

### Against parochialism

Eduardo Mendieta, ed., *Latin American Philosophy: Currents, Issues, Debates*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2003. 218 pp., £13.95pb., 0 253 21563 3.

Eugene Gogol, *The Concept of Other in Latin American Liberation: Fusing Emancipatory Philosophic Thought and Social Revolt*, Lexington Books, Lanham MD, 2003. 385 pp., £20.95 pb., 0 7391 0331 8.

Fidel Castro, *On Imperialist Globalization: Two Speeches*, Zed Books, London, 2002. 156 pp., £9.99 pb., 1 84277 269 4.

In his introduction to *Latin American Philosophy*, Eduardo Mendieta complains that 'one of the most amazing things about the bibliographical work on philosophy in English over the last decade or so is its utter silence about Latin American philosophy and philosophers'. Surveying the encyclopaedias and dictionaries of the discipline, he suggests that 'as if by conspiracy' their quiescence on these topics would seem to indicate 'that neither [the philosophy nor the philosophers] existed or exist'. His collection of essays aims to indicate otherwise, to show that 'Latin American philosophy exists and it is prodigious in its production and creativity'. Reading the essays themselves, however, may lead to other conclusions.

Indeed, even some of Mendieta's contributors are prepared to question the existence of such a thing as a distinctly Latin American philosophy. Most notably, Jorge Gracia ends up with the observation that

if we adopt a particular selective point of view with respect to certain philosophical texts, we can easily conclude that there is no Latin American philosophy, or very little of it. And if we adopt a different selective point of view with respect to the same texts we can conclude that there is Latin American philosophy – and much of it.

One knows what he means, which is in part that the definition of philosophy itself, let alone of what he terms an 'ethnic' philosophy such as the Latin American (or the Asian, or the French), is a site of contestation and dispute. Still, one might wonder, and other contributors to this book do wonder, whether it is better to work towards a subversion of the concept of philosophy from a Latin Americanist viewpoint, rather than to engage in the struggle to assert that Latin America can and must have its own philosophy too. Ofelia Schutte, for instance, rehearses a post-colonial critique that 'attempt[s] to place an element of undecideability in the colonial signifier' and thus

to ensure that 'the "resonance" of the postcolonial is felt in Continental thought. Somewhere in the speech of the colonizing power, a code is left imperfect, through which critical thinking can garner an Other vision, an Other language, a meaning missing in the lexicon of the dominant.' In other words, rather than attempting to complete that lexicon, as would seem to be Mendieta's desire, the point would be to keep it from ever appearing finished.

Eugene Gogol's approach, in *The Concept of Other in Latin American Liberation*, is rather different. A sustained defence of Marxist Hegelianism, Gogol's book advocates a philosophical tradition that, he freely admits, has with some justice been regarded as Eurocentric. Moreover, this is a tradition that is unabashedly totalizing and so apparently in search of closure. But it is for precisely this reason that, Gogol argues, Hegelianism can be read against the grain: Hegel's 'political conclusions', as found in, for instance, his *Philosophy of World History*, should not deter us from following a philosophical logic that is 'profoundly emancipatory'. Itself read dialectically, Hegel's dialectic can and should be open to and engage with an Other that is the practice of Latin American resistance to colonial oppression and capitalist exploitation. Hence this book's subtitle, 'Fusing Emancipatory Philosophic Thought and Social Revolt', and also its structure, in that its first half begins with a reading of Hegel and Marx and its second half consists of a series of brief analyses of movements such as Ecuadoran and Bolivian indigenous organizations, Brazil's Landless Movement, and Argentina's Mothers of the Disappeared.

Gogol's particular inflection of Hegel and Marx is strongly influenced by the work of Raya Dunayevskaya, whose ideas, he states, 'formed the cauldron from which my own ideas have emerged'. (The book is dedicated 'For Raya'.) Dunayevskaya, once Trot-

sky's secretary, is probably better known in the USA, through the journal *News and Letters*, than she is in the UK (though see Ben Watson's review of her *Power of Negativity* in *RP* 116). In the 1940s, she and C.L.R. James combined with a small group of others in the US Trotskyite movement to form the 'Johnson Forest tendency', so named after the pseudonyms that she (as 'Freddie Forest') and James (as 'J.R. Johnson') adopted for publication purposes. Johnson Forest, who developed the theory of state capitalism and eventually split from Trotskyism in the early 1950s, have been seen as precursors of, among others, Claude LeFort and Cornelius Castoriadas's *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group, as well as the Italian *operaismo* and *autonomia* movements from which, most notably, Antonio Negri has now emerged onto the English-speaking scene. As such, it is intriguing to consider a book such as Gogol's as an estranged cousin of Michael Hardt and Negri's *Empire* or their (forthcoming) follow-up, *Multitude*.

Like Negri and others in the extended family of autonomist or libertarian Marxism (other representatives of which would include Paolo Virno, Harry Cleaver and John Holloway), Gogol privileges Latin America as a site for the emergence of new forms of social protest, and equally he regards Mexico's Zapatistas as the paradigmatic example of these new modes of struggle. Critical of nationalist or party-centred theories of liberation, Gogol praises what he sees as an emergent subjectivity whose 'organization primarily emerges spontaneously out of the revolutionary consciousness of masses of people. A small group may at times serve as catalyst for such a movement, but its decisive nature is determined by the masses' own self-activity.'

Even Gogol's Hegelianism is pushed in the direction of what Werner Bonefield and others have termed 'open Marxism' in that, for instance, the concept of absolute knowledge as a circular form is not in fact "proof" of the "closedness" of Hegel's system' because 'Hegel adds that this circle is "a circle of circles"... Isn't this circle of circles perhaps best seen as a spiral because of the temporal development, history, and thus open to, indeed dependent upon Otherness, even when it has reached Absolute Idea?' Similarly, Gogol quotes Dunayevskaya's suggestion that we might see 'the "eternal Idea" not as eternality, but ceaseless motion and thus, "revolution in permanence," a movement entering upon "the new society"'. In short, and in contradistinction to other Marxist-Hegelian emphases on, say, the transition from a class 'in itself' to a class 'for itself', Gogol is

out to reconceptualize Hegel as a philosopher of difference, whose conception of totality is always open and expansive: 'All who see Hegel as a philosopher of identity, of an Absolute spirit that swallows up all Otherness, have not dove deeply enough into the Hegelian concept of "the thinking of contradiction [that] is the essential moment of the Notion".' Otherness itself is, if not primary, at least as relentless and persistent as is the resistance that Gogol sees in the historical record of Latin American responses to colonialism. Moreover, not only does Gogol claim that 'the Other is not a passive object'; he argues that otherness goes beyond simple reactivity in Hegel's conception of 'an Other which can be as self-animating as is Spirit'.

In addition to his defence and reinterpretation of the European philosophical tradition, demonstrating ways in which it is open, or can be opened, to the practice of Latin American resistance, Gogol also engages with a series of Latin American thinkers, such as Frantz Fanon, Octavio Paz, Aníbal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, Gustavo Gutiérrez, and José Carlos Mariátegui. His aim is, first, to outline 'a view of Hegel with Latin American eyes' and, second, 'a view of Latin America with the eyes of the Hegelian dialectic'. And again, whereas the tradition of Latin American thought is usually taken to be an (often anguished) examination of the existence of or possibilities for autonomous identity, Gogol emphasizes the way in which precisely this identity-talk yields to elaborations of what he terms Otherness. Mostly, however, Latin American philosophical articulations of Otherness are found wanting compared to Hegel's – thus Leopoldo Zea's version of *aufheben* 'considerably narrows its scope from Hegel's usage' while Enrique Dussel 'does not dive fully into [Hegel's] dialectic'. One might wonder, however, whether coincidence with Hegel should really be taken as the suitable benchmark by which to judge Latin American thinking. Fanon and Mariátegui, meanwhile, fare Gogol's inspection rather better, as Fanon is seen as a true Hegelian, and Mariátegui as authentically Marxist. Now, Mariátegui was indeed one of the most interesting Latin American thinkers in the twentieth (or any other) century, but his greatness and interest arise as much from what he achieved despite his Marxism as from what he achieved with it. The Peruvian's reconceptualization of colonial regimes of production and governance, and their relation to the so-called 'indigenous question', in many ways anticipates contemporary postcolonialism and subaltern studies more than it continues the legacy of European debates.

Finally, after a long (and, like the rest of the book, rather choppy) overview both of Marx's economics and of dependency theory, Gogol turns to an analysis of what he terms Latin America's 'revolutionary subjectivity'. Here, however, the theoretical framework of the first half of the book is either discarded in favour of almost testimonial narrative, or is applied with a clumsiness verging on the embarrassing. Take this conclusion to a section on the Zapatistas:

Despite all the horrendous activity of the government and its military in Chiapas, I would argue that the greatest challenge for the Zapatistas is taking steps along the path of the Self-Determination of the Idea along with the important steps taken on the Self-Determination of the People. To work out the Idea, the dialectic, to single out the concrete Other(s), form revolutionary organizations, battle to overthrow the oppressive objective situation, and move to overcome the Party-State form that is the oppressive heritage of capitalism is urgently needed.

Once we get past the awkward grammar, the proposal outlined here is either banal (the Zapatistas should combat oppression) or mystificatory (they should 'single out the concrete Other(s)'). Whatever force such a passage has is derived from bringing together the banal but rousing and the mystificatory but vague without ever attempting to resolve the differences in register. Even a 'dialectical' resolution would have been better than none at all. Moreover, while there is no doubt that, with the decline or discredit of national liberation movements of the Left and neoliberalism on the Right, we should attempt to rethink the question of revolutionary organization, Gogol's approach to the problem is uninformative. Merely to suggest that a dialectical philosophy needs to be brought into a (dialectical) relationship with revolutionary subject-

ivity (which is essentially the book's conclusion) is an empty and tautological expression of *a priori* principle, rather than a contribution either to philosophy or to practice.

So, the project to discover or elaborate an autonomous Latin American philosophy (as per Mendieta's collection) appears problematic, while the crude 'fusion' of European philosophical framework to (resistant) Latin American content, as per Gogol, is deeply unsatisfactory. Fidel Castro's two speeches to Venezuelan students published as *On Imperialist Globalization*, while undoubtedly entertaining, are as formulaic as one would expect of four-and-a-half-hour 'impromptu' discourses delivered forty years after the Cuban Revolution. Castro is almost Homeric in his recourse to familiar figures and illustrations: where Homer has his 'wine-dark sea', Castro has his healthcare system and his non-negotiable national sovereignty as recurring tropes. But at least Castro's discourse is global in scope, ranging from Simón Bolívar to the euro, the collapse of the Soviet Union to José Martí. Castro takes advantage of his status as some kind of elder statesman of world politics to eschew parochialism whether hidden or overt, and relishes the prospect of being invited back to Caracas in 2039. Any philosophy today has to be global and to emerge from a historical perspective on colonialism and postcolonialism. In so far as global culture is infected by (and inflected through) Latin Americanism, from the encounter with and construction of Europe's Other in 1492 to the viral spread of Latin affect through contemporary popular music, advertising and film, so any such global philosophy will inevitably be Latin American whether that is acknowledged or not.

**Jon Beasley-Murray**

## The primacy of politics?

Stathis Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution: From Kant to Marx*, trans. G.M. Goshgarian, Verso, London and New York, 2003. 434 pp., £45.00 hb., £17.00 pb., 1 85984 602 5 hb., 1 85984 471 5 pb.

It would usually be pointless, and churlish, to cavil at the encomiums distinguished scholars provide for works by younger members of their profession. Whether Stathis Kouvelakis's book is well served by Fredric Jameson's generous and arresting Preface seems, however, so doubtful that an exception should be made. For the main claims Jameson makes about the book have to be set aside if the reader is to form an accurate view of its aims and achievements. Thus,

Jameson suggests that Kouvelakis provides 'perhaps the first truly original new version' of the formation of Marx's thought 'since Auguste Cornu's monumental postwar history'. In contrast to this somewhat startling suggestion, Kouvelakis himself acknowledges that he is following a path opened up by Louis Althusser through the admission in his texts of self-criticism that 'Marx's political break preceded and conditioned his epistemological break'. Where Kouvelakis wishes

to go beyond Althusser is in establishing the 'central', as opposed to merely 'determinant', role of politics in Marx's development, thus dethroning philosophy from its Althusserian 'pre-eminence in the field of theoretical mediation'.

Still more puzzling is the fact that, in Jameson's view, Kouvelakis's originality consists partly in his 'new theory of what is structurally most central and distinctive in Marx's achievement: namely, the unique political nature and powers of the proletariat'. Once again the author knows better, for he is well aware that it was 'before discovering the proletariat' that Marx made the 'leap' which really is the central concern of his history, that from Rhineland liberal to political revolutionary. Moreover, that history comes to an end with the text of early 1844, the 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction', in the final paragraphs of which Marx does no more than, in Kouvelakis's words, 'name', and 'herald the entrance' of, the proletariat. Hence, it is plain that the materials for reconstructing any general theory of the nature and powers of the proletariat are simply not available in the period to which Kouvelakis confines himself, and that such a project falls outside the scope of his intentions.

While Jameson is clearly right to take the discussion of Marx to be the main focus of interest of Kouvelakis's book, it is by no means the only major topic dealt with there. The first two-thirds of the book consists of chapters on Kant and Hegel, Heine, Moses Hess, and Engels. They form, Kouvelakis tells us, a 'montage', being 'largely autonomous', 'virtual monographs' which 'at the limit can be read out of order'. This arrangement will not please those who like their intellectual history to be tidily linear and consequential. Nevertheless, the discussion does have at least a roughly determinate shape. The thinkers Kouvelakis deals with were addressing a more-or-less common set of problems, even if, as he maintains, their lines of approach and solutions were widely divergent, and indeed mutually opposed. In the most general terms their concern is with the ancient question of the relationship of theory and practice, and specifically of 'German theory' and 'French practice'. Still more concretely, the problem is that of the unfinished business of the French Revolution and its implications for Germany. Thus, these five thinkers may be seen as offering different versions of the 'German road' to an emancipated society. Moreover, the shape of the discussion may be further determined by way of negation. For, taken together, the thinkers in question present, in his account of them, a sharp contrast to

Marx, in that their positions, in relation to his, turn out to be either insufficiently political or insufficiently revolutionary or, usually, both.

These chapters vary greatly in interest. That on Kant and Hegel is the least rewarding, a routine exposition saying little that is not already familiar. It is, on the other hand, salutary to be reminded of Heine the revolutionary, even if, as he appears, here, one who suffers intermittently from anti-political bias and fear of the masses. Kouvelakis fails, however, to explain what Heine's 'revolutionary interpretation' of Hegel actually amounts to, beyond a belief that the categories of Hegelian philosophy of history can accommodate radical change. Hence, the claim that this interpretation marks the beginning of the Young Hegelian movement rings somewhat hollow. Heine had, of course, other things to do, more important perhaps in the human scale or at any rate more expressive of his genius, than adding to the interpretations of Hegel's philosophy being produced so copiously in his time. The result, however, is that the eighty or so pages of the chapter on him seem needlessly discursive, a sledgehammer addressing a small and not very tough nut. The treatment of Hess and Engels is more successful in this respect, with more proportion between subject matter and manner of treatment. They are depicted as committed in somewhat different ways to what Kouvelakis terms 'social-ism', underpinned by Feuerbachian humanism and anthropology. This position prioritizes the social at the expense of the political, and hence unity and harmony rather than antagonism and division. Kouvelakis's argument is persuasive in itself and, moreover, sheds a general light on the intellectual scene. It makes clear, for instance, how much closer the young Engels was to Hess than either of them were to Marx. In doing so it makes wholly intelligible Marx's break with Hess, and that of Engels too, once he had entered Marx's orbit, and indeed shows them to have been unavoidable. The discussion is, however, somewhat marred by the curious animus it displays towards Engels, the only thinker dealt with in the book of whom this is true in any degree.

It suggests itself in important details, such as the strong emphasis on Engels's supposed *völkisch* and racist affinities, the claim that his account of Irish immigrants 'comes close to being an expression of pure and simple hatred', and the scorn poured, with the clear vision of hindsight, on his hopes for an English road to socialism. It is reflected also in the way that even a feature that might well be accounted to his credit, in comparison with, say, Marx in the same

period, his personal acquaintance with, and scientific study of, a modern proletariat, is turned against him. For the 'sociological positivity' of his description of the condition of this proletariat is contrasted unfavourably with Marx's identification of the proletariat as the formal solution to a theoretical problem conceived on Hegelian lines; that is, as 'the negativity of a non-class which reveals the antagonisms inherent in bourgeois society'. However great one's respect for theory, and however little one may wish to be accused of sociological positivity, this surely goes too far in seeming to hint it might actually be an advantage for

never to trouble the discussion again. This bringing to bear of the fruits of recent fashions in scholarship seems to serve here, as so often, largely as a device for cutting a great figure of the past down to size, our size. It does so, moreover, without the need for any serious intellectual or imaginative engagement with their work and situation. In the present case it fails to do justice either to Engels or to Kouvelakis's own gifts as an intellectual historian. These are for a painstaking, scrupulous unravelling of meanings that is acutely responsive to, and expressive of, the inner life of its object, a procedure that appears to best advantage in the discussion of Marx.



This discussion derives its unity from its un-Althusserian insistence on Marx as a thoroughgoing Hegelian, indeed as a Hegelian critic of Hegel. His debt to Hegel shows itself most obviously in the main peg on which Kouvelakis hangs his narrative, the problem of the transition from civil society to the rational state. Marx's critique of Hegel is aimed in the first instance at the mediations he proposes for this transition, the estates, corporations and the bureaucracy as the universal class. From the start Marx, as convincingly depicted by Kouvelakis, starts off in a direction Hegel had set his face firmly against, that of democratic politics. In the earliest phase of this development Marx's hopes are pinned on a gradual extension of the public sphere, to be brought about largely by the workings of a free press under the tolerant eye of the Prussian government. In the critical year of 1843, however, he turns from reformist to revolutionary politics, to a 'true democracy' that demands the relentless democratizing of all political forms. This takes him close to the tradition of permanent revolution

a theorist of proletarian revolution not to know any proletarians at all.

The antipathy towards Engels shows itself in a deeper way, in a methodological shift undertaken for his sake alone. For he is subjected to a Foucauldian critique, a critique of a purely external kind not practised on anyone else in the book. Thus, the hapless text of *The Conditions of the Working Class in England* is pummelled and pulled about by means of the categories of 'bio-power', 'the empirico-transcendental doublet', 'the process of sexualization', and so on. The Foucauldian fever then subsides as quickly as it arose,

of the radical Jacobins and Babouvists, and may be said to represent a solution of the problem of transition just in that it envisages a closing of the original gap through overcoming the distinct existence of the political state.

Although the problem of the transition from civil society to the state serves Kouvelakis effectively as an organizing theme, his treatment of it has a feature which prevents him from exploiting its potential to the full. This is his failure to respond to the specificity of Hegel's concept of civil society. In the *Philosophy of Right* civil society, *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, is explic-

itly presented as the 'system of needs' in its peculiarly modern form. It is, that is to say, the system in which human needs are met through a vast web of market operations whose agents are private proprietors. Thus, as Kouvelakis notes, though without seeming to register its significance, Hegel has recourse to the French word *bourgeois* to characterize the members of civil society, and this may well, as older translations of Marx assume, be less liable to mislead than 'civil' as a rendering of *bürgerlich*. Thus, civil society is in essence bourgeois society or, in a word, capitalism. Kouvelakis's discussion does not adopt this distinctive focus and instead uses the term with great, and somewhat indeterminate, generality. For him civil society encompasses, it seems, the entire public realm and may be identified with 'the sphere of social relations' as such. Indeed, his usage might best be captured by supposing that in it civil society is effectively, again in a word, quite simply 'society'.

To have acknowledged the peculiar character of Hegelian civil society would, no doubt, have complicated Kouvelakis's story. It might well, for instance, have obliged him to recognize as a third basic category the economic, thereby upsetting the dualism of the political and the social. The resulting gain in explanatory power is, however, easy to illustrate. It would, for instance, have enabled Kouvelakis to state the central political problem facing Hegel and Marx in sharper, and more fertile, terms. This becomes the problem of the transition from capitalism to the rational state – that is, to the community of human freedom. Kouvelakis may surely be said to have missed a trick in depriving himself of the possibility of using such a formulation. A similar missed opportunity may be found elsewhere. For had Kouvelakis held to the narrower, authentically Hegelian concept of civil society, his scheme might have provided the framework for, or at least an important clue to, Marx's development more generally. Kouvelakis takes his leave of that process with, as he explains, Marx poised on the threshold of communism. His eventual stepping over the threshold may readily be seen as a specific rejection of Hegel's civil society, founded as that is on the right to private property. Thus, it abolishes the first term of the problem of transition he inherited, and thereby transforms the problem in its entirety. The step into communism seems, however, impossible for Kouvelakis to conceptualize in any such terms. For that step is, of course, not a rejection of the 'sphere of social relations' as such. Here too, Kouvelakis's inflation of the concept of civil society does not leave him best placed to make sense of the history.

The mention of Marx's later development summons up a context in which the reader can scarcely fail to wish to situate Kouvelakis's account. It is hard to avoid inquiring of it how much light it can project forwards, how well it prepares us for what is still to come in that development. When one asks such questions, however, misgivings of a general kind arise, misgivings that seem to call into question Kouvelakis's conception of his project. They focus on his choice of a unit of study, his periodization, so to speak. For he has surely broken off his narrative at a point that is not adequately motivated in terms of the larger story, and indeed is arbitrarily selected in terms of it. Thus, it would scarcely be contentious to claim that Marx soon ceased to be a radical Hegelian of the kind described in this book. For he ceased to conceive of the revolution to bring about human emancipation in exclusively political terms, as a matter of true democracy and the transformation of the state. Indeed, there seems no way to avoid admitting that instead he became a socialist. In doing so he was to produce either, as sympathetic critics hold, a dialectical synthesis of the two moments of the political and the social that stand opposed in Kouvelakis's account, or, as less sympathetic critics allege, an outright cancellation of the political, to the lasting detriment of the tradition of thought he founded. Kouvelakis's discussion has no significant premonitory insights to offer into either possibility.

It is true that he does sometimes look ahead, beyond his self-imposed limits, but these occasions do little to help his cause. Thus, he has to acknowledge that Feuerbach's influence on Marx had not yet reached its peak within the period he considers. Kouvelakis indicates his awareness of the presence in the *1844 Manuscripts* and *The Holy Family* of what are from his point of view lapses or regressions in a Feuerbachian direction, towards an anthropology which grounds a teleology of the human essence and a 'substantialist' view of the proletariat. This is at least tacitly to recognize that, even at the end of the period in question, not only, if the expression may be permitted, is Marx not yet Marx; he is not securely set on the path to becoming Marx. Hence, nothing that could properly be described as an account of his formation as such – much less a truly original one – is to be sought from Kouvelakis's book. Of course, in one way the remedy is obvious. It is that Kouvelakis should continue his narrative, to take in the *1844 Manuscripts*, *The Holy Family* and to go beyond, to *The German Ideology* and the texts of Marx's full maturity. Were he to bring the virtues mentioned earlier to bear on this complex, and still quite inadequately understood, subject matter, the

results might indeed be remarkable, and the words of Jameson's Preface come to seem anticipatory of, rather than falsely reporting, a major achievement.

Joseph McCarney

## Street fighting man

Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, trans. Robert Bononno, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2003. 198 pp., £37.00 hb., £11.95 pb., 0 8166 4159 5 hb., 0 8166 4160 9 pb.

In the final chapter of his *Atlas of the European Novel*, Franco Moretti traces the diffusion of various novels across the European continent during the course of the nineteenth century, tracking the quantity and speed of translations between different languages. Unsurprisingly, Britain and France prove to be the greatest exporters and smallest importers in percentage terms. It took, we discover, twenty-nine years for *Madame Bovary* to be translated into English (by Eleanor Marx), and an astonishing seventy years for *The Red and the Black* to make its way, linguistically, across the channel. Someone perhaps needs to carry out a similar exercise in cultural geography as regards philosophical texts of the last half-century. It could certainly throw some light on the differences between the contemporary 'philosophical cultures' of the French- and English-speaking worlds: the former notoriously reluctant to engage or disseminate the works of the latter; the latter, at least in the particular guise of 'continental philosophy', often seemingly content to do little else.

It might also explain why it has taken thirty-three years for Henri Lefebvre's classic 1970 text, *The Urban Revolution*, to merit a fine translation by Robert Bononno, while (shall we say) rather less 'impressive' works were accorded the privilege a good deal quicker. As Neil Smith notes in his excellent introduction, one unfortunate effect of this tardiness has been that certain influential encounters with Lefebvre's work from the early 1970s – particularly those of Manuel Castells and David Harvey – have been available in English for some time, while the text to which they most directly responded has not. Given the belatedness of this translation, it is tempting now to read the text for signs of prophetic anticipation. And there is indeed much to admire in this respect. When *The Urban Revolution* was first published, the 'urban'

was far from being the fashionable topic it is today (not least within mainstream Marxism), and what work there was, was still largely descriptive, reliant on undertheorized 'empirical generalizations', or tied to the technocratic concerns of social policy. While Lefebvre may thus be read as a precursor of the massive explosion of writings on the 'urban' over the last decade or so, he can also be read as extraordinarily foresighted regarding debates about globalization, a notion which is an explicit thematic of the book. One even encounters here an early, and still useful, articulation of the concept of the 'global city' (somewhat peculiarly credited to Maoism, if not to Mao himself). Moreover, in the light of his growing influence on a variety of disciplines, the book is of considerable interest in relation to Lefebvre's own intellectual trajectory; particularly as regards preliminary versions of ideas developed at length in his better-known *The Production of Space* (1974; trans. 1991).

Nonetheless, such historical and scholarly interest as this new translation will undoubtedly arouse should not elide the more fundamental and specific challenge that it offers to the burgeoning sphere of urban studies, as well as the relevance that it has for some of the most pressing problems of today. Close to 50 per cent of the world's population now inhabit urban space. By 2005 there are expected to be nearly twenty megacities with populations exceeding 10 million, located in all areas of the globe. A Landsat 7 satellite image of Tokyo (biggest of all, with a population approaching 27 million), included in the latest *Times Atlas of the World*, shows its extraordinary spread, like a terrifying lava flow absorbing surrounding conurbations, rural land and even reclaimed sea. One could not find a more vivid image of the way in which the 'urban fabric grows, extends its borders, corrodes the residue of agrarian life'. This is not simply a question of 'the built world of cities' but of 'all manifestations of the dominance of the city over the country'. If this includes the 'highway', the 'out-of-town supermarket', the 'vacation home' – which themselves can prompt new forms of urbanization, as in the eighty miles of coast around Malaga which many are describing as an emergent megalopolis – then the global process of 'urban revolution' also gives rise, as Lefebvre asserts in rather understated terms, to 'growths of dubious value'.

According to the UN-HABITAT 'Global Report on Human Settlements' ([www.unhabitat.org/global\\_report.asp](http://www.unhabitat.org/global_report.asp)), published in October 2003, nearly a billion people – approaching 32 per cent of the global urban population – are living in what the UN defines as

'slums'; in sub-Saharan Africa the proportion is closer to 72 per cent. The overall figure may well double within thirty years. As Kofi Annan notes: 'The locus of global poverty is moving to cities.' This movement is altering the very 'nature' of cities themselves, both in terms of the radically new 'non-Western' forms of urbanization that it produces, and the fact that some slums are now as vast as those spaces conventionally understood as properly 'metropolitan'. The Kibera district in Nairobi has a population of around 600,000, with little running water, access to few services, and appalling sanitary conditions; the Ashaiman settlement in Nairobi is now larger than the city of Tema around which it originally grew. Such are some of the most visible impacts of capitalist globalization and the policies imposed on so-called 'developing nations' by its guiding institutions, the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO.

Yet, as always, statistics conceal as much as they reveal. It is precisely for this reason that, as Lefebvre saw, the 'expression "urban society" meets a theoretical need', giving shape to 'a search, a *conceptual* elaboration' that, at a global level, might allow us to think through the larger *qualitative* implications of an emergent historical situation in which 'the urban problematic becomes predominant'. In his attempt to meet such a 'need', Lefebvre *still* has, despite the obvious achievements of Harvey, Castells, Sassen and others, few real equivalents in recent urban theory. Only those Italian theorists of the Metropolis, Manfredo Tafuri and Massimo Cacciari, whose neglect I have elsewhere bemoaned, spring readily to mind (and they draw on a distinct German tradition encompassing Simmel, Benjamin and Kracauer).

This is not to say that Lefebvre's own theoretical hypothesis concerning the 'urban problematic' is without problems or has not dated in crucial respects. The attempt to articulate a 'synchronic picture' of urban society, through a taxonomic scale of spatial-social 'levels' ('global', 'mixed', 'private') – partially retained in *The Production of Space* – remains crude, particularly in its extension to different types of 'built form'. Furthermore, the key concept of *l'habiter*, associated with the last of these levels – translated by Bononno as 'habiting', but which clearly refers to Heidegger's Hölderlinian *das Wohnen* (usually rendered as 'dwelling') – risks drifting into a naively ahistorical appeal to the 'durable primacy' of a certain human 'lived experience' that underlies and resists the various 'homogenizing' practices inflicted upon it. Yet the ambition of Lefebvre's undertaking is scarcely undermined by such weaknesses.

No doubt the most controversial aspect of *The Urban Revolution* remains that which both Castells and Harvey picked up on in their early critiques: the strong claim that, in some way, the 'urban field' has superseded the 'industrial' to become the dominant problematic on a global level. Castells and Harvey were surely right to say that Lefebvre exaggerates this 'shift' (which, in any case, is somewhat under-theorized) and underestimates the extent to which industrial capital continues to produce the conditions for urbanization. But one has to see Lefebvre's argument in context: seeking to remedy the neglect that the urban had received at the hands of most Marxist thinkers and their tendency to regard it as a mere 'superstructural' phenomenon. Moreover, fairly late in the book, Lefebvre acknowledges that the projective emphasis on an emergent 'urban reality' and its 'renewed space-time' is essentially a theoretical shift in perspective which seeks to overcome the reduction of its 'productive force' to the already given terms of the 'industrial field'. The 'city' is, as he puts it elsewhere, no longer conceivable (if it ever was) as 'a kind of vast factory, nor as a consumption unit subordinated to production'. It is in this light also that Lefebvre asks what remains a pertinent question for the Marxist Left: 'Why is it that the Commune was not conceived as an *urban revolution* but as a revolution of the industrial proletariat moving towards industrialization, which does not correspond to historical truth?' Lefebvre refers to the Commune, but, of course, he's thinking as much of the events of Paris 1968 and the 'urban guerrilla warfare' that marked the period elsewhere. For clearly, despite the often dry, analytical tone, what is really at stake for Lefebvre is the potential for elaborating new modes of revolutionary thought and practice resistant to 'the application of a homogenous global and quantitative space'. He is in search of urbanization's 'utopian moment'; what is historically *new* in the possibilities opened up by a global urban modernity, and the (long-harboured) promise of a 'differential space' to which it may give new life.

This translation of *The Urban Revolution* is, then, of far more than mere 'historical interest' and it requires much more detailed study than I can provide here. Indeed, its insightful, philosophical *and* politicized approach to questions concerning the urban problematic on a 'planetary' scale puts most of what passes for a contemporary 'urban studies' to shame, still pursuing, as it is, 'fragments of indigestible knowledge'. The demand it places upon us, to fashion a coherent and counter-disciplinary *concept* of that 'concrete abstraction', the urban, in a manner which

is adequate to emergent social dynamics, is one that will continue to grow.

David Cunningham

## Limbo

Ranjana Khanna, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 2003. xiv + 310 pp., £54.00 hb., £16.95 pb., 0 8223 3055 5 hb., 0 8223 3067 9 pb.

Ranjana Khanna's book is very ambitious, with several objectives. These are to 'provincialize and parochialize psychoanalysis', utilizing Chakrabarty's strategy of reducing the universalist claims of the products of Western reason and Partha Chatterjee's reflections on differential appropriation, leading to a discussion of the mobilization of psychoanalysis in (essentially) francophone anti-colonial writing of the 1950s and 1960s. Finally, there is an attempt to develop an analysis of 'critical melancholy' as the basis for a postcolonial ethics. En route she also endeavours to give these objectives a feminist inflection. Such a project runs many risks, not least of which are exegetical top-heaviness, conceptual overstretch and philosophical haste.

The 'provincializing of psychoanalysis' is carried out by demonstrating the imbrication of Freud's work with colonial practices and disciplines such as archaeology, anthropology and exploration, and by configuring psychoanalysis within the rise of nationalism and the acceleration of colonial expansion. Archaeology provides Freud with his model of the self – the self as object of retrieval – whilst Freud identifies 'with the nationalist colonialist, self-constructions of such explorers and archaeologists such as ... Stanley and ... Schliemann'. Khanna proposes that this model undergoes crisis with the onset of the First World War, and ideas of melancholia and disavowal come to the fore. So, psychoanalysis as a developing theory registers the vicissitudes of colonial power. Equivalently, the anthropology that psychoanalysis borrows from Fraser, Tyler et al., and rearticulates through Freud's social works (*Totem and Taboo*, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*) can be seen as an 'ethnography of the West': Freud's model casts light on the form of subjectivity ordered by narcissism and the ego ideal that emerges with imperialism: 'Freud's self was clearly one that was created as a national self conceived as civilized', but it too undergoes traumatic

dislocation in the aftermath of war and Freud's own displacement from 'national belonging'.

The discussion of the 'colonial rescripings' of psychoanalysis is a far denser affair, carried out along two primary axes. The first is an exegesis of Sartre's existential psychoanalysis and its impact on francophone anti-colonial writing, specifically the work of Fanon and Memmi. The second is a discussion of colonial psychiatry and the work of Octave Mannoni, with an intermittent engagement with Lacan and with Lacanian rewritings of Fanon, exemplified by Bhabha. Each leads to a discussion of 'colonial melancholy' as an affect linked to the 'uncertainty of national belonging', which echoes the emergence of Freud's theory of melancholy in his ambivalent experience of being Jewish in Austria, undergoing a sharpening of German nationalism prior to the *Anschluss*.

The final part of the book addresses the idea of melancholy thematically, but now as the basis for a contemporary ethic. 'Haunting' and 'lament' are the central ideas informing this conception of the persistence of the past and its unresolved legacies. For Khanna, it is the narratives of nationalism which provide a false resolution to the traumas of colonialism: what cannot be mourned, that which refuses inclusion in the redemptive articulation of the nationalist symbolic, 'thus gives rise to a critical agency which we could call the melancholic postcoloniality that characterizes *limbo patrum*' (a term from Joyce for the no man's land outside of nationalism).

As the book proceeds, then, the idea of melancholy and its complex relations to mourning, narcissism, Freud's evolving ideas of the ego as stages of assimilation of external figures and the emergence of the superego as punitive-critical agency becomes more and more central, to the point where the recuperation of melancholia becomes an ethical desideratum. The dialectic of assimilation and rejection reworked through Freud's digestive metaphors replaces the ocular preoccupations of post-Lacanian thinking about colonialism and nationalism: a shift from a preoccupation with identification and recognition to a concern for belonging and exclusion.

Here the work of Abraham and Torok, who revised Freud's theory, taking up Ferenczi's distinction between introjection and incorporation as an underpinning to the distinction between mourning and melancholia, becomes central. Mourning is achieved through introjection, the full assimilation of loss; melancholia involves the incorporation of the unassimilable, which, encrypted, evades integration and entails a process of endless lament. In opposition to Abraham and Torok's

therapeutic strategy, which designates melancholy as pathological and attempts to de-crypt the buried loss and articulate the unassimilated into narrative, turning lament into ordinary mourning, Khanna holds that the unassimilable must remain as such. Echoing a Derridean suspicion of Abraham and Torok's distinction, she claims that any mourning that is 'successful' does away with the trace of the lost object, in some sense annihilating it over again, denying its otherness. Critical melancholy, then, is the holding fast to the unassimilable as such because it maintains the trace of trauma, and in its symptomatic embodiment as haunting. It makes an ethical challenge to a present defined by amnesia and it makes an ethical claim on the future as beyond assimilation, restitution, reparation, or any other simple enactment of mourning.

There are clear parallels here with Lacan's extimate *objet a* or traumatic kernel of the real and Laplanche's source object of the drive. Other writers have used Abraham and Torok's notion of melancholia and explored its links with ideology, fantasy and the operations of narrative, seeing the persistence of a Žižekian version of the unassimilable Lacanian real as the basis of critique. A classic use of this in the Latin American context is the work of Idelber Avelar, especially *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (1999) which, like this book, appeared in Duke's Post-Contemporary Series, and yet goes unmentioned by Khanna.

In conformity to a version of 'afterwardsness', the fullest discussion of melancholy appears in the introduction to Khanna's book, which was obviously written after the various occasional pieces that make up the main body of the text – as if the object of Khanna's investigations only became apparent to her later. This is unfortunate in that aspects of the argument are rehearsed incompletely in the chapters that follow, giving the reader an uncanny and persistent sense of *déjà vu*. More troubling is Khanna's failure to address the epistemological consequences of her historicization and reworking of Freudian concepts. If melancholia is a signifier of Freud's own 'loss of power' as a Jew and an index of 'non-belonging', can it still operate as a scientific theorization of a generally experienced affect, with the net of its conceptual connections intact, or must it now be resemanticized within a discussion of a rhetoric of social and biographical expression? As the concept is reformulated, can it maintain its original clinical content or does it slide into a mere metaphoricity?

Khanna must be aware of the long-standing debates over the status of psychoanalytic concepts and their explanatory value, given her approving citation of Nandy and Obeyesekere's view that psychoanalysis is not a science but rather a 'historical and theoretical discipline'. But her response is to claim a strategy of reading psychoanalysis 'against the grain', which avoids the epistemological issues and allows her text



to trade on ambiguities. Too many of the effects of a colonial and imperial modernity come to register as failures of assimilation, with their corresponding hauntings: Fanon's symptoms are 'a form of demetaphorized ... melancholy'; 'women coming into full citizenship ... could similarly experience melancholy haunting'; 'the refusal to assimilate ... brings the affect of the subaltern into the archive ... [which] can also be a home ... for the phantoms from *limbo patrum*'. Phantoms seem to be everywhere, grief ubiquitous, and mourning suspect.

The strongly deconstructive cast of Khanna's more extravagant claims for 'critical melancholy', where melancholic remainders are 'non-identificatory ... do not build a sense of belonging ... manifest an inability to remember, an interruption ... that critiques national-colonial representation', and melancholic manifestations constitute a 'form of non-representational critique ... that nevertheless alerts us to a different form of disenfranchised, subaltern call for justice', suggests a metaphysical hypertrophy of the notion of melancholy, wholly unwarranted by the textual material. As the introduction has it: 'Melancholia becomes the basis for an ethico-political understanding of colonial pasts, postcolonial presents and utopian futures.'

Such inflation contrasts harshly with the definitional deficit of other central notions; most egregiously, nation, nation-state, nationalism, colonialism, imperialism and so on. Despite their importance, they barely achieve conceptual presence. Events may have 'thrown the purity of the concept of the nation-state into doubt' and the *limbo patrum* may, 'in its very specific formations haunt all of us who live under the shadow of the nation-state', but it is far from clear what object this is. The very linkages that need to be explained – between the psychoanalytically theorized self and political form – are asserted rather than argued.

Such lopsidedness suggests that the book's initial aims – entirely laudable, delimited reconstructions of particular intellectual contexts – underwent a massive exorbitance under pressure for a radical and totalizing ethical gesture. They have suffered grievously in consequence. Current academic publishing seems bent on demanding endless avatars of the same unsuccessful grandiloquence.

**Philip Derbyshire**

## Fleshing it out

Max Deutscher, *Genre and Void: Looking Back at Sartre and Beauvoir*, Ashford, Aldershot, 2003. xxxii + 268 pp., £45.00 hb., 0 7546 3296 2.

'One is not born, but rather becomes a woman' must be one of the most famous opening lines in modern French thought. And it launched a scandal. On the front page of the daily *Figaro*, the Catholic novelist François Mauriac wrote in disgust that, having read *The Second Sex*, he now knew 'all about' Simone de Beauvoir's vagina. It was clearly something he did not want to know about. The Vatican took the view that *no one* should know about it and placed the text on its Index of Forbidden Books, which presumably meant that the unfortunate Mauriac was (*nachträglich*) in a state of mortal sin. Albert Camus – macho Mediterranean man personified – spluttered that the book made French men look ridiculous. Like existentialism in general, Beauvoir's book came to enjoy an almost pornographic reputation. The cover of my old paperback copy of the 1953 English translation, purchased in 1969, is illustrated with a softish porn photograph of a nude woman seen from behind in three-quarter profile. If memory serves, I bought it from the sort of not-quite-a-bookshop that specialized in Henry Miller, second-hand copies of *Lady Chatterley* and offerings from Maurice Girodias's Olympia Press.

*The Second Sex* is often said to be one of the founding texts of modern feminism, but that it is what it *became* and not what it was born as in 1949. It was only in the 1970s that Beauvoir began to speak of herself as a feminist; in 1949, she was convinced that socialism would bring women social equality. The book is not so much feminist manifesto as a phenomenologically based account of becoming woman in a world where men force women to assume themselves as the other, as the second sex. Its author had had the right to vote for only three years, and she had no legal access to either contraception or abortion.

Max Deutscher's backward look at Sartre, Beauvoir and their phenomenology is an attempt to work upon their ideas 'so as to keep them in motion' as part of contemporary thinking, as opposed to leaving them to gather dust in the museum of philosophical antiquities. The conference held at the Sorbonne in 1999 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *The Second Sex* – not mentioned here – strongly suggested that, for many, the book is still relevant. Yet both

looking back and 'keeping in motion' prove to be more problematic than might be expected.

Deutscher certainly looks back with great attention and perspicacity, particularly when he picks his way through the density of Sartre's terminology, concepts and tortured syntax. But by concentrating almost exclusively on *Being and Nothingness*, he may be missing things that can perhaps be better seen elsewhere. The metaphors of and references to the 'obscenity' of the female genitals – also to be found in Beauvoir – might look rather different if they were set against the imagery of Sartre's fiction, where gender proves to be a very uncertain category. Beauvoir's journey to feminism may have begun not in 1949, but with her 1948 account of her travels in America, where the mordant account of 'college girls' – apparently so free, so independent and so *American* but in fact so naively conformist – reads like a critique of 'the feminine mystique' *avant la lettre*.

If looking back is trickier than it looks, the encounter with contemporary thinking, represented primarily by Michèle Le Doeuff and Luce Irigaray, is no less straightforward. The role of the former is to endorse the claim that Sartre inevitably speaks in the masculine voice and condemns femininity to the realm of facticity, lack of being and 'the viscous'. More interestingly, Irigaray is seen as offering an extension of and complement to Beauvoir's thesis, as turning dystopia into utopia when vaginal obscenity is transformed into 'two lips' touching and talking. The dialogue might have been quite different if Christine Delphy had been invited to join in. And could the phenomenology of vaginal 'obscenity' have something to do with Kristeva's 'abjection'?

Deutscher's point of departure is the thesis that in the hands of Husserl and Heidegger phenomenology is 'blind to sexuality', and that in Sartre's hands it is 'biased against women in its imagery, structure and anecdote'. It is hard to object to the first proposition (though this is far from the only objectionable feature of Heidegger; there is, after all, also the minor issue of the politics). Sartre makes the same point when he remarks that *Dasein* appears to be asexual and takes no account of sexual differentiation. He goes on to speculate that 'masculine' and 'feminine' may be contingent factors that have nothing to do with *Existenz*: perhaps men and women simply 'are'. This would suggest that if their 'being men' and 'being women' are contingent modes, their 'being' is actually a 'becoming', unless we lapse into gender essentialism. Sartre also hints that biological maturation is the key to understanding the coming into being of the boy.

In his detailed reading of sections of *Being and Nothingness*, Deutscher insists that there is a 'rampant' identification of the feminine with the in-itself, which is viewed as a threat to the transcending for-itself. Masculinity is, that is, equated with free consciousness, whilst femininity is associated with the body, passivity and the viscous. The latter induces the nausea inspired by semi-liquid substances that cannot be grasped, by unstable colours (pink and mauve), certain tastes (sugariness) and even certain allergenic dishes (the squishy body of crustacean inside a hard carapace). Yet nausea is surely a reaction to being as such rather than to being-woman. A lot of this imagery is carried over into *The Second Sex*, but its function may not be quite the same. When Beauvoir likens man's 'sex' to a 'neat finger', and woman's to a 'swamp', she is, as Deutscher suggests, writing almost on the edge of angry satire. The same imagery pervades Sartre's novels, which really should be regarded as part of his philosophical oeuvre. But something strange, almost uncanny, happens here. Much of the first chapter of *The Age of Reason* is taken up with descriptions of one of the main female characters. Marcelle is sometimes described as being plump, feminine, soft and 'sugary', and at times as being hard and masculine. In the same novel, the brother-and-sister couple of Ivich and Boris (who always seem almost on the point of incest) are ambiguous to the point of androgyny. 'Gendered' characteristics are, that is, not always consonant with the actually existing gender of those who display them. Similar shifts take place with other categories. One of the classic instances of bad faith is, of course, the seduction scene in the café, where the woman retreats from possible eroticism and desire by withdrawing from the dialogue and letting her hand lie in that of her male companion, 'like a thing'. Bad faith can be read here as a feminine mode of being, but in *The Age of Reason* the walking embodiment of bad faith is Marcelle's lover Matthieu, who deliberately traps himself into a relationship with a woman he knows he does not love. It should also be recalled that the whole novel – written at a time when 300,000 illegal and dangerous abortions were being performed a year – can be read as a plea for the legalization, or at least decriminalization, of abortion. Mauriac found that disgusting too, but it is scarcely the work of an unrepentant masculinist.

*The Second Sex* is rightly read by Deutscher as striving to flesh out a somewhat disembodied phenomenology with a historical and above all economic substance. It is not just the male gaze that sees, possesses and deflowers femininity; it is an entire

politic-economic structure (and it must be said that the seeing–possessing–penetrating paradigm is by no means unique to Sartre). Beauvoir adds a whole new materialist dimension to Sartrean phenomenology. And perhaps it was she who set in motion their joint transition to Marxism.

At times, Deutscher's attempt to keep Sartre and Beauvoir 'in motion' leads him to transpose and transport into the present key scenes from *Being and Nothingness*. The theme of 'the seer seen' now involves a surfer on an Australian beach; the seduction scene in the café becomes 'doing lunch', with the gender roles reversed. The man leaves his hand between the woman's, mutters that 'we were only doing lunch', and remembers that he might have made an appointment at the gym. The transpositions are intriguing failures. Characters in *Being and Nothingness* do indulge in some gentle boating, but *surfing*? The point about the café scene is surely that it is entirely consonant with the socio-sexual mores of the day. Whatever one thinks of the contemporary value or potential of Sartre's early philosophy, his anecdotes, characters and observations all belong in the cafés of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. Any reader of *Being and Nothingness* can still smell the cigarette smoke and almost taste the apricot cocktail that sent Sartre to Berlin to study phenomenology, even though it must have been both sweetish and viscous.

David Macey

## Patocka to come

Barbara Day, *The Velvet Philosophers*, Claridge Press, London, 1999. 344 pp., £16.95 pb., 1 870626 42 7.

Edward F. Findlay, *Caring for the Soul in a Post-modern Age: Politics and Phenomenology in the Thought of Jan Patocka*, State University of New York Press, Albany NY, 2002. 259 pp., £13.95, pb, 0 7914 5486 X.

Aviezer Tucker, *The Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidence from Patocka to Havel*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh PA, 2000. 295 pp., £16.50, pb., 0 8229 5728 0.

During the Communist period, especially with the imposition of 'normalization' following the 1968 Soviet occupation, the Czech Republic became increasingly isolated from the European intellectual life to which it had previously contributed. The dynamism that it has previously shown, it could be argued, was a product of the sort of creative tension that comes of being both

'colonized', as a subordinate part of the Austro-Hungarian empire, yet also educationally and materially relatively privileged. It is perhaps not coincidental that its Jewish–German culture produced two of the intellectual giants of the early twentieth century, Freud and Husserl (their origins in rural Moravia not being as well known as Kafka's in Prague).

That Czech intellectual culture could subsequently be reduced to the state so minutely documented in Barbara Day's *The Velvet Philosophers* is a tragedy. Day's book does not focus on Czech academia as a whole but rather details, in particular, the activities of those Western academics who, in the period after the establishment of Charter 77, went to Czechoslovakia to give clandestine seminars. These arose through the response of a number of Oxford philosophers to a letter of invitation from Julius Tomin, one of a number of Czech dissents who were already organizing clandestine seminars. The eventual establishment of these activities as the Jan Hus Foundation and the involvement of academics from elsewhere in the UK and abroad is fully detailed by Day. It is particularly interesting to read her account of French attempts to take a more 'political' stance on the question of the clandestine seminars, with Derrida as one of the instigators. Yet Derrida is also singled out for criticism, as Day questions the usefulness of a complex and challenging seminar presentation for people in a pressing political situation – a criticism that could equally have been put to any of the many quite abstruse papers presented by English philosophers.

Useful as it is to recall and document these events, Day adopts a tone that seeks to stir feelings of nostalgia for a time and place where philosophy mattered enough for the secret police to make it their business. Perhaps Day tries to lighten the documentary stodginess such an account inevitably risks with a frisson of danger. Yet to let contemporary philosophers paddle in such nostalgia does no justice either to the period Day writes about or to ours. The contemporary call of university administrators may be no less threatening to philosophy as a discipline, if considerably more banal. Unlike Eastern bloc regimes, our 'open society' governments apparently have no interest whatsoever in philosophy, happy to let it wither in favour of promoting more 'relevant' and 'productive' subjects'. Perhaps, with the ever-increasing stress on the link between academia and economic output we are not as far from the state Communists as we'd like to think.

Such active links to Czechoslovakia on the part of Western academics only came after 1977 – that is, after the death in police custody of the Charter 77

founder Jan Patočka. A student of Husserl, Patočka is undoubtedly the great Czech philosopher of the twentieth century. However, his career was dogged by difficulties. In the 1930s, despite his close association with one of Europe's leading philosophers, Patočka could not find a full-time university position in the Czech Republic, a situation which continued under the fascist occupation. Finally getting a post after the war, he was then twice dismissed by the Communists (in 1949 and again in 1972) as the system clamped down. Despite his intellectual reputation he spent only a small percentage of his life in a university post.

Edward Findlay's *Caring for the Soul in a Post-modern Age: Politics and Phenomenology in the Thought of Jan Patočka*, is the first introduction to Patočka's work written in English. As such it is to be welcomed, although the way in which it situates, or fails to situate, Patočka and relies instead on summary of his writings makes it less valuable than it might have been. At a time when much of Patočka's original writings are available in English translation, the value of such extensive summaries is questionable. This is especially so when so little time is spent on engagement with these writings, and when what there is is prey to some rather dubious assumptions: for example, that the present age, post-Husserl and Heidegger, is somehow 'postmetaphysical' and that this, furthermore, can be equated to 'postmodern'. Both Findlay's rash deployment of the term 'postmodern' and his bibliography suggest a lack of familiarity with phenomenological philosophy after Husserl and Heidegger. Indeed, in general, he seems to spend rather too much time batting labels around, telling us that Patočka is neither a phenomenologist nor a classicist, neither a Heideggerian nor a Platonist – time which could have more usefully be spent placing Patočka among his contemporaries. A work that related Patočka to the post-Husserl and Heidegger generation he had so little opportunity to interact with – Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas and Ricoeur – would have been much more enlightening.

Where Findlay's work is largely uncritical of Patočka, Aviezer Tucker heads off in the opposite direction, going so far as to blame him for the state of the Czech Republic a quarter of a century after he died. Tucker's is a peculiar mix of a book, one which combines empirical political analysis of the Czech Republic in the 1990s with an 'assessment' of the philosophy of Patočka and, more interestingly, of his influence on Havel. The latter chapters are rightly critical of the corruption and failures of the post-Communist period. But to blame this on the culture

of dissidents in the pre-1989 period and their failure to elaborate plans for a post-Communist situation, as Tucker does, is judgementalism of the most absurd sort. Day amply details the sufferings of intellectuals persecuted for the most innocuous of actions. A retrospective demand that dissidents, instead of trying to live as they can, should have become revolutionaries with plans for the future is one that is too easy to make from the safety of contemporary academic life. In addition, it overestimates the actual ability of post-Communist governments to shape their own destinies. The transformation of the Eastern bloc was largely carried out according to the dogmas of the prevailing neoliberal economic orthodoxy. To imagine that Czech dissidents could have set a significantly different course if they had had the journey planned out seems implausible.

In opening up Czech philosophy, politics and culture to the English-speaking reader, these three volumes are to be welcomed. Yet, to the extent that they fall short of doing justice to the work of Jan Patočka, they fail to satisfy. As Derrida's *The Gift of Death* has shown, Patočka is a philosopher worth returning to. Erazim Kohák and James Todd have done much over the last fifteen years to make his writings available in English translation. Political circumstances forced Patočka's isolation from the phenomenological tradition, and European academia generally, during his lifetime and so his engagement with his contemporaries – Arendt, Levinas, Ricoeur – is yet to happen.

**Mihail Dafydd Evans**

## Paulinity

Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier, Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 2003. 128 pp., £29.95 hb., £10.95 pb., 0 8047 4470 X hb., 0 8047 4471 8 pb.

Many Anglo-American readers will already be familiar with this book via the work of Slavoj Žižek, as well as through the secondary literature on Badiou that has quietly emerged in recent years. Whatever preconceptions already exist may soon prove inadequate, however, for in spite of its brevity this text provides the clearest development of Badiou's theory of the subject available in English to date. *Saint Paul* serves as an ideal introduction to Badiou's philosophy not only because it incorporates so many of his major themes

(truth, the subject, anti-philosophy) but because this exposure is situated in relation to Paul's militancy. This makes for painless initiation: neologisms like 'evental truth' – often obscure when posed purely philosophically – seem quite lucid when presented in the context of the Damascus Road conversion. This text would be an allegory if it were not for Badiou's insistence on the subjective, materialist tenor of his interpretation.

Badiou's task is not so much the explanation of his own philosophy as the reflection of what is unique in Paul. As suggested by the subtitle, Paul's distinctive contribution is the understanding of subjectivity as necessarily 'universal', which for Badiou (and anachronistically for Paul) entails the quasi-Kantian notion that the witness to evental truth must be singular (even asocial) in her determined proclamation of a truth which is nevertheless valid for the entire universe. Thus the Resurrection of Christ was, for Paul, the Event that marked his creation as a subject and the revelation of the possibility of human immortality – achieved through participation in the truth process (the persevering proclamation of evental truth).

This kind of 'truth' may strike one as anonymous or even contentless, and this is a charge Badiou gladly concedes, for he believes that his two contemporary adversaries have erred specifically in their privileging of such content. On the one hand, we have the identity politics of recent decades, in which various groups are allegedly concerned to assert their particular 'communitarian' values (be they racial, sexual or cultural) to the exclusion of others. Their antithesis is the ethics of Otherness, which professes acceptance of all difference – but only as long as the Other is a 'good' Other, and does not threaten the dominant political and economic order.

Badiou finds Paul in a similar situation: where we are faced with the suffocating expansion of global capital (reinforced by the 'ethical ideology' of Otherness), Paul stared down Roman imperial law, which was rooted in Greek philosophy; where we find communitarian and nationalist fragmentation ('only a homosexual can "understand" what a homosexual is'), Paul struggled against the exceptionalism of Jewish election. Thus in both contexts, 'Ultimately, it is a case of mobilizing a universal singularity both against the prevailing abstractions (legal then, economic now), and against communitarian or particularist protest.'

But although a given sociopolitical content is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for evental truth, Badiou has no difficulty describing the kinds of content such truth-processes have advanced.



In fact, the momentum driving this book is best captured in Badiou's willingness 'to risk the comparison that makes of [Paul] a Lenin for whom Christ will have been the equivocal Marx'. Paul is presented not as the moralizing, anti-Semitic institution-founder so excoriated by Nietzsche, but as an answer to the 'widespread search for a new militant figure', a combative Apostle of the Resurrection for whom advocacy always trumped apologetics. What makes Lenin and Paul revolutionaries together is that the justice they sought was on behalf of all, giving new pertinence to the injunction that there is 'neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female'.

Badiou's reading draws parallels between the external political and religious opposition Paul faced and the theological discourse of his epistles, with ease. In Chapter 4, 'Theory of Discourses', for example, he outlines the three 'subjective dispositions' against which Paul positioned his faithful singularity: prophetic Jewish exceptionalism, Greek cosmic wisdom, and private unutterable mysticism. The familiar nodes of Jewish election and the Greek totality are understood as the two sides of the figure of mastery, since each presupposes the other and both presuppose salvation found in the immanent order (of a law), making universalism impossible. The fourth discourse, that of the silent mystic, relies on the advent of the truth-event, but appeals to an undisclosable private transcendence as verification, typified for Badiou in the 'balanced contradiction' of Pascal. The discourse which resists

all of these, proclamation of the truth-event, contains within itself the three virtues that counter the other discourses: faith, hope, and love (each of which receives explanatory treatment in subsequent chapters). Faith, the incessant force which 'activates the subject in the service of truth', enables the initial break with the global cosmic order. Love, the affirmation of life (life understood here as the unity of thought and action) universalized for all, counters the particularist communitarian narcissism. And hope, the 'simple imperative of continuation', forestalls the temptation to silent hermitic retreat.

The text is not without its imprecisions. Early on, Badiou insists that his motives are not 'historicizing or exegetical' but rather 'subjective through and through', and while in large part this focus is maintained, there are two notable exceptions. The first is the early series of remarks on Paul's life and literature, which presumably serve as methodological signposts but seem at times irrelevant to his project and are dubious on their face. For example, the 'scholarly exegesis' that warrants the exclusion of all but six epistles seems more like an attempt at indirectly garnering hermeneutic credibility. And in his repeated attempts at countering Nietzsche's well-known condemnation of Paul, Badiou

seems occasionally to trade subjective explication for historical refutation, diluting the cogent thesis that Paul can be most relevant today if viewed as a militant figure for the possible but less straightforward claim that Nietzsche 'is not precise enough', and got the facts all wrong.

The double attack announced most audibly by Badiou and Žižek will be strengthened by the English translation of this text. The withdrawal into national, religious and sexual particularisms is spared no more than is the ethics of Otherness (which unwittingly serves as the ideological supplement to rising global capitalism). For some *Saint Paul* will provide a politically salient answer to the impotent appropriation of religion in what passes for contemporary post-secular philosophy. In the face of such vacillating and retreatist academic currents, Badiou's word is that 'Paul himself teaches us that it is not the signs of power that count, nor exemplary lives, but what a conviction is capable of, here, now, and forever.'

**Jared Woodard**