Turn again

Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996. xvi + 477 pp., £35.00 hb., 0 521 55436 5.

Brian Vickers, ed., *Francis Bacon: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1996. xlvii + 813 pp., £35.00 hb., £13.99 pb., 0 19 254198 6 hb., 0 19 282025 7 pb.

Back in the 1960s, Quentin Skinner started a little revolution in the study of political theory in Britain. Drawing on Wittgenstein and Austin, he attacked the whole idea that there could be monolithic cumulative progress in 'political science'. There was no fixed set of political questions, he said – rights, the state, equality, and civil obligation for instance – forming a kind of perennial political agenda anchored in transcendent verities. Political thinkers of different periods were playing different language games and performing different speech acts, and their doctrines were therefore incommensurable. Political problems were 'essentially historical', tossed about on the seas of language and carried hither and thither by the currents of contingency. The 'unhistorical stereotype' was at last to be ejected from politics, it seemed, just as it had been removed from natural science by Thomas Kuhn a few years before.

At the time when he first proclaimed this 'historicist' turn, Skinner's own interests concentrated on the English Revolution, and the 'ideological context' of Thomas Hobbes. Since then he has ranged far and wide, especially with the commanding *Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (1978). But he has now come back to his starting point, with a meticulously argued and highly original recontextualization of the first great political philosopher in the English language.

But Skinner's approach to Hobbes is not quite what you might have expected. He is not interested in going over the great political events amongst which Hobbes spent his long and hyperactive life, or in exposing acts of low political point-scoring or incorrectness concealed beneath Hobbes's abstract argumentations. The context in which Skinner has chosen to locate Hobbes's politics is not political, in short. Instead, it is dryly scholastic, and the first half of *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* is devoted to a detailed reconstruction of part of the renaissance academic curriculum: the courses on rhetoric which any son of an English gentleman at the end of the sixteenth century would have followed either with a tutor at home or, as in Hobbes's case, in the higher forms of a grammar school.

Skinner admits that the academic study of rhetoric 'may appear irrelevant to students of Hobbes's philosophy', fixated as they mostly are on the idea that Hobbes, along with his contemporary Descartes, was obsessed with securing human knowledge against the ambuscades of scepticism. Every manual on the history of philosophy will tell us how Hobbes was bowled over by the achievements of the 'scientific revolution', and how he then conceived the ambition of replicating them in the sphere of politics. Specifically, so we have always been told, he wanted to do for the social system what Galileo and Descartes did for the solar system, with the natural selfishness of individual citizens acting on the machinery of politics rather like the inherent inertia that keeps the planets to their regular courses. But Skinner's argument, understated with his usual graciousness, is that there is 'something misleading' about this interpretation. We may find it easy to suppose that formal rhetoric is a dull historical backwater, but, he says, 'perhaps the most important point I am trying to make is that such a reaction would be a mistake'.

Rhetoric in a Tudor grammar school meant the art of composing spoken and written discourses following the canons formulated by Cicero and Quintilian. All schoolboys would have known, for instance, that there are three kinds of discourse: the Demonstrative, the Judicial, and the Deliberative, respectively occupied with praise and vituperation concerning the present, accusation and defence concerning the past, and warnings and proposals concerning the future. And, as Skinner shows with exemplary thoroughness, they would have been drilled in all the techniques required to 'arm' or 'ornament' their compositions in these different genres, deploying 'figures', 'tropes' and 'commonplaces' to best advantage in order to

'hold forth' their side of the question and so to 'win' their audience.

The function of this curriculum was to prepare pupils for careers in law, statecraft, preaching or teaching. But rhetoric was not simply a transferable skill: as Skinner shows, it also carried a definite message. It presupposed, as the Ciceronian maxim had it, that 'every question has two sides', and hence that truth and justice are never self-evident. In particular, it was always possible to use the figure known as 'paradiastole' in order to redescribe an apparent virtue as if it were really a vice, or a vice as if it were a virtue: the gravity of your rival might be dismissed as dullness, for instance, whilst the rash impetuosity of your patron would be an example of bold alacrity. (Machiavelli's *Prince*, with its systematic redescriptions of the royal virtues of clemency and liberality, was, as Skinner points out, a virtuoso performance in paradiastole.) Thus rhetoric involved a kind of hidden curriculum, combining what might today be called relativism or anti-realism with a high-minded sense of public service: for if truth and justice were not of themselves attractive, then a willingness to speak up for them in the most convincing rhetorical style was an essential part of civic duty.

Skinner argues that the techniques of classical rhetoric, together with the tricky assumptions about truth, reason and citizenship that they presupposed, were 'a matter of second nature to the educated' in England in the first half of the seventeenth century. And Hobbes was particularly close to them, because they were not only the staple of his own grammar school education, but the main discipline that he taught as a private tutor in the period up to 1640 – when, at the age of 52, he began his eleven-year exile in France and started to reinvent himself as a European philosopher.

His first great work, *De Cive*, was published in Paris two years later. Hobbes regarded himself as propounding a new but incontrovertible 'science of Virtue and Vice', based on the principle that all citizen-subjects are obliged to obey the state, since it is the only guarantee of their own peace and happiness. But according to Skinner's arresting reinterpretation, his main aim – persistently overlooked by readers ignorant of the rhetorical background – was simply to 'outlaw the art of rhetoric from the domain of civil science'. Hobbes was in effect trying to tear down the framework of his own intellectual formation, ditching the old rhetorical belief that there are 'two sides to every question', and denying all legitimacy to the old art of paradiastolic redescription.

And Hobbes practised what he preached: his prose in the 1640s was denuded of the rhetorical ornamentation in which he was a past master. But when he published *Leviathan* nine years later, in 1651, he changed his tune. The new book gloried in Ciceronian 'rhetorication' – especially, as Skinner shows, in the deployment of satirical similes and metaphors, and of such 'mocking tropes' as sarcasm and irony. And this change, according to Skinner, marked 'a dramatic concession' on Hobbes's part, even a 'conversion' back to the old rhetorical tradition. Hobbes may still have believed himself to have discovered the scientific basis of politics, but he had returned to rhetorical orthodoxy, accepting that 'wheresoever there is place for adorning and preferring of Errour, there is much more place for adorning and preferring of Truth'. Politics could not be pursued without the assistance of rhetoric after all: 'the sciences', as he now put it, 'are small power'.

But Skinner may be rather overestimating the radicalism of Hobbes's rejection of rhetoric in the 1640s, and the significance of any subsequent change of mind. Ciceronian schoolmasters were already figures of fun by the end of the sixteenth century, and the theme was frequently rehearsed by Hobbes's hero Francis Bacon – as we can all easily find out now that Bacon's main English works are accessible in a new 'Oxford Authors' edition.

The editor, Brian Vickers, is himself a pioneer in the study of English rhetoric, and he has made an imaginative choice of texts, supplying introductions and abundant notes and comments on them all, and emphasizing their rhetorical resonances in particular. But although Bacon was a complete humanist rhetorician, he always maintained that rhetoric was not enough. For him, education needed to concentrate on training the intellectual powers, before imparting the rhetorical and civic skills required to present the truth 'winningly'. *The Advancement of Learning* (which came out when Hobbes was eighteen) attacked a whole century of rhetoric-centred education for having encouraged students 'to hunt more after words than matter'. Rhetoric and civil philosophy were not independent forms of knowledge, according to Bacon, but simply shoots put out by the central 'trunk' of humane education; and this trunk was constituted by the 'universality' of 'first philosophy'.

And Hobbes was fundamentally of the same opinion: for him too, rhetoric and civil philosophy were always subordinate to 'first philosophy'. But in that case Skinner's hypothesis of a cataclysmic change of mind between *De Cive* and *Leviathan* may itself be – to turn his own phrase against him – 'slightly

misleading'. The issue is strategic rather than logical or epistemological, and Hobbes's boast that he had at last discovered the true nature of political obligation was not altered in any way when he re-endorsed the old affinity between rhetoric and politics.

If Skinner has overdrawn the contrast between the Hobbes who believed that politics could be reduced to a science, and the Hobbes who accepted that it was inseparable from rhetoric, perhaps the reason is that he has been projecting his own concerns onto the past, and then finding in *Leviathan* an image of his own continuing campaign for seeing politics as a contingent collection of overlapping language games. But the comparison between Hobbes and Skinner could be read in the opposite direction as well. There has always been a suspicion, after all, that the historical and linguistic turn in political thought was only a hollow hullaballoo. For surely no one ever really supposed that actual political institutions and debates are constructed in accordance with a timeless rational model: neither Plato, nor Aquinas, nor Kant nor Hegel. Nobody has ever denied that states and legislatures and systems of justice vary from time to time, together with the 'languages' in which they are formulated, and indeed the concepts in which they are thought. In that sense, historicism about politics is not a bold new intellectual adventure but a tired old truism.

But politics is not everything, and even Hobbes – the most political of British philosophers – followed Bacon and subordinated it to 'first philosophy'. Despite its title, however, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* covers only Hobbes's 'civil philosophy'. And perhaps the omission of first philosophy from Skinner's reconstruction is not accidental. For when it comes to philosophy in its wider compass, the idea of making a historical and linguistic turn loses its obviousness and allure. Philosophers are presumably rooted in their places and times as much as everybody else, and the idea that they are magically acquainted with transcendent eternal truths would – if anyone actually believed it – deserve the transcendent eternal smirks it receives from those who are pleased to consider themselves 'post-philosophical'. But the supposition that we can conceive of themes like truth, meaning and logical consistency – the traditional topics of first philosophy – as changing their nature just as political institutions do is not so much courageously iconoclastic as insanely deluded. For if we did not trust that other people in practice share our sense of truth, meaning and reason, then we would be unable even to begin interpreting their ideas, or assessing their significance and consistency. So Hobbes had a point after all when he affirmed that first philosophy comes before rhetoric; and the historicists need to recognize that their historical turn would have nothing to turn to otherwise.

Jonathan Rée

The politics of culture

Jodi Dean, ed., *Feminism and the New Democracy: Resisting the Political*, Sage, London and Thousand Oaks CA, 1997. ix + 274 pp., £40.00 hb., £14.95 pb., 0 8039 7617 8 hb., 08039 7618 6 pb.

This collection addresses the issue of how recognition of difference can be built into the democratic process. The papers vary enormously in quality, optimism and theoretical level. They range from reflections upon personal experience (e.g. Kathleen B. Jones, Patricia Williams) to the worst abstractions of post-structuralist or post-colonialist theory (e.g. Kate Mehuron, Shannon Bell). All share an unabashedly North American perspective, drawing on the experience of American feminism, with the possible exception of Anita Desai, who writes about contemporary women's movements in India. Even she shares a largely unexamined model of democracy based upon a system of individual rights, in which the affirmation of individual self-expression is paramount, together with a commitment to movement politics and a fairly facile dismissal of socialism. However, what might appear as a limitation turns into one of the book's strengths, for it enables a clear focus to emerge from papers apparently written quite independently of each other.

Thus, the same history is often noted, the same problems articulated, and most of the authors move in the same direction in search of solutions, despite the variety of contexts and issues raised. The history comprises the shift from first- to second-stage feminism – from the claim of equality based on the commonalities between men and women, to the recognition of the differences between them and the need for women to be valued for what they are and do, rather than for their approximation to men. This approach was,

in its turn, recognized as inadequate because of the failure to acknowledge the differences between women and the hegemony of white, middle-class and heterosexual values exhibited by the women's movement. So second-stage feminism began to disperse under the pressures of anti-essentialism on the one hand, which denied any natural solidarity based on gender (or on race, sexuality or ethnicity for that matter), and multi-culturalism on the other, which appears to require a respect for and affirmation of the givens of our different identities. The problem of clitordectomy, addressed by Engle and Khanna, acutely demonstrates this dilemma: do we condemn it as feminists (and if so how are we distinct from liberalizing colonialists), or tolerate it as multiculturalists (and if so how are we distinct from reactionary conservatives)? Such embarrassments as feminists aligned with the New Right in anti-pornography campaigns demonstrate the limits of coalition politics as a putative solution to these dilemmas. According to Patricia Mann, we have entered the era of post-feminism – a period in which women no longer form a movement on the basis of gender identity, but in which gender problems and politics remain central as women increasingly move into public spaces: gender politics without feminism.

At this point, the problem can be articulated in a different way, which might also suggest a solution: how can we connect a cultural politics of difference and identity with a social politics of justice and equality? Or, in another formulation, how can we develop solidarity with the oppressed and become political actors in a postmodernist world? All the papers have as their starting point a recognition of the demise of modernity, which they see as equivalent to that of first-stage feminism: the apparent achievement of equality with men (or whites, or ex-imperial powers, etc.) as merely a different acknowledgement of their hegemony. And all recognize and celebrate what has been one of feminism's most considerable contributions to contemporary politics: the creation of cultural politics in which symbols and myths, the very clothes we wear, become sites for power struggles. This politics involves recognition of, and struggle between, the many different groups or cultures that compose society, which also means the dissolution of the 'homogenous' citizen (who used to be a white, propertied male), and scrutiny of the ways in which cultural representations oppress and constrain us as members of those groups. Many of the papers acknowledge a debt to Foucault, Derrida or Judith Butler in analysing these developments, and then try to move beyond them.

The sceptic in me wants to ask how cross-dressing can have anything to do with the abject misery of sweatshops in the special export zones of developing nations. In that context, cultural politics look like the narcissistic self-indulgence of a society which controls the global market, and hence can persuade itself of the truth according to the advertisement: change the advertisement and you change the world. But we all know the minute ways in which image both oppresses and constructs us – too cross-eyed to be adopted, too fat to be a receptionist, too frilly to be a professional – and we can scarcely forget that advertising and window-shopping had much to do with the collapse of the Soviet Union. It might be worth exploring whether there are parts of the world too poor (or pure?) for cultural politics. All of these papers would deny it, for there is an implicit acknowledgement of the forces of global capitalism (elegantly deployed by Eisenstein to show how Western feminism can be used to market goods to the rest of the world). Meanwhile, we can no more ignore the knowledge that we are the children of our cultures than that of how to make nuclear bombs; and we need a politics to deal with that.

Repeatedly and in a variety of contexts, these papers raise two related problems: how to move beyond the argument between multi-culturalism and anti-essentialism; and how to connect cultural politics – both of different groups and of the way we express ourselves or consume – with issues of justice and equality. Indeed many, like Nancy Frazer, argue that to do the latter is to solve the former. We need to maintain the insights both of multi-culturalism – that there is more than one valuable way of being human – and of anti-essentialism – that identities and differences are constructed – and use them to interrogate differences in terms of justice and equality. Others, like Jodi Dean, focus on our ability to go beyond coalitions based merely on the coincidence of a shared interest in a particular result, and build reflective solidarities based on dialogues, understanding and relation. In part this is seen as possible precisely because we are the children of multi-cultural societies, consisting of multiple selves which have been constructed by the overlapping and conflicting cultures to which we belong.

Most of the authors share a belief in the idea of forum politics, understood primarily as talking to each other, developing *public* understandings of solutions. This often leads them to revise such concepts as public, private, civil, personal, to reconfigure political agency, and to delineate as political, sites often considered neutral in liberal or socialist terms. (Hence the politics of cross-dressing, of shopping, or even, as Princess

Diana's funeral has shown, of flowers and mourning.) They barely discuss what they mean by equality and justice, presumably on the grounds that this can be articulated only within such a political process – that indeed it is process, not principle. And none of them analyses the structural basis of oppression, being far too post-structuralist for that. Thus socialists will feel uncomfortable that class is only mentioned in cultural terms, and economic considerations are almost wholly absent. But however self-indulgent the papers sometimes get, they define the problems that those of us unhappy with the oppressions of advanced capitalism and consumer culture now need to address. Whether or not we are in a post-feminist stage, this collection indicates that feminism has come of age, and is now moving out of what has been a necessary solipsist phase into an engagement with politics on the global stage. We may yet see the feminization of politics, and the reader who wants to get an idea of what that will look like could do a lot worse than begin with this collection.

Anne Seller

Idem and ipse

Charles E. Reagan, *Paul Ricoeur: His Life and His Work*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1996. 151 pp., £19.95 hb., 0 226 70602 8.

Richard Kearney, ed., *Paul Ricoeur: Hermeneutics of Action*, Sage, London, 1996. 213 pp., £37.50 hb., £12.95 pb., 0 7619 5138 5 hb., 0 7619 5139 3 pb.

Paul Ricoeur's output is prodigious and these two works deal primarily with the notion of narrative identity that emerges during the 1980s, with the three volumes of *Time and Narrative* and the essays in *From Text to Action* and, most recently, *Oneself as Another*. For Ricoeur, narrative is the fundamental category through which the aporia of temporality (e.g. the disjunction between cosmological and phenomenological time) are thought and is, therefore, central to the construction of social and individual identity. In Ricoeur's view, many thinkers have failed to recognize the constitutive role played by narrative in the construction of personal identity and thereby reduce it to a static, atemporal category of sameness (*idem*) which finds its paradigmatic expression in numerical identity. What *idem* accounts of identity cannot offer is a more dynamic, temporalized notion of the self (*ipse*) as constancy through and within change, illustrated in the examples of the promise and friendship. For Ricoeur, identity is constituted through a fusing and overlapping of *idem* and *ipse*, and narrative is the mode through which these two dimensions are mediated and explored – for example, in imaginative reworkings of the themes of freedom and necessity.

The dialectical understanding of the self at the heart of Ricoeur's notion of narrative identity has significant political and ethical implications. Of interest to many of the authors in the Kearney collection is the extent to which the idea of narrative identity suggests a position between the self-reflexivity of the Cartesian *cogito* and the pure contingency of the post-Nietzschean subject. The self has unity, but that unity is the dynamic unity of narrative which attempts to integrate permanence in time with its contrary – namely, diversity, variability and discontinuity. One of the valuable aspects of this collection is the way in which it indicates how Ricoeur's conception of narrative identity may suggest a way beyond the polemicized positions of the modern–postmodern debate which frame discussions of identity. For example, Mara Rainwater argues that the idea of narrative identity provides a useful corrective to the much-noted formalism of Habermas's communicative ethics, which arises partly from the atemporal manner in which the ideal speech situation is conceptualized. The force of the concept is that it draws attention to the ontological condition of human being in time and thus reformulates the ideal speech situation as an ongoing process of argumentation and dialogue, rather than as the relatively static goal of consensus. It shares with the notion of communication an ethical orientation towards the other. However, what it draws out more clearly is the evolution of the self through time in a complex network of human relationships. In this view, reflexivity becomes a permanent labour of dispersion, forgetting and retrieval, enacted through the narration of self-identity rather than, *pace* Habermas, a symmetrical process of intersubjective recognition. In a similar fashion, Rasmussen and Dunne claim that certain theories of interlocution reduce the self to other by conceptualizing identity primarily in terms of sameness (*idem*), thereby privileging the moment of recognition over that of alterity. By including the dimension of ipseity, particularity – conceived as the variations that the self may assume through time – is not effaced from the process of intersubjective interaction.

Another valuable aspect of this excellent collection is the way in which it draws out the implications of Ricoeur's largely philosophical work on narrative identity for social and political theory. To this end, the

collection includes three essays by Ricoeur in which he applies the hermeneutic concern with detour – the view that the self can only know itself through another – to the political questions of European identity, conflict within civil society, and theories of justice. For example, Ricoeur shows how the understanding of narrative identity as both stasis and change reframes the relation of identity to alterity – raised by the formation of post-national European identity – from antinomy to a necessary and insuperable dialectic. The recognition that self-narrativization always involves entanglement in the stories of others offers a model of identity as 'memory' exchange. Against reified discourses of nationalism, the construction of national identity can be rendered open-ended if it is based on a ceaseless process of reconfiguration of the past arising from the encounter with other histories. Here again, Ricoeur's work offers an interesting alternative to the Habermasian framework that tends to dominate in work on post-national identity.

By its own admission, Charles Regan's book is rather an eclectic collection, comprising a biographical essay, a memoir, an exposition of Ricoeur's work on identity, and a couple of interviews. The interviews and essay do a good job of documenting key aspects of Ricoeur's life – as a prisoner of war 1940–45, professorships at the Sorbonne, Nanterre and Chicago, his position with regard to the events of 1968, the death of his son – and relating them to his intellectual development from phenomenology, through structuralism, to hermeneutics. The memoir is the least successful section of the book, mainly because Ricoeur appears to lead a very ordered life which, whilst explaining the extent and rigour of his work, makes for rather monotonous reading. The philosophical essay provides a thorough account of the development of Ricoeur's ideas in *Oneself as Another*, focusing on the ethical import of the notion of ipseity – namely, the way in which the idea of constancy within change invokes a responsibility to act in such a manner that others can count on me and that I am accountable for my actions. What is lacking in this essay, and the book as a whole, is any independent critical assessment of Ricoeur's work, or any sustained attempt to relate his concerns to broader debates within political philosophy, politics or social theory. Thus, whilst it offers a solid introduction to the latest phase of Ricoeur's work, the Kearney collection goes much further in sketching out the centrality of his work on narrative and the self to the discussions on the nature of identity in a detraditionalized world that dominate so much recent social, political and cultural theory.

Lois McNay

Angels of anarchy

Katharine Conley, *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Woman in Surrealism*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln NE and London, 1996. xvi + 179 pp., £32.95 hb., 0 8032 1474 X

In his first 'Surrealist Manifesto' of 1924, André Breton defines surrealism 'once and for all' as 'pure psychic automatism by which we propose to express, either verbally, in writing, or by any other means, the true functioning of thought'. The notion of automatism, sometimes known in English as 'Clérambault's syndrome', describes a condition in which the patient feels and believes that his or her actions cannot be controlled by willpower, and that he or she is acting under the influence of some external force. Breton and his fellow surrealists sought to simulate the syndrome, in order to create a new poetics and to reach what the 'Second Manifesto of Surrealism' (1929) defined, in quasi-Hegelian terms, as 'that point of mind' where life and death, real and imaginary, and all other binary oppositions cease to be contradictory. In 1927 the journal *La Révolution surréaliste* featured a photograph entitled 'Automatic Writing'. It shows a woman dressed in a schoolgirl's uniform and holding a pen. She is looking away from the paper on the desk, waiting for the flow of words to begin. This child-woman is the 'automatic woman' of Conley's title.

Surrealism is the paradigm for the twentieth century's many avant-gardes: a small group of committed individuals with a charismatic leader, prone to internal quarrels and schisms, and totally dedicated to its ends. It is also paradigmatic in that it is male-dominated, and appears to consign women to the essential but subaltern roles of muse and mistress. These figured prominently in Breton's life, and surrealist iconography often focuses on woman as spectacle. In a famous celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of hysteria, photographs taken from the archives of the Salpêtrière hospital depict women in the convulsively beautiful poses of that version of the female malady. The concentration on woman as spectacle has often led to accusations of misogyny and worse, but recent studies have begun to concentrate on women's contributions to surrealism, and reveal a more complex picture. Like Whitney Chadwick's pioneering *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (1985), Conley's study is an important contribution to the reassessment of one of the twentieth century's cultural movements. Anecdotal history remembers the 1936 surrealist exhibition in London for Salvador Dali's doomed (and near-fatal)

attempt to give a speech while wearing a diving suit. A more serious art-historical approach might recall the figure of Sheila Legge, photographed in Trafalgar Square as 'the surrealist phantom', her head covered in rose petals and ladybirds. And it should certainly recall Eileen Agar's *Angel of Anarchy* (1937), a gorgeous plaster head decorated with feathers, silks and beads that looks like a ritual object from some lost religion.

Conley does not in fact discuss Agar, but concentrates on Breton's own writings on women and the examples of Leonora Carrington and Unica Zürn, who were both muses (to Max Ernst and Hans Bellmer respectively) and practising surrealists. Her general thesis is that Breton's primal vision of automatic woman as a creative muse who can provide access to worlds normally closed to him helps to create a space which women can claim as their own. That space has now been reclaimed by the theorist-practitioners of *écriture féminine* and those who, like Hélène Cixous in her play *Portrait of Dora*, celebrate hysteria as a revolt against patriarchy. Zürn, in particular, is now celebrated by Luce Irigaray. Carrington and Zürn are automatic women – they might also be seen as angels of anarchy – who step down from the pedestal to create in their own right. They do so at considerable cost to themselves. In both her writings and her paintings (sadly, only the *Self-Portrait* of 1937 is reproduced here, and the dowdy black-and-white does it no justice), Carrington re-creates herself as 'the bride of the wind', as a white horse drawn from Celtic mythology that symbolized death and rebirth. The elaboration of a personal mythology was a plunge into a hallucinatory labyrinth from which she emerged only after great suffering and periods of internment in clinics. Zürn was born in 1916, but it was not until 1953 that she met Bellmer and discovered her talent for automatic drawing. Four years later, she experienced the first of the mental breakdowns that are recorded in her *L'Homme-Jasmin* (1971). The text does not simply provide a description of madness; it is itself a descent into a realm where identity dissolves and where the body can be – and is – taken apart and reconfigured like one of the anagrams Zürn was so fond of. According to Conley, acting out the role of automatic woman was, for both Carrington and Zürn, the experience of being drained and consumed, of becoming a surface for the projection of automatic messages. No longer the muse, automatic woman is both medium and message. Her body writes, and is written upon.

Conley's readings of Breton's expository texts and of the works of her automatic women are fascinating, and contribute to an important reassessment of the role of women in surrealism. Some doubts about their validity nevertheless arise. Carrington and Zürn are assumed to represent a specifically feminine experience of madness, and it would be helpful to know more about how it compares with Artaud's experience of psycho-physical suffering as language disintegrated around him. Conley's explorations of Breton's interest in the Virgin and assorted pre-Christian goddesses will be too close to a celebration of the Great Goddess for readers who prefer to recall the surrealist anti-clericalism typified by the famous photograph of Benjamin Péret insulting a priest. More worryingly, no real answer is forthcoming to the questions asked by Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady*. Does not the celebration of hysteria perpetuate romantic (and psychiatric) myths of female irrationality? How does the angel of anarchy avoid becoming another madwoman in the attic?

David Macey

Theory against itself

Dwight Furrow, *Against Theory: Continental and Analytic Challenges in Moral Philosophy*, Routledge, New York and London, 1995. xx + 224 pp., £40.00 hb., £12.99 pb., 0 415 91079 X hb., 0 415 91080 3 pb.

Michael Dillon, *Politics of Security: Towards a Political Philosophy of Continental Thought*, Routledge, London and New York, 1996. viii + 252 pp., £45.00 hb., £13.99 pb., 0 415 12960 5 hb., 0 415 12961 3 pb.

Lots of books like these are being written at the moment, but in a cluttered field they rank among the best. The backdrop they share is provided by a fairly familiar diagnosis of a sense of crisis in philosophy. Both Furrow and Dillon see 'traditional' categories and approaches – to ethics and the political, respectively – as having encountered their limits, and demanding to be rethought. The mission of both is to find such a way of rethinking.

As one might expect, *Against Theory* takes as its starting point the ever more widespread suspicion of the coldly schematic, objectivistic, pseudo-scientific (in short, the 'theoretical') character of much ethical theory. Furrow looks at various theorists who have rejected this in favour of a more concrete, narrative-based orientation: MacIntyre's account of collective narrative history as a source of moral obligation; Nussbaum's claim that the descriptive powers of literature enhance a moral sensitivity to the needs of others; and

Rorty's suggestion that imaginative redescription can make the unfamiliar familiar, and thus expand our sense of moral solidarity.

These, says Furrow, are examples of what an anti-theoretical ethics *should not*, in fact, be like. One thing they fail to provide is an account of understanding compatible with a universal moral agency. This is because 'concrete ethics' – the attempt to ground ethics in embedded, local identities and conventions, rather than abstract principles – tends to lead to a sort of moral blindness with regard to that which is excluded by 'our' shared histories and values: the radically 'other'.

Furrow's response to this is to try to find an anti-theoretical way of making ethics universal – to avoid the schism between 'us' and 'them' created by an overemphasis on the cultural situatedness of moral judgement. He does this by supplementing of Levinas's appeal to the priority of ethics over ontology, and to the individual's infinite responsibility to the Other, with the broader social context and theory of moral judgement provided by Lyotard in *The Differend*. The professed result is an intimate ethics with a universal context: a genuinely anti-foundationalist and non-parochial account of moral agency and obligation. Or, put differently, a transcendent ethics which does not rely on transcendental arguments.

Does Furrow find 'an account of a universal moral agency that avoids the abstractness and reductionist tendencies of theory' (p. xviii)? Yes and no. He combines lucid, subtle exegesis and commentary with a smooth crossover between different philosophical idioms – apart from anything else, the book serves as a fine primer for a set of complex issues and thinkers. That said, it seems less of a fundamental reshaping of ethical philosophy than he may think.

Like so many representatives of the 'antitheory position' discussed in his book, Furrow wants to theorize without theory – to generalize about why generalizing is a bad idea. But it is noticeable that in combining Lyotard's ethics with Levinas's we end up (pragmatically at least) with something like traditional liberalism restated: individualistic, universalistic, agnostic about the nature of the good life – only purportedly 'untheoretical' in character. The many strengths of this impressive book notwithstanding, those of us unsure that theory is necessarily reductive, or that ideals and abstraction are irrelevant to ethics, may wonder how much is actually gained by their removal.

Dillon, meanwhile, is trying to get political theorists, rather than ethics specialists, to change their thinking habits. He might have called his book *Why Heidegger Matters in International Relations*, because that, crudely put, is the question at stake. To Dillon, the game is up for traditional (or modern) approaches to international relations, basically for Heideggerian reasons: he deplores that 'conservatism of thought' which would place limits on our conception of the political by its very precepts and concepts, and the procedure for their application. In their place should come a rethinking of the question of the political 'in response to the rethinking of thought itself' (p. 3).

'Security' provides the required thematic link: while metaphysics seeks the secure grounding of first principles, so security has been the predicate upon which the political discourses of modernity have been constructed, whether the issue be state security, territorial security, economic security or whatever. Dillon's account is rich, varied and inventive. It proceeds by way of (amongst other things) the mandatory rejection of attempts to dismiss Heidegger's work as 'political anathema', an etymology of 'security', and, finally, an insightful reading of *Oedipus Rex*, showing how the tragic resists the effacement of difference and brings questions of security and insecurity – in their broadest, non-traditional sense – to the fore. Dillon calls for a poetic transformation of the vocabulary of politics and the 'revivification of political imagination' (p. 201), proposing tragedy as the genre which, more than any other, appropriately poses the question of the political.

Dillon's redescription of the international relations problematic is accessible (even, I would have thought, to those completely new to Heidegger), forceful, and imaginatively put. Furrow for one would probably be disconcerted by its studied abstractness, and its remarkable avoidance of any reference to the material or empirical. Is one, for instance, to take it that capitalism, or exploitation, or imperialism, are no longer worth talking about, being mere effects of the will to 'the calculative truth of correspondence'? It is one thing to question 'modern' categories of political analysis, but quite another to imply that capitalism might as well be said no longer to exist. Dillon's subtitle is thus a little grandiose: rather than being representative of the broad sweep of current continental thought, this is a very readably adept attempt to show what a specifically Heideggerian political thinking might look like – and, for better or worse, about as 'theoretical' as theory gets.

Gideon Calder

John Brannigan, Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys, eds, *Applying: To Derrida*, Macmillan and St Martin's Press, London and New York, 1996. xxv + 239 pp., £42.50, 0 333 65662 8 hb., £15.99, 0 333 67070 1 pb.

Imagine attending a conference where you are the topic. This was Jacques Derrida's predicament when he spoke at the 'Applied Derrida' conference in Luton in the summer of 1995. His lecture, an unscripted and apparently impromptu after-dinner speech which insisted, rather perversely, on the impossibility of improvisation, is published under the title 'As If I Were Dead' at the end of this selection of papers. For Derrida, being in Luton was a spectral experience, like haunting his own wake. But this volume as a whole is far from mournful. In fact, if it has a fault, it is in a certain lightness of tone adopted by the younger contributors.

The struggle to find rightful heirs for major intellectual figures always presents problems, and these are inevitably exacerbated when the thinker in question is still living, and thus in a position to read the applications that come in. The hunt is on for those entitled to claim Derrida's legacy, and it is a search in which his executors must, in the proper spirit of deconstruction, reckon with his presence. The problem is that the nature of the bequest is unclear, especially in a British context, due to the vexed question of political affiliation. Derrida's long-awaited encounter with revolutionary politics, *Specters of Marx* (reviewed by Terry Eagleton in *RP* 73), which declared that deconstruction was 'a radicalization of Marxism', pulled the rug from under two sets of critics. The first was those followers of Derrida who considered Marxism to be a dead letter, and who shied away from a rhetoric of commitment; the second, those critics of deconstruction, part of an established Left tradition, who had hitherto viewed Derrida's refusal, as they saw it, to engage with Marx as conclusive proof of his political conservatism.

On one level, then, this volume is, like the conference whose proceedings it comprises, the story of two generations. It is thus appropriate that Derrida, in his closing remarks, should address the state of morale in British universities, and anticipate 'some radical change in structure'. That the prospects for deconstruction are good was borne out by the fact that around two-thirds of the participants at Luton were under thirty. Yet paradoxically it is the older generation of Derrideans represented here who are writing with a real sense of urgency, so that Derek Attridge's attempt to read J.M. Coetzee's latest novel, *The Master of Petersburg*, in the wake of *Specters of Marx* provides the most acute 'application' of deconstruction, while the contributions by Antony Easthope and Peggy Kamuf on film and television are equally charged with immediacy. By contrast, the younger generation favours a style that approximates to a parody of Derrida's prose, replete with the hesitations, disavowals, equivocations, precautions, digressions and qualifications which infuriate his detractors. This is not to say that the essays of John Brannigan and Boris Belay, for example, on Irish nationalism and concepts of justice, are not significant and challenging. However, there is a gaping gulf between those older critics who have clearly mapped out their own approaches to literature and philosophy before coming under the influence of Derrida, and the new wave whose main grounding is in deconstruction, rather than, say, philosophy or literature more generally. *Applying: To Derrida* is admirable in its interdisciplinary coverage, ranging from film to fiction, the law, television, and translation; and the essays are in the main lively and engaging. But the overall tendency on the part of the new generation of deconstructivists to privilege play over purposefulness does not augur well for the future. While the older Derridians appear to be playing for high stakes, the younger ones are, on this showing at least, merely playing for time.

Willy Maley

Dennis Patterson, ed., *A Companion to Philosophy of Law and Legal Theory*, Blackwell, Oxford and Cambridge MA, 1996. xii + 602 pp., £65.00 hb., 1 55786 535 3.

Although this Companion does not sit uncomfortably within the general series of 'Blackwell Companions to Philosophy', its subject matter – jurisprudence, legal theory – displays a somewhat unclear relationship to philosophy. This cannot be said of the other published Companions. Moreover, the background of the contributors to the present volume is, in the main, law and legal studies rather than philosophy. This is not a criticism. The volume is a fine collection of essays by distinguished authors who survey, in a comprehensive and authoritative fashion, many themes, topics and theories in contemporary philosophy of law.

However, one might wish for a clearer statement of what this subject should be taken to amount to. The editor is content to distribute the material across 'Areas of Law', 'Contemporary Schools', Law and the Disciplines', and 'Topics'. He provides no general introduction or guide through the various essays; cross-references are minimal; and any attempts to control overlap are not readily evident. For instance, sections of the entries on 'Law and Morality' and 'Legal Enforcement of Morality' cover similar ground without any mutual acknowledgement of the fact. This is also true of the entries on 'The Duty to Obey the Law' and 'Authority of Law'.

One pressing need is for someone to situate the subject in relation to philosophy. This last does not figure as one of the 'disciplines' considered in its relation to law. Yet the work of pure philosophers (Aquinas, Aristotle, Hume, Quine, Rawls and Rorty) looms large in the development of jurisprudence.

Further, certain key figures in contemporary jurisprudence are philosophical in their interests, approach and more general ambitions. Dworkin, Hart and Raz are obvious examples. Dworkin, whom one author describes as 'probably the most influential English-language legal theorist now writing' (p. 234), in particular suffers from receiving no extended critical treatment. Instead, he is considered – each time partially and again without serious cross-referencing – under both 'Natural Law Theory' and 'Coherence'. There are preoccupations or presuppositions of legal theory which are properly described as meriting philosophical consideration. Maimon Schwarzschild's entry on 'Constitutional Law and Equality', for instance, has far less to do with constitutions than it does with various understandings, familiar within moral and political philosophy, of equality. Indeed, this entry would not be out of place in a 'Companion' to ethics or political philosophy.

One obvious reason for situating legal theory in relation to political and moral philosophy is that the major practitioners of the former – Hart, Dworkin, Raz – have felt compelled to talk about the latter and, importantly, to see relations between the two spheres. It is not enough to assert, as does one contributor, that 'jurisprudential theories are political theories which have legal ramifications' (p. 303). Rather, what is interesting is why Hart and Dworkin, despite both being left liberals, embraced such obvious and self-consciously opposed theories of law.

Set within the context of this general concern with the relation between law and politics, the entry on the 'Marxist Theory of Law' is worthy but generally unenlightening as to the proper character of a socialist jurisprudence. The entry on 'Feminist Jurisprudence' ruminates about 'feminism' and 'jurisprudence' without really clarifying the topic its title promises to discuss.

There is a further cause for concern to British readers. The volume has, as its editor confesses, a 'decidedly American perspective'. This is explained, rather ingenuously, as due in the main to the size of the American law school population. It does mean that many topics receive an attention they would not merit in the British context, such as 'privacy' and 'constitutional law'. Moreover, schools of thought – most notably 'legal realism' – are treated even whilst authors note the indifference, if not outright hostility, of British legal scholars to them. A measure of public reflection on the salient differences between American and British legal discourses would not have been a luxury in a project of this nature. Nor would it have been unilluminating.

David Archard