel, makes recognition a *struggle* in the first place; and which, for his more tragic French psychoanalytical heirs, condemns all forms of subjectivity to a variety of forms of misrecognition. The form of disrespect cited by Honneth as the contrary of love, for example, is 'violation of the body', which is both too narrow and undialectical a category to grasp what is at issue. Psychoanalytic theory is deployed – specifically, Winnicott's version of object-relations theory – but its insights into phantasy and misrecognition are restricted to the personal domain of love relations.

The achievements of this domain are, however, central to Honneth's position. For it is here that the psychic basis for an empirical approximation to the ideal subject of modern law must be forged: that core individual whose further individualization through socialization is the topic of Mead's writings. (Mead's work is, of course, far more of a social *psychology* than a *phenomenology* of any sort, let alone a phenomenology of *spirit*. Social interactionism is notoriously weak at grasping the objectivity of social forms.) This core individual is the basic unit of Honneth's analysis. Normative 'advance' is judged relative to the scope of his or her developing self-relations. Politics appears as the establishment of the social conditions for the development of self-relations. A Kantian individualism thus persists, despite the constitutive role of recognition-relations, protected by the transcendentalism of Honneth's method from the full ontological consequences of recognition itself. And, once again, it is legal relations that are crucial. For it is only by mediating recognition-relations through the form of mutuality specific to law – formal universality – that Honneth is able to shield the identity of social subjects from the ontological consequences of misrecognition.

The problem is that Honneth takes legal recognition at face value. He abstracts from the existence of the state, with its 'class- [and, we might add, gender- and race-] specific implementation' of the law; not to mention the specificity of state forms in different social formations. Yet he insists that we continue to view the law as a universalistic medium of recognition between actual, socially specific subjects. Furthermore, he assumes such mediation to be both possible and desirable. Yet might there not be injuries *of* recognition, as well as of its denial, as Wendy Brown has powerfully argued in her *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton University Press, 1995)? Might the law not equally well be seen as constituting social identities through exclusion, than as expanding recognition-relations through generalization? Indeed, is politics itself not more radically thought in terms of the constitution of the social, rather than the establishment of conditions to meet existing identity-claims? One need not be a communitarian to think so.

This is Honneth's domain of solidarity and it is here that the problematic formalism of his analysis is most apparent. Wanting it both ways (liberal and communitarian), but reluctant to transform the terms of either, he ends up undermining his own starting point. For to reduce ethical life to 'the intersubjective conditions that serve as necessary preconditions for individual self-realization', as Honneth does, is to discard the central insight contained in the concept of recognition: namely, that the basic categories of social ontology are themselves ethical categories, from the start. Ultimately, Honneth can neither hide the ethical presuppositions of his analysis behind its formalism, nor maintain the concretion to which it aspires, in the face of such formalism. Somewhere along the line between Hegel and Habermas, Honneth has lost his way.

That things might have been different can be seen in some of the essays Honneth wrote between 1979 and 1992, collected as *The Fragmented World of the Social*. Divided into three parts – on Frankfurt Critical Theory, French social thought, and recent moral and political philosophy – these essays offer a fascinating glimpse into the background of Honneth's two main works. 'Provisional problem-formulations and theoretical stocktakings', their disjunctive but overlapping concerns weave a complex series of experimental paths back and forth between Habermas and a variety of other thinkers in search of what, in the Introduction, Honneth calls 'an alternative formulation of Habermas's original idea'. The section on French social theory is made up of a set of philosophico-political profiles, on Lévi-Strauss, Merleau-Ponty,

Sartre, Castoriadis and Bourdieu. While interesting in themselves, these do not add much to our understanding of Honneth's trajectory. Elsewhere, however, are three essays which throw a rather different light upon Honneth's thought. All three concern that everyday experience of moral conflict which Honneth now hopes to grasp with the concept of recognition, viewed from the standpoint of a reworking of Marx's concept of labour.

The earliest and longest of them, 'Work and Instrumental Action' (1980), lays down the terms through which 'a critical concept of work' might be developed in opposition to Habermas's Arendtian insistence on separating out the logic of interaction from all forms of instrumentality, as an alternative normative basis for social theory. The next, 'Moral Consciousness and Class Domination' (1981), attempts to uncover the field of ongoing moral–practical conflicts within contemporary capitalism that remains hidden from Habermas's communicative ethic, with its emphasis on publicly articulated, generalizable validity-claims. Finally, in 'Domination and Moral Struggle' (1989), interestingly placed at the front of the book, Honneth provides a short overview of the philosophical heritage of Marxism, in which his own 'paradigm of recognition' appears as the successor to Marx's 'paradigm of labour', by virtue of the continuing connection it offers between social analysis and the theory of emancipation, in a transformed theory of action. Critically reworked, Marx's account of alienated labour becomes a region within a general theory of social relations of 'damaged recognition'.

There is clearly a strategic dimension to this; as there is to the use of the phrase 'damaged recognition', evocative of the 'damaged life' in the subtitle of Adorno's *Minima Moralia*. However, the argumentative content of the first two of these essays is sufficient to raise the question of the disappearance of this line of thought from Honneth's work and to make one wonder whether it could not have been profitably pursued. For it points to a fundamental lacuna within *Struggle for Recognition*: namely, a theoretical account of the relationship between recognition and interests. Honneth notes there, in passing, that 'not all forms of resistance have their roots in injury to moral claims'; that the theory of recognition should not try to 'replace' an interest-based model of conflict, but 'only extend' and 'possibly correct' it. But this throws the systematic logic of Honneth's project into doubt. How many paradigms must we embrace simultaneously to balance the books here? And for how long can we keep on talking about paradigms in this way?

Struggle for Recognition is an ambitious and rewarding book, at the intersection of a number of important debates. And if it is ultimately unable to bear the burden of expectation generated by its supporters, in the long run that may be no bad thing. Sometimes the demands of recognition can be just too great.

Peter Osborne

National socialism: a liberal defence

David Miller, *On Nationality*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995. viii + 210pp., £19.99 hb., 0 19 828047 5.

Since the Second World War, nationalism has generally been treated with suspicion by political philosophers of a socialist or liberal persuasion. National sentiments have been regarded as at best a deluded romantic attachment to outmoded traditions that merely bolstered the status quo; at worst as fuelling racism and jingoism. Either way, nationalism is viewed as a conservative or even reactionary force, which detracts from people's sense of solidarity with humanity at large.

David Miller's book belongs to a growing literature that seeks to revise this negative judgement. He argues that a certain sort of nationalism supplements liberalism in a number of crucial respects, and is likely to be necessary for any viable socialist project in the foreseeable future. 'National Socialism: A Liberal Defence' offers a suitably provocative alternative title for Miller's book, then, hinting at the sort of objections and prejudices he has to overcome in mounting his argument, as well as the ambivalence it is likely to generate in the reader. It is a sign of the achievement and originality of his study that he almost pulls it off.

Miller singles out three key related features of the conception of nationality he seeks to defend: it forms a part of our personal identity; it possesses ethical value; and it provides a basis for claims for national self-determination. Chapters 2–4 discuss each in turn. The

first is both the most contentious and the most significant, providing the necessary starting point for much of what follows. Miller acknowledges that national identities are often invented and depend on a large element of myth, but regards this feature as an advantage. He sees modern nationality as very much a political construct that is largely distinct from ethnic identities and, unlike them, capable of being adapted to encompass a wide variety of groups holding diverse views of the good.

Miller's discussion of the second element is in many respects the most philosophically original part of the book. He distinguishes the difference between ethical universalism and ethical particularism on the one hand, from the contrast between impartiality and partiality in ethical reasoning on the other. The first distinction has to do with the structure of ethical thought. In an analogous manner to Michael Walzer and Bernard Williams, Miller juxtaposes 'thin' universal moral concepts, such as basic human rights, to 'thick' moral concepts, such as treachery, gratitude or courage, which have a more local and contextual application and are subject to a degree of variation. He contends that, whilst the former generate perfect obligations, they are of a relatively minimal kind. The latter, by contrast, provide a source of special obligations vital to any well-developed system of welfare provision or redistributive taxation. The second distinction has to do with how far ethical demands may constrain an individual's pursuit of his or her own projects. Miller believes this tension will be reduced to the degree that our identity has the sort of collective dimension suggested by his account of nationality.

Finally, national self-determination derives from the view that national identities are largely political, at least partly constructed, and produce relatively strong mutual ties. Personal and collective autonomy are in this way closely related. More important, Miller contends that democratic deliberation presupposes that we feel part of a *demos*. The search for collectively binding decisions, in which we accept the majority vote whilst paying some respect to minority opinion, would not make sense unless people felt bound together in certain important ways so as to form a political community. Miller maintains that nationality offers the main, if not the only, source of this collective identification.

Miller attempts to ward off a number of predictable lines of criticism. Against Conservative traditionalists, he argues (in Chapter 5) that nationalism cannot be plausibly interpreted as in some sense natural or God-given and unchangeable. As noted above, he concedes its often mythical and invented character. This view in turn allows him to counter certain liberal characterizations of nationalism as tribal and primitive. Instead, he presents it as the public political culture of a modern democratic state – a position that certainly coincides with the aspirations of the liberal nationalists of nineteenth-century Europe. As such, he believes it proves compatible with a certain degree of ethnic, religious and value pluralism. Consequently, he equally rejects the view of what he calls 'radical' multiculturalists, who argue that separate representation, and a high degree of devolved political power and special rights, are necessary to protect individual and group identities. They regard the privileging of a national identity as oppressive, since it will usually only reflect the interests and self-image of hegemonic groups. Miller responds that, to the extent that minority groups are concerned to engage with, and seek concessions from, both each other and any dominant majority, they must at some level feel that they belong to a single political community and possess a common public culture. Quite legitimately, they will not take that culture as a

Jindrich Marco, Warsaw – centre of the Old Town, March 1947

given, but seek to shape it to reflect, or at least be compatible with, their concerns. The best way to achieve this result, in his opinion, is to avoid as far as possible schemes likely to fragment the public sphere and detract from the search for inclusive, common policies.

Miller argues that a nationalist political culture is necessarily 'thicker' than either a Habermasian 'constitutional patriotism' or a Rawlsian 'overlapping consensus' on political principles. Such principles are too indeterminate, too much in need of interpretation and balancing, to offer sufficient guides to policy. A people has to exist possessing the legitimate authority and desire to develop collective social and political institutions capable of determining who owes what to whom in much more specific ways. Such peoples do not form spontaneously or through voluntary association. Not only is it implausible to characterize states in this manner; such associations would also be highly unstable and open to all sorts of collective action problems as a result of the possibilities for defection and free-riding. Instead, they must in some degree be communities of fate: a belief encouraged by nationality.

Libertarians, of course, will see no need for anything beyond the minimum. Miller says little in reply, except to voice the familiar communitarian doubts about the coherence and sustainability of an atomistic society of self-interested and disencumbered choosers. There are other more socialistic liberals, however, who thicken the universal requirements of justice way beyond the minimum. For them, nation-states are either merely pragmatically useful devices for the effective organization of welfare and democracy, or subordinate units of an emerging international social and political system, such as the European Union. Miller rejects both these suggestions. Even more than market exchanges, extensive schemes for social and other sorts of security, involving more than mere humanitarian aid, depend on forms of reciprocity and trust which exceed the strict dictates of justice. Cosmopolitans make the mistake of taking these attitudes for granted. However, they are only likely to arise in situations where people feel linked by special ties and responsibilities to each other. For analogous reasons to democracy, social justice assumes a national community.

Whilst largely normative in character, Miller's case for nationalism invokes empirical evidence of a historical and socio-psychological nature at a number of crucial points. Although such a mixture is inevitable when tackling this kind of topic, it is often unclear whether he is merely saying that nationality does provide the social and moral cement which the universalist and individualist theories of egalitarian liberals and libertarians trade on; or whether his claim is that only nationality can – and hence should – attempt to do so. Indeed, he has a tendency to imply that if people do not feel obliged to do more than what common human decency demands when dealing with non-compatriots, then we must assume that they cannot and so ought not to do so. This reasoning is clearly false. In fact, all three of these contentions are empirically and substantively disputable.

With regard to the first, Miller dismisses H.G. Wells's remark that 'Our true nationality is mankind' as an empty liberal platitude. Yet people's response to the plight of remote strangers via events such as Live Aid should not be discounted. Nor, Miller's mildly Euro-sceptical remarks notwithstanding, should we dismiss the international idealism that lies behind initiatives such as the European Union or the United Nations. Moreover, if one is looking for cases of reciprocity that transcend mere mutual advantage, such as donating blood, picking up hitchhikers, or giving directions to strangers, then none of these seems to require that the beneficiaries belong to our community, merely that we are community-minded – an attitude fostered through local experiences but capable of being extended beyond them.

The second doubt is correct to the extent that a scheme for international justice that went beyond humanitarian aid would certainly be highly costly for the wealthiest nations in the short term, and as such might well prove unacceptable to their populations and possibly not viable. How feasible and even beneficial a global distribution might be in the long term is a different matter.

So far as the third point is concerned, Miller's view appears to be grounded in some form of pluralism linked to a defence of individual and collective autonomy. Promoting a 'thick' universalism risks becoming paternalistic or imperialistic. Yet once people are allowed to govern themselves, wide variations in social provision and political organization are likely to appear which cannot be legitimately reduced to a single model. Thus, Miller regards the chief weakness of the pragmatic defence of nation-states as local providers of universal services to be that it justifies 'benevolent' imperialism in those cases where the local state proves inadequate – a position most liberals are reluctant to adopt.

Miller traces this reluctance to a tension between liberalism's commitment to individual rights on the one hand, and collective autonomy on the other. I fail to see this difficulty. Most liberals see collective

autonomy and individual rights as intimately connected: both pragmatically and substantively it is hard to conceive of one without the other. Hence, with the exception of extreme cases of hardship or oppression, when, as Miller also concedes, humanitarian considerations call for direct intervention, benevolent imperialism is unwarranted as a means of better meeting individual rights. It is likely to prove self-defeating for much the same reasons that liberals standardly caution against paternalistic interference with individuals: namely that rights are justified by, and largely protected through, the autonomous action of individuals, both personally and collectively. However, extensive aid and the attempt to promote international political institutions which help poorer peoples to resist the economic and military might of the major powers are entirely justified.

Building an international public arena that allows for a variety of national cultures seems no more incoherent and inherently anti-pluralist than a national political community that encompasses a number of ethnic, religious and other groups. Indeed, the reasons for subsuming national politics within an international political system exactly parallel those that motivate Miller's caveats about radical multiculturalism – namely, that it leads to more inclusive decisions. There are practical problems, of course, but these are potentially superable. Miller may well be right to doubt (in Chapter 6) whether the forces of globalization are as all-pervasive as some of their enthusiasts claim, such that the nation-state is about to wither away. However, they have gone sufficiently far to make a wide degree of international decision-making in economic, social and defence matters increasingly desirable. Since intergovernmental decision-making largely entrenches the interests of the hegemonic powers, the only opportunity for poorer nations to be heard is through political fora that go beyond the nation-state so as to modify national self-interest. I doubt that socialism in any country could be achieved through autarchy or isolationism, but for poor nations it will only come through an international politics.

Miller correctly insists that political and economic co-operation require a higher degree of social capital and shared culture than a 'thin' universalism can offer. But he has not shown that a 'thick' universalism is either undesirable or unattainable if the appropriate international institutions exist to promote it. That would still allow for a 'thin' national and regional politics, but nationalism would have given way to internationalism as the source of our common ideals and public culture.

Richard Bellamy

Last philosophy

Peter Dews, *The Limits of Disenchantment: Essays on Contemporary European Philosophy*, Verso, London and New York, 1995. xi + 300pp., £39.95 hb., £13.95 pb., 1 85984 927 X hb., 1 85984 022 1 pb.

The diverse essays that make up this book are drawn together mainly by a negative claim: that currently popular 'deflationary' conceptions of philosophical inquiry – most notably Rorty's neo-pragmatism, the post-structuralisms of Derrida and Foucault, and Habermasian critical theory – are either untenable or crippling. But a positive and far-reaching thesis emerges from the negative one. For the predicament which gives rise to deflationary philosophy, Dews argues, calls for 'metaphysical' inquiry of a kind originally practised by the non-Hegelian German Idealists and continued today primarily in the hermeneutic and psychoanalytical traditions.

The predicament in question concerns the fate of meaning in a disenchanted world. Before disenchantment, the human world was believed to be continuous and potentially in harmony with the cosmic order. On this conception, to know oneself, to understand one's own meaning and purpose, is to find one's place in the objective order of being. Such self-knowledge could be achieved, at least in part, by philosophical contemplation. But once the objective order of being appears void of intrinsic significance, the objective ground of the self's existential orientation vanishes. How, then, can the self be reassured that it inhabits a realm of meaning at all? Is it the business of *philosophy* to answer this question?

It is widely believed that if there is a realm of meaning, it exists only in a conditioned or context-relative sense. On this contextualist view, significance is confined to specific cultural schemata and contingently occurring forms of life. But while acknowledging *local* meaning-occurrences, contextualism is committed to the meaninglessness of their

global ontological backdrop. Dews is critical of this position, as exemplified in the work of Rorty and Foucault, on the following counts: first, because it dogmatically *assumes* the truth of global meaninglessness; second, because it fails to account even for local meaning; and third, because it cannot make sense of its own reflective practice. But Dews's main concern is that the 'naturalization' of global meaninglessness – its hypostatization into an unchallengeable, eternal truth – keeps the very *question* of existential reassurance off the philosophical agenda. Rorty's avowed historicism is in bad faith, Dews argues, because it does not take seriously the possibility that studying the philosophical tradition might really *illuminate* our basic existential and cognitive predicament. Dews suggests that, rather than registering an authentic historical awareness, the contextualist short-circuiting of the ontologically orienting function of philosophical reflection is symptomatic of a profoundly impoverished approach to the history of philosophy.

For all its differences with contextualism, deconstruction likewise suffers from a self-imploding refusal of ontological thought and a merely gestural respect for philosophy's past. In a devastating critique of the main essays of *Margins of Philosophy*, Dews shows how Derrida's loosely targeted suspicion of ontology leads him to wayward interpretations of Austin's theory of speech-acts, the hermeneutic conception of metaphor, and Heidegger's notion of proximity. More important, by equating the self-present with the proximate, and the transparent with the pre-reflexive, Derrida – at least in his deconstructive phase – rules out the possibility of a world whose structure 'can be neither definitively shattered nor entirely objectified'. If, as hermeneutics suggests, we can make sense of such a world, deconstruction's suspicion of ontology suddenly seems unmotivated. Furthermore, Dews informs us, this is a conclusion reached two centuries ago by the German Idealists. In a critical rejoinder to Rodolphe Gasché's work on Derrida, Dews argues that the fundamental problematic which drives deconstruction, even the most distinctive Derridean strategies for tackling it, are vividly anticipated by Jacobi, Fichte, and especially Schelling. Since Schelling's Idealism both foreshadows deconstruction and points beyond it, Dews notes, the epochal claims made on behalf of deconstructive practice – that it heralds the transition to a 'postmodernity' of the unprecedented and the unthought – are less than compelling.

Schelling is also commended as a corrective to Habermas's thought. Like Kant, Habermas responds to the predicament of disenchantment on the one hand by ceding to science a norm-free conception of nature, and on the other by insisting upon the unconditional validity of just principles of human interaction. Yet Habermas's project is unlike Kant's in at least two respects. First, Habermas feels compelled to account for our heightened sense of the moral inappropriateness of an objectifying, instrumental attitude to the non-human world. Second, he strives to locate the source of moral meaning in structures of linguistic intersubjectivity, rather than the self-reflecting subject. As Dews argues, however, these two tasks are difficult to reconcile. Indeed, it may even be that the intersubjectivist orientation of Habermas's theory makes it *less* capable of dealing with the normativity of nature than the 'subject-centred' practice of philosophy begun by Kant. For it was just by reflecting upon the structure of subject-relatedness that the German Idealists evolved a non-objectified conception of nature. And it is just such a conception that seems to be needed now for seeing our relation to nature aright.

But Habermas's 'paradigm shift' to intersubjectivity risks losing more than the possibility of imagining a rational but non-instrumental orientation to nature: it rules out the prospect of *any* context-transcending disclosure of significance. The best-known manifestation of this exclusion is Habermas's distinction between the moral and the ethical. For Habermas, the moral point of view has its roots in formal, universal structures of language-use, structures supposed to hold independently of the semantic resources of any particular language. The substantive ethical beliefs that compose a self-identity, on the other hand, are relative to specific languages and traditions. On this model, therefore, the 'transcendent' moment of morality coincides with its *abstraction* from local disclosures of significance, not from an *expansion* of them. However, in line with contemporary hermeneutic and communitarian thinkers, Dews suggests that only an expanded, substantive conception of morality – rather than a contracted, formal one – does justice to the fund of solidarity required for social life. In his three essays on psychoanalysis, Dews considers how the capacity for solidarity with others has its roots in the psychosexual history of the subject. For Dews, the great virtue of psychoanalytic theory, especially its Lacanian variant, arises from an ambition it shares with Schellingian metaphysics: to lay out the structures of subjectivity *as such*. Lacan is applauded for bucking the deflationist and contextualist trend in contemporary

thought by taking seriously – perhaps even discovering? – the context-transcendent truth of what it is to be a subject.

This last point raises the issue of the status of 'metaphysical' thinking itself. Metaphysics is commonly defined as the *a priori* science of being in general, as the set of necessary, apodeictic and eternal truths which provides the foundations for all knowledge. Metaphysics is here conceived as 'first philosophy'. By contrast, the kind of philosophy practised by Schelling and the German Idealists – and by contemporary 'revisionist' metaphysicians like Dieter Henrich, Michael Theunissen and Herbert Schnädelbach – can be described as 'last philosophy'. Metaphysics as last philosophy does not seek out the common objective ground of given knowledge practices. Rather it looks beyond them, to realms of significance that resist objectification and disenchantment. Not all the formulations Dews invokes for this conception of metaphysics are consistent: for Schnädelbach, metaphysical questions 'are primarily concerned with *significance* rather than *truth*', whereas for Henrich, metaphysical interpretations of life certainly do aspire to truth, albeit in a revisionary sense of 'integrating conflicting tendencies'. Nor is it clear how metaphysical interpretations are validated; nor whether the different manifestations of 'last philosophy' are validated in the same way. How are we to decide *between* conflicting general interpretations? If metaphysical questions are concerned with truth, can they be given equally good but incompatible answers? Perhaps such issues arise most pressingly in relation to psychoanalysis. Dews concludes by suggesting that it has been left to psychoanalysis to take up the metaphysical task of asking 'who we are, and what we ultimately desire'. But the condition ascribed to us is surely parochial: psychoanalysis illuminates the truth of a 'we' which has already in part been shaped by it. If so, the problem arises of reconciling acknowledgements of cultural contingency with the comprehensive, context-transcending ambition of metaphysical inquiry. Dews may leave epistemological questions concerning the tension between particularity and universality unanswered. But he impresses on the reader undoubtedly more important insights concerning the ontological significance of this tension.

Nick Smith

Coming of age

Norberto Bobbio, *The Age of Rights*, translated by Allan Cameron, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1996. xix + 168pp., £45.00 hb., £12.95 pb., 0 7456 13845 hb., 0 7456 15953 pb.

This is a collection of essays, most of them originally given as lectures, organized into three parts for publication. The first deals generally with human rights, the second with the significance of the French Revolution, and the third contains two pieces on capital punishment. The nature of the material makes for overlap – considerable in the case of the two essays on the French Revolution – and it is not always easy to retain a sense of an overall purpose to the volume. Nevertheless, there are recognizable recurrent themes. They can be summarized in the following way.

The currency of human rights is modern and, rather than reflecting some absolute moral principle of shared humanity, should be understood as historically specific and underwritten by legal, political guarantees. The French Revolution is a decisive historical moment in this context and should be seen as representing a broader shift in the way in which the relationship between individual and state is understood. The shift is from an organic model, in which the exercise of power takes priority over the assertion of individual freedom, to an individualist one in which political association is founded upon the freely given consent of individual citizens. The change is progressive and, to that extent, the coming of our age of rights is an ascent into political maturity. Rights are indissolubly linked with democracy and peace as the mutual guarantors of further progress. More and different kinds of rights are being claimed at the same time as the basic rights are accorded to more people and protected within an ever more explicit international order. There is every reason to be optimistic about the future of humanity. Yet that does not absolve the philosopher, or anyone else, from the responsibility of playing their part in ensuring that what has been gained is not lost, and that what can still be won is indeed secured.

All of this is urged with great assurance, intelligence, clarity of vision, and lucidity of argument. It will have some appeal to both philosophers interested in the language of rights, and those who wish to see the more political case for rights spelled out. It would

also be hard to fault the generous and compassionate humanist outlook animating the writing. Nevertheless, the essays operate at a certain level of generality, perhaps demanded by the circumstances of their original delivery, which makes for a lack of precision and unambiguous commitment at crucial points. The two pieces on the death penalty are models of judicious, even-handed summary. Any student of the topic would find in them an invaluable guide to the main arguments for both the abolition and the retention of capital punishment. Yet the arguments Bobbio marshals for his own strongly expressed view that abolition alone betokens a humane future are gestural and schematic.

Again, there are good reasons to endorse the view that the shift from an organic to an individualist construal of the polity is to be commended. But that is only half the story, and perhaps not even that much. Many would bemoan the loss of community, identity and belonging which modern individualism has entailed, without being committed to a politically reactionary organicism. Equally, there are many sympathetic to the Aristotelian ideal of a polity which realizes the common good who would not wish to deny the ideals of universal equality and personal liberty. There are, perhaps most pertinently, those who commend the political achievements of modernity, but who worry about the pervasive and promiscuous use of 'rights'. *Pace* Bobbio, the ever more extensive employment of rights to express, defend and promote particular interests is seen as a devaluation of their overall worth, and as contributing to a contestational, agonistic form of politics.

One way of moderating the use to which rights are put is to be clearer about their moral foundations. Bobbio's objections to the 'illusion' of an 'absolute principle' underwriting the various human rights are familiar. However, to an Anglo-Saxon philosophical audience at least, they would not be seen as decisive. As his 'Preface to the English edition' rightly observes, 'the distinction between a "moral" and a "legal" right' is an unfamiliar one to the French, Italians and Germans. It is also true that there is all the difference between claiming that something should be a positive right, and asserting one's legally recognized right. Nevertheless, it does not follow from this that 'rights' can only be understood as a recent historical innovation without any objective moral basis in some shared humanity. It is hard to reconcile Bobbio's conviction that the death penalty is deeply abhorrent with a refusal to concede that a right to life does rest on firm, ahistorical grounds. Bobbio writes eloquently on the importance of what Kant called 'prophetic history', the history that should and can be made, rather than the speculative history that might occur. His optimism about our future is infectious and engaging. Yet pessimism – or at least caution – of the intellect is also to be commended. We do now live in an age of rights and there is much to commend in our age. Much of it may be traced to the achievements which have found expression in the charters and declarations of rights. But it does not follow that we have come of age only through securing our rights, or that it is by means of rights that we will grow further.

David Archard

Revolt into style

Peter Starr, *Logics of Failed Revolt: French Theory After May '68*, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 1995. x + 268pp., £30.00 hb., £10.95 pb., 0 8047 2445 8 hb., 0 8047 2446 6 pb.

In November–December 1995 much of France was brought to a standstill by strikes as public-sector workers attempted to defend their pension and social-security rights in the face of a government policy of austerity. There was unrest in the universities. It rapidly became apparent that this was not a repetition of the events of May 1968. For the public-sector workers, it was a matter of protecting fragile rights (or privileges, as some in the private sector complained); for the students, discontent with their material conditions and anxieties about their future prospects were the dominant emotions. Realism, rather than the imagination, was in the streets, if not in power. The utopianism of May now seems to belong to a very distant past, but it continues to fascinate. More specifically, it is the failure of the revolt that fascinates.

Many explanations for the collapse of the May movement have been advanced: recuperation by the state, betrayal by the Communist Party, lack of true revolutionary discipline... Many conclude that the revolutionary model, or even political radicalism, has been exhausted. When, with typical rhetorical self-indulgence, 'new philosopher' Bernard-Henri Lévy described himself as the bastard child of an unholy union between fascism and Stalinism, he relied on a model that had already become a commonplace. Kristeva, for one, has argued that traditional Marxism is capitalism's specular double. The choice between socialism and barbarism has, it would appear, been invalidated.

Starr's goal is to trace the logics of failed revolt, or the commonplace explanations for the failure of revolutionary action. He attempts to bridge the gap between studies of specific theorists and the work of historians and sociologists. The underlying socio-historical model is not unfamiliar, and Starr relies heavily – and quite openly – on the work of Debray, Touraine, Morin, Ory and Sirinelli in his account of the gradual integration of the would-be revolutionary intellectual into state apparatuses.

The corpus of texts and theorists is even more familiar: Lacan, Barthes, Kristeva, Derrida, Cixous and *L'Ange*, an exercise in quasi-mystical nostalgia by Jambet and Lardreau (1976), former Maoists turned new philosophers. *L'Ange* is certainly a good, if minor, example of the Lacanian-inspired mythologies of the post-May years, and a reminder of how a murderous Cultural Revolution in China could be transformed by the imagination into a festival of the oppressed. Whether it is representative of anything more than its authors' involvement with the micropolitics of a trend within French Maoism is open to dispute (the *Gauche prolétarienne* and 'French Maoism' were not synonymous). And the supposedly representative nature of Starr's corpus is perhaps the most problematic aspect of a study that has both the virtues and the vices of so many essays in post-structuralism. It displays, that is, the virtues of erudition, close reading and sophistication, but is vitiated by its reliance on a pantheon of authors constructed by Anglo-American scholarship rather than French politics.

The concentration on a literary-philosophical corpus poses problems that are not really addressed. As Starr notes, it would have been possible to use a different corpus; that he does not do so is perhaps indicative of the hold a certain body of literary and philosophical theory continue to have on the Anglo-American imagination. Barthes was no enthusiast for May '68. Derrida's political radicalism is of very recent vintage, and usually takes the honourable form of a principled defence of human rights (as well as the more dubious form of apologias for Heidegger and De Man). Althusser is an unlikely candidate for inclusion in this corpus, and the chapter Starr devotes to him sits uneasily with the rest of the book. To discuss Althusser's stress on the need for theoretical rectitude solely in terms of Lacan's vatic pronouncements on the psychotic nature of any attempt at rigour may be legitimate in purely Lacanian terms. But that legitimacy needs to be established by more than the statement that Lacan's work *must* be read as setting the stage for a rethinking of the political in non-binary terms. A sceptical 'why?' is surely in order, as is the suggestion that Althusser's undoubted attempts at rigour probably owe more to Canguilhem's 'philosophy of concepts' than to Lacan.

Starr is at his best when he moves away from the overt concerns of his selected theorists and argues that the dominant logic of the post-May period has been one of 'neither/nor/but'. It is no longer a question of 'socialism or barbarism', but of 'neither Stalinism nor totalitarianism', and of the search for a third way or term. The third way proves in many cases to be what Foucault called 'a relentless theorization of writing', and an aestheticization of the political – a celebration of the avant-gardes that exist, marginally but not unhappily, on the fringes of modern society. Writing becomes a vehicle for a compensatory utopianism: the revolution will be poetic, or it shall not be. Starr traces instances of the logic of 'neither/nor/but' in the work of Barthes, Kristeva, Cixous and others, and notes in passing that this tripartite structure originates in Sartre's work of the early Cold War period. Could it be that Sartre is a better guide to the logics of failed revolt than Lacan?

One of the fears of the post-May period, and of the new philosophers in particular, was that revolution would trigger a process of repetition, producing a new authoritarianism, or, to adopt the terminology of Lacan's mythologies, the remergence of the Master. In perhaps the most fascinating sections of his study, Starr demonstrates that a process of repetition is indeed at work in an unexpected quarter. Cixous's celebration of the explosive hysteric whose subversive activity spreads through contagion is, it emerges, strongly reminiscent of the polemical imagery of nineteenth-century anarchism, as is *L'Ange*'s mobilization of an absolutist image of power. Not for the first time, revolt has been turned into style.

David Macey

Two steps forward

Red–Green Study Group, *What on Earth is to be Done?*, Red–Green Study Group, Manchester, 1995. x + 69 pp., £3.50 pb., 0 9525784 0 9.

This pamphlet, which has much of the character of a manifesto, although it disclaims that status, is the result of a dialogue among a group of reds and greens. The personal notes on the participants indicate that some come from a background of activity in distinctly red organizations, others in distinctly green ones. Whether the dialogue was a lively one I don't know, but its product is a wide area of agreement and a surprisingly small residual area of dispute. But perhaps it is not so surprising after all; these are greens who recognize that the enemy is capitalism, not science or technology, and reds who recognize that the developed countries must accept a lower level of material consumption in the interests of worldwide justice and a sustainable economy. Even the division between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism in ethics, which is mentioned as a persistent disagreement to be resolved by a bit of both, is not a clear red/green divide. There are greens who justify environmental concern in terms of the human future, and there are reds (I am one) who accept the existence of non-anthropocentric values.

The Red–Green Study Group is agreed in its analysis of the problem: the subordination of human and environmental needs to the market; the power of multinational capital and the nation-state; the consequent impoverishment of the southern hemisphere; the exploitation of workers, and the oppression of women and minorities; the irresponsible use of resources and the pollution and destructive use of the earth. There is both class politics and movement politics here, as well as environmental politics.

It is also agreed that the solution must include a thoroughgoing democratization of both the state and the economy; a shift of power away from the nation-state towards local communities on the one hand and global internationalism on the other; and a shift of emphasis from the formal economy, through reduction of working hours, towards the informal sector and the household economy.

Although the issue of whether it is desirable to set up a Green Socialist Party is one that still divides the Study Group, the text inevitably gives rise to the idea of doing so, and so to the question of whether we should join such a party if and when it emerges. Since the diagnosis and prescriptions outlined above can hardly be faulted, the answer 'Yes' suggests itself. But here I come to some reservations about the document. A party needs a strategy for realizing its aims, and a strategy needs to be guided by a theory about what is possible – what constraints exist on the reproduction and transformation of existing societies. The strength of classical Marxism is that it has such a theory, and one that is both falsifiable and unfalsified.

This text lacks any such theory. It speaks of three kinds of 'political strategy': (1) anti-capitalist and anti-productivist struggles linking producers, consumers and communities at local, regional, national and global levels; (2) the thoroughgoing expansion of the scope and depth of democracy in both state and civil society; (3) the continued creation and extension of non-capitalist economic, social and cultural forms.

The first of these is a short-term strategy – for working under capitalist conditions, not for transforming them. The second is not a strategy at all, but an aim that presupposes the conquest of the capitalist state. The third could occur in a small way as the former and in a big way as the latter, but cannot simply start small and grow big; it requires a revolutionary break in the middle. But this seems to be ruled out:

> Traditional political struggle has focused on seizing the power of the state. However, no past attempts, either through revolution or the ballot box, have brought about the hoped for liberation. Our starting point is that this traditional approach has failed; it was wrong in theory and ineffective in practice. By contrast, our emphasis is on the transformation of society from the bottom up. (p. 52)

'Transforming society from the bottom up' could mean revolution, but in this context it clearly doesn't. So it can only mean the accumulation of personal and volun-

tary group action – something which has been tried even more than seizing the state, with even less success. The dilution of the term 'politics' to include cultivating our allotments and democratically organizing our cycling clubs, or at best going on strike, obscures the inability of these excellent activities to transform society, or even to diminish the power of the multinationals and the nation-state to despoil and spoil the earth. Admittedly this activity from below that remains from below is to be supplemented by 'enabling from above, through the democratization of state and other institutions'. But unless this means revolution, it can only mean appealing to well-disposed reformist governments to facilitate these marginal activities.

Doubtless the capture of the state can only be projected at the far end of a long march through other kinds of struggle; yet we can't wish the state away. If green socialists are to find a real alternative to official green or social-democratic electoralism, it is necessary to open a new dialogue: between red–greens and socialists who are committed to revolution from below – the Trotskyist and council communist traditions, for instance – socialists who are quite aware of the fact that previous seizures of state power have not led to liberation, and who have theories as to why that is so. I hope that such a dialogue can be conducted in as comradely a spirit as the dialogue that gave rise to this project seems to have been.

The pamphlet is clearly written, without wasted words or rhetorical flourishes, and deserves to be widely read by greens and socialists with a view to such broadening of the dialogue.

Andrew Collier

Genealogy and generosity

John Llewelyn, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Genealogy of Ethics*, Routledge, London and New York, 1995. xii + 243 pp., £37.50 hb., £12.99 pb., 0 415 10729 6 hb., 0 415 10730 X pb.

Llewelyn presents his latest book as an incitement to the *prospective* reader of Levinas, and thus as a sort of 'introduction' for the uninitiated; but it is not an easy read. It presupposes a more than passing acquaintance with Heidegger, for example, and a tolerance for a demanding style of philosophizing that involves much etymology and erudite word play. I suspect that the effort required will be most rewarded in the case of those already familiar with Levinas's work.

The intended sense of the word 'genealogy' in the title is plural. In one sense the genealogy of ethics refers to 'the order in which [Levinas's] thinking develops historically from one publication to another', and the first of the three parts of the book traces, more or less chronologically, the evolution of Levinas's early work, notably *On Evasion* (1935), *Existence and Existents* (1947), and *Time and the Other* (1947). Llewelyn affords these little-known texts an unusual importance because he believes that 'a grasp of what Levinas is arguing in the *magna opera* is facilitated by a grasp of the framework outlined in the early *opuscula*.' In the second part, which mostly deals with *Totality and Infinity* (1961), and the third, which concentrates, somewhat obliquely, on *Otherwise than Being* (1974), Llewelyn makes good this claim.

'It is as though', he says, 'a plot unfolds from the earliest of Levinas's writings to the most recent.' This plot is sometimes explicit, as in the announcing of the subject-matter of *Time and the Other* in the earlier *Existence and Existents*. More interestingly, however, Llewelyn extrapolates a less obvious and more contentious genealogy, for example by weaving connections between the subject's relation to being in *On Evasion*, the phenomenological descriptions of fatigue and lassitude and the idea of the 'there is' in *Existence and Existents*, and enjoyment and need in *Totality and Infinity*. In this way he accomplishes a careful and often illuminating overview of the Levinasian oeuvre, read both forwards *and* backwards.

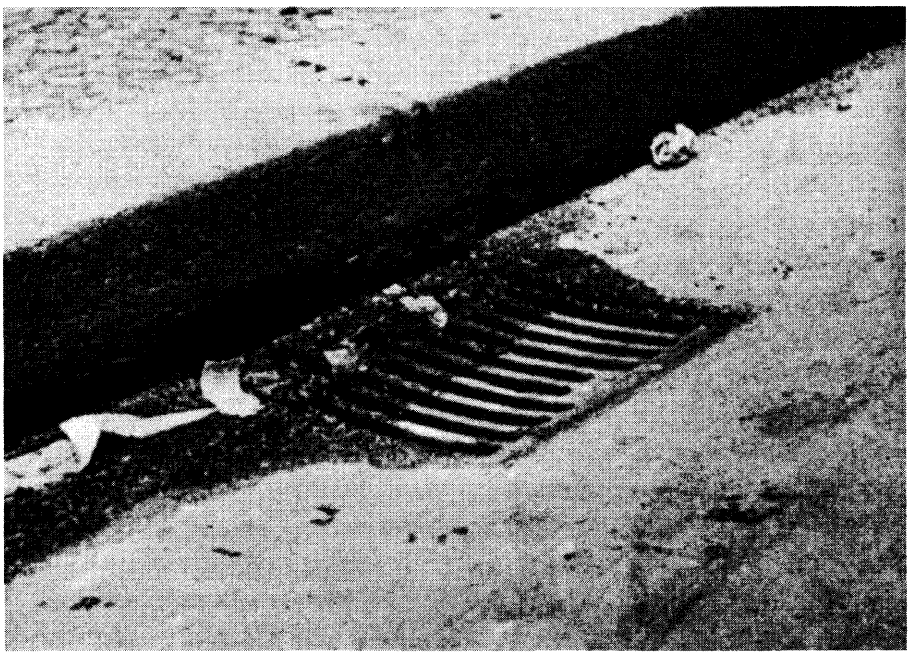
Throughout his career Levinas drew upon a vocabulary deriving, as Llewelyn puts it, from gender, sexuality and family relationships. In Llewelyn's book the word 'genealogy' is then 'employed most determinately of the stage of Levinas's teaching for the exposition of which he invokes the nomenclature of the family tree'. With regard to the overt sexual politics of Levinas's texts, these familial and gendered themes appear to be embarrassingly reactionary, and, perhaps for this reason, have often not been given the attention they deserve. Llewelyn, in contrast, makes these themes central, and in simultaneously sidestepping the accusations of feminist critiques his interpretation is hugely generous. At bottom, the arguments rely on distancing the terms ('the feminine', 'paternity', and so on) from any residual biological reference, thus making all discussions marked with the trace of gender curiously gender-neutral. As a creative philosophical rewriting of Levinas, this is singular and provocative. It does not, however, rebut any but the weakest of feminist analyses, and the question remains as to why an apologia is still deemed more appropriate

than thoroughgoing critique. The absence, in both text and bibliography, of the critical voice of Luce Irigaray is nothing short of wilful neglect.

The reason for this lies perhaps in the fact that Llewelyn's rewriting of this particular genealogy of the family tree is connected to the most general sense of genealogy at work in the book: that which refers to the way in which Levinas's philosophy is related to the dominant history of philosophical thinking. Although 'maternity' explicitly appears as a theme only in Levinas's later work (notably *Otherwise than Being*), Llewelyn constructs it as the dominant trope, so that in this revised family genealogy the 'phallogocentric idea of the father' is laid to rest and the figure of the mother, 'of substitution or bearing *par excellence*', takes centre-stage. Levinas's genealogy of ethics may then be seen as an alternative 'genealogy of man', which resists philosophy's virile will to power with 'the Other's indeclinable request': an alternative in which the model of responsibility and response is maternity.

It can still be objected that the tropes of 'the feminine' and 'maternity' in a philosophical text cannot be so easily divorced from what these words mean, and how they operate, in the world of men and women. How, for example, does one think abortion when pre-natal maternity symbolizes, in whatever way, the apogee of ethical responsibility? These misgivings, however, do not preclude an appreciation of the book. Llewelyn is more interested in creative reconstruction than in straight commentary or critique, and, especially when the various sense of the word 'genealogy' are conjugated, he effects a truly impressive and distinctively original reading of Levinas.

Stella Sandford



Reapproaching Rorty

Norman Geras, *Solidarity in the Conversation of Humankind: The Ungroundable Liberalism of Richard Rorty*, Verso, London and New York, 1995. 151 pp., £34.95 hb., £9.95 pb., 0 86091 453 4 hb., 0 86091 659 6 pb.

David L. Hall, *Richard Rorty: Prophet and Poet of the New Pragmatism*, SUNY Press, Albany NY, 1994. xii + 290 pp., $49.50 hb., $16.95 pb., 0 7914 1771 9 hb., 0 7914 1772 7 pb.

How do you argue with a neo-pragmatist, when central to his neo-pragmatism is the eschewing of all 'representationalist' recourse to notions of argumentative rightness? These two studies treat this question very differently, provide quite different answers, and for quite different reasons represent the richest resources among the book-length treatments of Rorty's work.

Geras has written the best book on Rorty to date. Rather than a straightforward appraisal or critique, it is a pointed and polemical four-part essay about the politics of philosophical anti-foundationalism and anti-universalism, in which Rorty figures as a kind of imaginary conversational partner. The result is a strong challenge indeed: Geras's compelling critique of Rorty's central suppositions on human nature, language, truth and liberal politics is always thoughtful, and often devastating.

Can philosophers evoke ideals of human solidarity while rejecting all talk of universal ethical norms, or truth, or human nature? Geras thinks not, and wants to defend such talk against Rorty's rejection (particularly in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*) of the very idea of universalism. He also wants to show how Rorty's anti-realism, his ironizing of truth, issues in a sort of intellectual defencelessness in the face of political injustice. Indeed, argues Geras, if there is no truth – as separable from the contingencies of social practice or language games – then there *is* no injustice. Rorty, liberal as much as

ironist, is thus torn between good old-fashioned humanistic sentiments and a neo-pragmatist epistemology with which such sentiments are in constant, nagging tension.

In denying the possibility of knowing either the Way The World Is, or what it is that human beings may have in common, Rorty's statements about the goal of solidarity become slippery and self-contradictory. In fact, says Geras, it is only by retracting what he has actively propounded that Rorty can escape a squeeze on his affinities. Underpinning Rorty's 'liberal ironism' is a shifting hybrid of exactly the ideas of a common humanity he spends most of his time trying to dispose of. He smuggles back what he needs from the rubble of his own attempted demolition of Enlightenment political principles. And in the process his story gets tangled: he simply can't have the foundationless liberalism he wants.

Whether pointing out that five conflicting statements by Rorty on human nature are culled from the same page of the same book, or citing personal account after personal account to demonstrate, contra Rorty's ethical parochialism, that it was universalistic and humanistic concerns which motivated those who sheltered Jews fleeing the Holocaust, Geras's study is motored by a familiar but well-articulated sense of leftist moral unease about Rorty: can he *really* mean what he says? As it happens, it seems he often doesn't.

Geras is especially troubled by Rorty's view that personhood, and thus morality, can extend only as far as those deemed to be 'one of us' in some contingent, ethnocentric sense – rightly thinking that this spells doom for most meaningful rhetoric of human emancipation. Not that Rorty is a tyrant. Rather, he emerges from the book as a well-meaning, fuzzy liberal whose ideas (on the sentence-bound nature of truth, on the meaning of human rights, or on the ingredients of political solidarity) are deeply riven by conflicting intellectual commitments. Rorty, one suspects, would readily admit as much. Given his own view that knowledge is a matter of acquiring habits of action for coping with reality, rather than getting reality *right* in any way, such incongruities matter less than the overall persuasiveness of his case. Geras would still need a deal of persuading.

Hall's book, meanwhile, offers a more synoptic, if unsystematic, approach to the whole of Rorty's *oeuvre*. Here is a sort of Rortyan reading of Rorty: a creative, non-rigorous *recontextualization* of the main elements of his thinking among alternative metaphors and narratives, seeking not to refute or to affirm, but rather to illuminate.

Hall hops back and forth, as he admits, between 'exuberant praise and testy complaint', settling on various themes in Rorty's thought: his nominalist historicism, his use of irony, his situation in the American pragmatist tradition, or his 'methodophobic' fear of conventional philosophical habits of argument. Mostly this strategy works pretty well. Hall's theme-by-theme approach, and his canny juxtapositions (with, for example, Marx, Heidegger, or classical Chinese thought) provide useful background to Rorty's work, and highlight important, novel strengths and inconsistencies.

Though it is not his declared aim, Hall probably provides the best general introduction to Rorty's work currently available: Rorty's main ideas are neatly set in helpful context. There are extensive footnotes, and an amusing, if glib, epitextual 'Guide For Those Still Perplexed'. Hall's style can be cramped by his painstaking avoidance of anything resembling a deductive argument (neither pro- nor anti-Rorty does the 'boot' ever really get 'put in'), but then neither on Rorty's terms nor his own is this lack of dialectic much cause for concern. And the book works, on those same terms, as a thought-provoking counter-narrative to Rorty's version of philosophical events – occasionally indulgent, but always worth reading for anyone wanting a handle on the Rortyan enterprise.

Gideon Calder

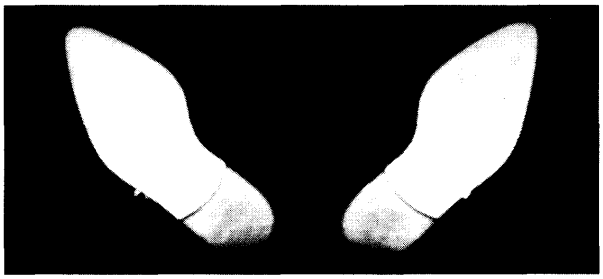
Stylistic pretensions

Ted Sadler, *Nietzsche: Truth and Redemption. Critique of the Postmodernist Nietzsche*, The Athlone Press, London and Atlantic Highlands NJ, 1995. xii + 262 pp., £42.00 hb., 0 485 11471 2.

Peter Berkowitz, *Nietzsche and the Ethics of an Immoralist*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA and London, 1995. xiv + 313 pp., £27.95 hb., 0 674 62442 4.

In these commentaries, the fashionable postmodernist Nietzsche – whose 'perspectivism' has been dressed up as democratic pluralism, and pressed into the service of the postmodernist war against 'logocentric' and 'phallocentric' discourses – is stripped of his stylistic pretensions. Emphasizing the absolutely fundamental position which truth occupies in his thought, Sadler and Berkowitz show that Nietzschean perspectivism, far from sanctioning an anti-dogmatic relativism, is itself grounded in a dogmatic claim to truth: the fundamental truth about existence.

Sadler defines Nietzsche's sense of genuine philosophical truth as a 'stance of existential truthfulness' towards that 'primordial reality' which he variously terms 'the primal One', 'the Dionysian', 'life', 'becoming', and 'will to power'. Drawing on Schopenhauer's distinction between intellect and intuition, Sadler explains how Nietzsche's absolute truth, or truth about the Absolute, cannot be conceptualized; unlike theoretical or discursive truth, Nietzsche's intuitively apprehended truth is wholly resistant to linguistic determinations. It is, argues Sadler, precisely this ineffability of Nietzsche's fundamental truth that places it beyond perspectival intellectual truth – perspectival because of the necessarily anthropomorphic and hence inadequate relation between intellect and object – and guarantees its esoteric sanctity.



Guided by ethical concerns, Berkowitz sees Nietzsche's dogmatic appeal to a 'fundamental truth about human excellence' as an implicit refutation of his purportedly radical perspectivism, and further undermines the alleged anti-metaphysical (e)quality of Nietzsche's texts by showing that the paradox which bedevils his 'ethics of creativity' (and, for that matter, the postmodernist opposition between 'free-play' and 'closure') is that which bedevilled the metaphysical tradition: freedom and necessity. At the very foundation of Nietzsche's thought, Berkowitz discerns a 'contest of extremes' between 'his fundamental assumption that morality is an artifact of the human will and his unyielding conviction that there is a binding rank order of desires, types of human being, and forms of life'. This antagonism between the necessity for mastery and the ineluctable mastery of necessity is seen to constitute the fundamental flaw in Nietzsche's creative ethics, and to reflect 'the distinctive clash between ancient and modern in his thought'. This 'clash' is overstated, however, and whilst Berkowitz's inquiry into Nietzsche's ancient notions of metaphysics and human excellence is remarkably fruitful, his interrogation of Nietzsche's modern ideas about knowledge, freedom and mastery is horribly misconceived.

Relating Nietzsche's paramount concern with human excellence, and consequent subordination of art to moral and philosophical considerations, back to Plato and Aristotle, Berkowitz proceeds to ground the central thesis of Part I of his book on Nietzsche's and Aristotle's shared belief that poetry is more philosophical than history. Under the general heading 'Nietzsche's Histories', Berkowitz identifies the histories narrated in *The Birth of Tragedy*, *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *The Antichrist* with the 'monumental histories' of the 'genuine historian', whose specific task, as set out by Nietzsche in his early essay 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', Berkowitz portrays as 'the fashion[ing of] artworks, in the light of true metaphysical knowledge and accurate understanding of true or real human needs, out of raw materials drawn from history to provide an education in human excellence.' This inspired identification enables Berkowitz to establish a unity of genre and authorial intention beneath a surface texture of structural, topical and stylistic diversity.

In Part II, in an otherwise trenchant critique of the 'vengeful' Zarathustra, a morally indignant Berkowitz explores the 'dire consequence' for moral and political life of Zarathustra's extreme demands for total freedom and absolute self-mastery. Blind to the profoundly mystical nature of Zarathustra's ethics of self-perfection, Berkowitz is misled into condemning the latter as 'utopian individualism', 'radical egoism', 'monumental hubris' and 'absolute barbarism'; while his failure to comprehend Zarathustra's differentiation (informed by a Schopenhauerian metaphysics of the will) between self and ego, deed and doer, leads to a damning and incomprehensible indictment of Zarathustra's 'pale criminal' parable as 'avid praise of theft and murder for sport, and eagerness for mass hysteria and destruction'.

A corrective to this travesty can be found in Sadler's brilliantly incisive work, which unites the strains of ancient and modern in Nietzsche's thought by locating him firmly within the metaphysical tradition (understood as the search for 'a more fundamental truth than theoretical truth'). In depicting the urge to philosophical truthfulness as the drive towards a 'higher world' of truth and justice, as a 'divine' ascent to the universal by way of 'the individual', and in positing this ideal as the philosophical truth to which the 'metaphysician' aspires, Sadler succeeds not only in re-establishing the fundamental link between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer and establishing a new one between Nietzsche and Heidegger, but in severing once and for all the link between Nietzsche and his postmodernist pretender.

Francesca Cauchi

Scott Meikle, *Aristotle's Economic Thought*,

Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994. viii + 216pp., £25.00 hb., 0 19 815002 4.

The title of this book might suggest an obscure or specialist topic. What Scott Meikle has given us, however, is not only a piece of good classical scholarship, but a fascinating study in the history of ideas and a profound reflection on the role of the economy in shaping contemporary society.

The six pages which Aristotle devoted to economics in the *Nicomachaen Ethics* and the *Politics* formed the basis of medieval thinking on the matter, and of present-day Catholic social teaching, as well as being a strong influence on Islamic economic doctrine. And many modern schools of economic thought, from Marxism to Jevonian utility theory, have claimed descent from Aristotle. That so many diverse traditions have seen their values reflected in him argues for a chaotic state of interpretation. But Meikle carefully indicates how Aristotle formulates the distinction between exchange-value and use-value – a problem which lies at the centre of all economic theory. Of course, Aristotle is less good at explaining the commensurability of products, and thus does not possess a 'theory of value' as such. This is because, unlike neo-classical economics, which connects use-value with exchange-value via the concept of utility, Aristotle assigns them to the different categories of quality and quantity, considering them as having different ends which require different courses of human action. Antiquity was predominantly governed by a system of use-value and not the market-orientated exchange-value which has given rise to the discipline of economics in modern societies.

Thus, notwithstanding the title of his book, Meikle argues that the Greeks did not have an economy of the kind that would have made it possible for them to engage in economic thinking. He details all this in chapters dealing with Aristotle's attitude to demand, money and exchange, and demonstrates that the inhabitants of the main peasant economy of Greece strove to be self-sufficient. The result was an absence of unattached labour looking to earn money, and hence no developed system of investment opportunities of the kind that lies at the centre of modern economic activity.

Some of the discussion about whether ancient society really had an economics might seem rather abstruse and semantic, and Meikle meticulously dissects the arguments of such protagonists as Finley and Schumpeter. His conclusion is that the subject of Aristotle's research is the metaphysics of exchange-value – what kind of a property it is and to what order of being it belongs. Its upshot is that the pursuit of exchange-value must be subject to the overriding end for human beings which is explicated in politics and ethics. For exchange-value does not really deal with ends and Aristotle's enquiries must therefore ultimately be ethical and metaphysical, rather than economic.

Consequently, this study of Aristotle's economic thought (or, rather, the lack of it) contains an implicit critique of the whole basis of modern society which only surfaces in its closing pages. In some respects it is similar to the critique of instrumental reason offered by the Frankfurt School, or to MacIntyre's account of the aporias of liberal social ethics. For what are we to make of a society in which activities with their own intrinsic ends increasingly have the end of a different activity – the pursuit of exchange-value – imposed on them? This involves compromising, or even destroying, the real end of such activities. The endless (in both senses) pursuit of exchange-value becomes universally dominant. This is a large theme, but Meikle has given us a truly original insight into its origins and made good his surprising claim that the analysis of exchange-value is the main problem of modern social philosophy.

David McLellan

Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm*,

translated by Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis, Power Publications, Sydney, 1995. 135pp., £8.99 pb., 0 909952 25 6.

A synopsis of the concerns of Félix Guattari in the decade between the publication of *A Thousand Plateaus* and *What is Philosophy?*, *Chaosmosis* combines the terminology of the former with the aesthetic and 'ecosophic' drive of the closing chapters of the latter. Deterritorialization, Transmonadism (or Nomadology), the Abstract Machine are reactivated here in order to help introduce Guattari's new paradigm: 'virtual ecology'. However, as already indicated in his 1985 collaboration with Antonio Negri, the 'new spaces of liberty' with which Guattari is concerned may be as much mental and corporeal as environmental.

These new spaces are 'chaosmotic' in so far as their elaboration entails a plunge into the chaos of the unconscious, the body and the world. Consequent upon this plunge is emergent, assembled chaos: composed chaos, or chaosmosis (as in much of Guattari's late work, the debt to the work of Prigogine and Stengers is evident). However, if chaosmosis is the assemblage of chaos, that assemblage is neither foreseen nor preconceived; neither ordered by Platonic imprint nor structured by Leibnizian harmonics. The movement of chaosmosis is not from elementary to composite – from 'base matter' to organic body. Instead, chaosmosis is the practice of 'ontological heterogeneity', the effect of which is further to complexify, rather than to simplify (or envelop), the complex.

The two opening chapters subject a familiar cast of purveyors of ontological homogeneity to withering scrutiny. In particular, the 'ossifying' models created by Heidegger for philosophy and by Lacan for psychoanalysis must be dismantled. The 'molecular' dismantling conducted by Guattari leaves a destratified plane (or smooth space) for the remaining chapters to remodel.

'Schizoanalytic metamodelisation' is the reworking (and dislodging) of ossified and molar conceptions of being, thinking and political practice. The acknowledgement that 'beneath the diversity of beings, no univocal ontological plinth is given' (whether that plinth be Capital, Being or the Signifier), gives rise to the question: 'how, and under what conditions can be best brought about the pragmatics of incorporeal events that will recompose a world and reinstall processual complexity?'

The final chapters attempt to sketch an answer to this question. In order to illustrate how an institution or discipline can put chaosmosis into practice, Guattari describes some of the experiments at the La Borde Clinic (where he continued to work until his death), which, by treating psychosis not as a structural object but as a machinic interface, sought to plunge the psycho-therapeutic set-up into a 'fractal', deterritorialized space. Such practice is *aesthetic*, Guattari argues, because it entails 'the creation and composition of mutant percepts and effects'; it is *ethical* in so far as it can be considered 'the paradigm for every possible form of resistance'.

Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy?* ended, like *Chaosmosis*, with a vision of philosophy part-plunged into chaos – a space named the 'No of philosophy', inhabited by a 'shadow' designated 'the people to come'. It is to this population, an always virtual, protean species, shuttling between chaos and world – a liminal people – that *Chaosmosis* dedicates its ethico-aesthetic manifesto.

Garin V. Dowd

Arran E. Gare, *Postmodernism and the Environmental Crisis*, Routledge, London and New York, 1994. vii + 192 pp., £35.00 hb., £11.99 pb., 0 415 12478 6 hb., 0 415 12479 4 pb.

Postmodernism, Gare believes, could potentially help to explain the causes of environmental problems and point us in the direction of solution. However, existing postmodern theories – handicapped by their relativism, dissolution of the subject, and rejection of grand narratives – are unable to provide an effective orientation for action. A new kind of 'postmodern grand narrative' is therefore proposed.

The first two chapters provide the background: first, a readable (though rather uncritical) survey of contemporary cultural and social trends as depicted by postmodernism; and then an overview of its philosophical roots from Vico, through Nietzsche and Heidegger, to the post-structuralists. There is little attempt at critical appraisal; the aim is rather to set out the postmodernists' position in readiness for a confrontation with their opponents, who include not only supporters of the Cartesianism rejected by Vico but also Hegelians and Marxists who represent an opposing tradition within the anti-Cartesian camp.

That confrontation is staged in Chapter 3, where environmental issues, scarcely mentioned until now, take centre-stage. Gare sets out to assess the merits of post-structuralism and Marxism, in relation to the mainstream (Cartesian) culture, by considering the ability (or inability) of each theory to respond to the environmental crisis. There is much of interest here, including a somewhat ambiguous critique of environmental economics, an assessment of recent and historical environmentalist trends within Marxism, and a survey of the connections between post-structuralism and deep ecology. Broadness of scope, however, is bought at the expense of detailed argument; the conclusions are under-argued and questions I wanted answered were left unaddressed. In the end Gare's view is that none of the competing approaches is adequate; what is needed is 'an alternative philosophy which transcends the limitations of all the philosophies considered so far while at the same time providing an appreciation of their achievements...' A sizeable undertaking.

The alternative offered in Chapter 4 is a 'postmodern metaphysics' which combines a modified form of Whitehead's process philosophy with an epistemology that asserts the possibility of judging between competing knowledge claims, but denies that knowledge has absolute foundations. This, Gare argues, enables us to interpret and systematize the insights of such 'postmodern sciences' as special and general relativity, quantum theory and thermodynamics, as well as developments in biology and ecology, while avoiding the criticisms of metaphysics made by Nietzsche, Heidegger and the post-structuralists. Clearly Gare is right to suppose that an ecologically adequate philosophy must be able to account for contemporary scientific developments; what is less clear, however, is that his own offering is uniquely suited to the task.

In the final chapter Gare returns to the concrete consideration of environmental problems and solutions. He breaks with postmodernism, first in arguing that effective action to challenge the existing system and overcome global environmental problems requires the construction of a new grand narrative (albeit of a new and non-oppressive kind); and second in arguing that an 'environmental nationalism' should form an important part of the content of that narrative. The defence of nationalism involves some of the book's most interesting arguments, but once again they are offered at too general a level to sustain Gare's conclusions, and counterarguments are dismissed with undue haste. I am also sceptical about Gare's view of the extent to which his practical proposals depend upon his process philosophy.

Gare's book provides a useful introduction to postmodernism and some thought-provoking contributions to environmental politics. However, it is unlikely to convince readers who are not already persuaded by some form of postmodernism to combine the two.

Jonathan Hughes