

In the Name of the Father

Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, translated by Barbara Bray, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1997. xix + 574 pp., £25.00 hb., 07456 1523 6.

In the spring of 1962, a 21-year-old woman is standing on a balcony in Paris, anxiously waiting for her father to keep his appointment with her. She waits and waits. Eventually, she sees a woman hurriedly leaving what she knows to be a discreet *maison de rendez-vous* or house of assignation frequented by the wealthy. Moments later, she sees a man leaving the same house, recognizes him as her father and exclaims to herself: 'How could he put me through this ordeal in order to satisfy his desire *first*?' The philandering man is Jacques Lacan; the young woman, Sibylle Lacan, his estranged daughter by his first wife Marie-Louise Blondin. She was, as he well knew, suffering from a variety of psychosomatic disorders and had been hoping to consult him in his professional capacity. In his seminar on the ethics of psychoanalysis (1959–60), Lacan had recently argued that the analysand's feeling of guilt arises because he (the analysand) has at some point 'given ground with respect to his desire' and had formulated the analytic ethic as the interrogative 'have you acted in conformity with the desire that is within you?' By his own standards, he had no reason to feel guilty. This particular – and particularly unpleasant – anecdote does not figure in Elisabeth Roudinesco's new and compendious biography of Lacan; it is drawn from Sibylle Lacan's *Un Père: puzzle* (Gallimard, Paris, 1994), a bitter and almost intolerably moving little memoir that has yet to find an English-language publisher. The two do, however, have points in common. The Lacan who emerges from Roudinesco's biography is at times deeply unpleasant, arrogant and possessed of a strong will to power from a very early age. Yet whilst the unpleasantness of the man does not necessarily devalue the work – it is, as Sartre once remarked of Heidegger's dubious political leanings, possible for a man to be unworthy of his own work – the adoption of a biographical approach to a psychoanalyst does raise some worrying questions.

Roudinesco is without doubt France's most important historian of psychoanalysis. Her *Jacques Lacan & Co.*, published in translation in 1990 and reviewed in *Radical Philosophy* 60, is now a standard

history and work of reference, but the present volume is rather more than a reprise of its contents. It is the richest and fullest biographical study of Lacan to date, and it is unlikely to be bettered for a long time. Roudinesco's knowledge is encyclopaedic, and it is that of an insider who, like some character from Racine, was born in the analytic seraglio and knows its secrets. She herself is a psychoanalyst; her mother Jenny Weiss Roudinesco was one of the pioneers of child analysis in France and a significant protagonist in the Lacanian saga. It was her privileged insider status that allowed Roudinesco to retrace the lines of analytic descent – in which 'analysed' replaces the Biblical 'begat' – which added so much to the richness of her earlier study. Here, she again combines documentary and textual evidence with a kind of oral history to powerful effect in a narrative that is as readable as it is informative.

The original French edition of 1993 was subtitled 'Sketch of a Life, History of a System of Thought', and the decision to drop the subtitle in Barbara Bray's fluent translation was a wise one. This is no sketch, but a full-length portrait, and the history recounted in it reveals that Lacan's thought is much less systematic than it might appear. Roudinesco does not record the autonomous self-development of a system that finds its final expression in the 'classified index of major concepts' appended to the 1966 *Écrits* by Jacques-Alain Miller, Lacan's son-in-law, literary executor and, in his own view, rightful heir, but a process of accretion that resembles Lévi-Strauss's bricolage. For Roudinesco, Miller's interpretation of Lacan's logic was the harbinger of all the dogmatism that was to come. She has little time for the 'legitimists' who have produced a dogma, and is sceptical about the obsession with quasi-mathematical formulae. For Roudinesco, the period in which Lacan explored the properties of Möbius strips, mathematical topography and Borromean knots was an extraterrestrial stay on 'planet Borromeo' that threatened to reduce psychoanalysis to a form of Zen.

Leaving the theoretical stratosphere to which Lacan is so often elevated and confined, Roudinesco digs into history. Some of her discoveries border on the comic. Much has been made of Lacan's famous style, variously described as baroque or Gongorian and sometimes regarded as following or imitating the workings of the unconscious. It proves to be the effect of an almost total inability to write coherent French. In 1938, Lacan submitted a lengthy essay on the family for publication in an encyclopaedia edited by the psychologist Henri Wallon and the historian Lucien Febvre. The style was so convoluted and impenetrable that the unfortunate and long-suffering woman who edited it referred to her work as an exercise in 'translation'. Matters were little better when, after considerable persuasion had been applied, Lacan agreed to publish his *Écrits*. Once more, a great deal of editorial input was required to make the text as readable as it is, and much of the punctuation is the work of François Wahl.

Some of the other concrete details that emerge are not so amusing, and much less edifying. The central issue at stake in Lacan's stormy relationship with the International Psychoanalytic Association was his use of variable or short sessions in training analyses. Despite all the promises to discontinue the practice in a bid to gain official recognition, Lacan continued to use short sessions. And as the sessions grew shorter, Lacan – never a man averse to wealth – became richer. By 1979, Lacan was seeing an average of ten patients per *hour*, and earning some four million francs a year from psychoanalysis. As the technique was adopted by many of Lacan's disciples, it allowed the *École Freudienne* de Paris to proliferate by producing analysts on an almost industrial scale. The numbers involved in the constant round of analysis and attendance at the master's seminar bound them together, but also sowed the seeds for the later dissensions that have left the house of Lacan so divided.

Althusser once famously remarked that Lacan 'thinks nothing but Freud's concepts', but Roudinesco demonstrates otherwise. From the 1930s onwards, Lacan borrowed concepts from Freud and looked to philosophy to provide a theoretical infrastructure. More tellingly, every conceptual borrowing, every glance at a theory, helped him to appear simultaneously the destroyer of old values, the heir to an old tradition and the solitary pioneer of new knowledge. Lacan borrowed from the concrete psychology elaborated by Georges Politzer in the 1930s, from Wallon – whose work on child psychology provides Lacan with the underpinnings for his mirror-stage, from the surrealists, and, perhaps above all, from Kojève,

without whom he could not have elaborated his famous dialectic of desire. Borrowing is of course not an illegitimate activity and Lacan is at his best a wonderful synthesizer of disciplines. At other times, he appears to have borrowed concepts in the same way that some people borrow cigarettes. As every smoker knows, you never get back a borrowed cigarette. Roudinesco describes the young Lacan as displaying a Madame Bovary-like desire for a change of identity, and he borrowed roles too. In 'The Freudian Thing', Lacan cites Jung's words to Freud as they came into New York harbour in 1909: 'They don't realize we're bringing the plague', and added 'I have it from Jung's mouth'. Lacan certainly met Jung, but neither the Jung nor the Freud archives contain any mention of the anecdote that makes Lacan an heir, gives his subversion of the subject a legitimate pedigree, and fosters the illusion that Freud was Lacan *avant la lettre*.

Conceptual borrowings are central to one of the strangest and saddest stories told by Roudinesco. It concerns 'Aimée', or Marguerite Paintaine, to give her her true name. 'Aimée' was a failed novelist who, suffering from paranoia and erotomania, attacked a famous actress with a knife, and who provided the raw material for Lacan's thesis on the relationship between paranoid psychosis and the personality (1932). Although no analysis took place – Lacan was not yet qualified – the two worked together for over a year but Lacan never returned the writings he borrowed. He was more concerned with using her as a source than with treating her as a patient. The full story of Marguerite/Aimée has as many twists and turns and unlikely coincidences as a novel by Balzac or Victor Hugo. After many years in psychiatric hospitals, she was actually employed as a cook-housekeeper by Lacan's father. At this point her son – Didier Anzieu – was actually in analysis with Lacan. Anzieu learned from his mother that she was 'Aimée' and questioned Lacan about the story. Lacan admitted that he had pieced together the story, but had said nothing. A distinguished analyst himself, Didier Anzieu is not one of Lacan's greatest admirers. The story becomes still more intriguing when we learn that Lacan was constantly torn between a desire for fame and recognition, which meant publication of his work, and a fear that, if he did publish, his ideas would be stolen or that his letters would be purloined. When Lacan died, Roudinesco asked Miller if she could look at the Aimée papers, but received no reply to her request. Some things clearly do run in families.

The interns' common room at Sainte-Anne, 1932



And the question of what runs in families is central to Roudinesco's narrative. Lacanian psychoanalysis is notoriously father-centred. In his earliest writings, Lacan attributes all the ills and discontents of modern society to the decline in the importance of the 'paternal imago'. In 1953, he first used the term 'name of the father' in a lecture on 'the individual myth of the neurotic', and it was to become a key term in the work of his maturity. In the system developed in the 1950s, and enshrined in the magnificent 'Rome Discourse' that provided the Lacanian school with its great manifesto, the symbolic function of the father is crucial, the tragedy being that it is rarely performed by actual fathers.

Although Roudinesco does not fully explore the implications of her claims, she strongly suggests that this important innovation is deeply rooted in Lacan's life and family history. The wealth of the Lacan dynasty was originally made from the manufacture of vinegar, and he spent a stifling childhood in a family where religiosity combined with quarrels and rivalries in the very best tradition of the bourgeois novel. His middle name was Emile, that of the paternal grandfather he loathed so much that his memory provoked an extraordinarily bitter outburst in a public

seminar. The birth certificate was signed by father and grandfather, and no doubt hastened the decline of the former's imago. Emile was the dominant male, the man who punished Jacques-Emile Lacan by making him stand in the corner and whose behaviour taught him what the adult Lacan called 'the essential act of cursing God'.

Questions of paternity also appear in the next generation. When Lacan's daughter Judith was born in 1941, her mother was still officially married to Georges Bataille. To divorce him, she would have had to declare her Jewish identity and lose the minimal protection afforded by Bataille's name. Judith was registered as Bataille's daughter. Lacan raised an adored, and adoring, daughter who bore the name of another, and not the name of her father. It was only on Bataille's death in 1962 that she was legitimized, and she was 'Judith Lacan' only for a few short years before becoming Judith Miller. Roudinesco does not attempt to 'analyse' Lacan, but does hint that the origins of the name of the father do lie in these imbroglios over paternity and descent. Given that developments in psychoanalysis are so often bound up with the lives of psychoanalysts and those around them – there would have been no psychoanalysis without Freud's

self-analysis, and no discovery of the fort–da game and all that it implies, without his grandson – one has to ask if the history of psychoanalysis is anything more than a story of and about psychoanalysts?

Roudinesco does not ask these questions, let alone answer them. She does tell a story that has to be read. She is critical of Lacan, or more specifically of tendencies within Lacanian psychoanalysis. And her criticisms appear to have been taken badly; there is little

sign of collaboration on the part of the Lacan–Miller side of the family. Yet her faith in psychoanalysis remains intact. The rather touching final lines dedicate the book to the silent history of the analysts who do not write books, but who want more than a formula or a matheme. And, as Roudinesco demonstrates, they can find still more than that in Lacan.

David Macey

Hobgoblin's gone

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto: A Modern Edition*, with an Introduction by Eric Hobsbawm, Verso, London and New York, 1998. 87 pp., £8.00 hb., 1 85984 898 2.

It is 150 years since the publication of the most famous pamphlet in history, the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. It was commissioned by the newly renamed Communist League, and although Engels had some input we owe the final form to Marx. It is a work of literary genius as well as of enormous political and historical importance. The two most remarkable things about it were, first of all, its address – instead of being an appeal to all, it called on a specific class to assume its historical destiny – and second, communism was argued not as a timeless truth but as the historically conditioned solution to the contradictions of modern society, issuing in the movement of the class brought forth by capital itself as its ‘gravedigger’.

Thanks to its red endpapers and stylish red ribbon placemaker, the edition before us, issued to mark this anniversary, might be called the coffee-table version – indeed a Verso spokesman described it as ‘elegant enough to grace a coffee table’. It was reported that Barney’s department store in New York featured the book, along with a selection of red lipsticks, in its windows as ‘conceptual art’. Barney’s creative director Simon Doonan suggested the book could, if given an attached handle, ‘make a snazzy accessory to a designer dress’. Barnes & Noble window displays featured the book, and Verso are well pleased with the sales. Numerous more or less light-hearted pieces on the anniversary appeared in the newspapers. In sum, Marx has had his fifteen minutes of fame in the bourgeois media.

Let us first clear up some confusion about when exactly the anniversary was. There is no doubt that the *Manifesto* first appeared at the end of February 1848, although as late as 24 January 1848 the Central Committee of the Communist League wrote to Brussels notifying Marx that ‘if the “Manifesto of the C. Party”,

the writing of which he undertook at the *last* congress, has not arrived in London by Tuesday, February 1 of this year, measures will be taken against him’. Yet, in spite of the date appearing prominently on the cover, virtually as a subtitle, the *Manifesto* has been persistently misrepresented as appearing in 1847, not least by Marx and Engels themselves. Engels perpetrated this error in his preface to the American edition of his *Condition of the Working Class in England*; even in today’s *Collected Works* (Vol. 26, p. 441) this particular mistake is repeated. In the edition before us a different mistake occurs in that the prelims state that the *Manifesto* was ‘first published in English 1848’. But the 1848 edition, published in London to be sure, was in German, while the first English translation did not appear until 1850 in Harney’s *Red Republican* (‘A frightful hobgoblin stalks throughout Europe.’). To cap it all, Verso issued a press release stating that ‘April 1998 is the 150th anniversary of the first publication in English of *The Communist Manifesto*’ – and this was uncritically repeated in various papers. April was not the anniversary of anything, German or English.

Although the date of the first edition (in twenty-three pages) is not in doubt, the dating of the second – the so-called ‘thirty-pager’ – is a problem. Hobsbawm, following received opinion, assigns this to April or May of 1848. However, Wolfgang Meiser has argued that the thirty-page edition was printed neither in 1848 nor in London, but, in accordance with a decision of the Communist League’s central office in Cologne, around the turn of the year 1850/51 in that city; it was deliberately disguised by the use of the imprint of the first edition produced in London (‘*Das Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei vom Februar 1848*’ in MEGA-Studien 1996/1). Apart from this, the scholarly quality of the first part of Hobsbawm’s Introduction

dealing with the circumstances of its publication, and its subsequent influence, is excellent. Those in search of further instruction should consult the following three recent works: Hal Draper, *The Adventures of the Communist Manifesto* (Center for Socialist History, Berkeley, CA; 1994); Rob Beamish, 'The Making of the Manifesto', in *Socialist Register 1998*, edited by L. Panitch and C. Leys (Merlin, 1998); F. Diamanti, 'The Influence of Cabet on the Manifesto', *Studies in Marxism 1997*.

The translation used in this 'modern edition' is that of 1888, which was lightly edited by Engels, and is supplied here with a few extra notes. Following it is Engels's Preface to that translation. As Hobsbawm argues in the latter part of his Introduction, Marx showed amazing prescience in the first part of the *Manifesto* in that the world of capitalism he described barely existed at that time and has only now achieved its true world-historical dimensions. Hobsbawm concludes that, although Marx overestimated the revolutionary potential of the proletariat, capitalism is still riven with contradictions; but he refuses to give a name to what might supersede it.

1848 was not only the year of the *Manifesto*, of course, it was also the year of revolution in Europe. Three more printings of the *Manifesto* were rushed out in the spring to supply the comrades with material. Hobsbawm affirms, without explanation, that in the revolution the tactics outlined for Germany in the *Manifesto* were not in fact applied. Let us look at what the *Manifesto* says communists should do:

In Germany they fight with the bourgeoisie whenever it acts in a revolutionary way, against the absolute monarchy, the feudal squirearchy, and petty-bourgeois conditions. But they never cease, for a single instant, to instil into the working class the clearest possible recognition of the hostile antagonism between the bourgeoisie and proletariat, in order that ... after the fall of the reactionary classes the fight against the bourgeoisie itself may immediately begin.

After the revolution Marx outlined exactly the same perspective in *Addresses to the Communist League*, this time summarized with the formula 'permanent revolution'. But in the events themselves, until at least the autumn of 1848, Marx concentrated entirely on using his Cologne newspaper to ginger up the radical bourgeoisie; he ignored the second half of the policy, and fell out with the local branch of the League, which wanted to pursue an out-and-out proletarian agitation.

The same issues arose in the Russian revolution. In his reflections on the 1905 edition, Trotsky reinvented 'permanent revolution', and in 1917 the Bolsheviks applied the theory to legitimate the October revolution albeit (against the Menshevik orthodoxy that Russia was too backward to sustain a socialist transformation) with the important proviso (taken from Marx's Preface to the Russian edition of the *Manifesto*) that it spark off revolution in the West. In this context, a



reflection of Engels on conditions in Germany in the 1850s is very striking. He wrote to Weydemeyer (12 April 1853):

I have a presentiment that, thanks to the perplexity and flabbiness of all the others, our Party will one fine morning be forced to assume power and finally to carry out the measures that are of no direct interest to us, but are in the general interests of the revolution and the specific interests of the petty-bourgeoisie; on which occasion, driven by the proletarian populace, bound by our own printed declarations and plans – more or less falsely interpreted, more or less passionately thrust to the fore in the Party struggle – we shall be constrained to undertake communist experiments and perform leaps the untimeliness of which we know better than anyone else. In so doing we lose our heads – only physically speaking, let us hope – a reaction sets in, and until the world is able to pass *historical* judgment on such events, we are considered not only beasts, which wouldn't matter, but also *bêtes* [stupid], which is much worse.

In the present period of reaction, communists are indeed considered stupid; that is why poor old Marx can be patronised so. The spectre of communism no longer haunts Europe.

Chris Arthur

Life, the universe and everything different

Keith Ansell Pearson, *Viroid Life: Perspectives on Nietzsche and the Transhuman Condition*, Routledge, London and New York, 1997. 203 pp., £37.50 hb., £11.99 pb., 0 415 15434 0 hb., 0 415 15435 9 pb.

Keith Ansell Pearson, ed., *Deleuze and Philosophy: The Difference Engineer*, Routledge, London, 1997. x + 277 pp., £47.50 hb., £14.99 pb., 0 415 14269 5 hb., 0 415 14270 9 pb.

Despite the caricature that resides all too firmly within the popular imagination, philosophers rarely concern themselves with 'life, the universe and everything'. This is particularly true in an intellectual environment still struggling to come to terms with the core task of modern philosophy. For modern philosophers, it was precisely the holistic approach to the subject matter of philosophy that sowed the seeds of illusion and error in ancient thought. Only the sharp edges of a differentiated approach to life could cut through the matted undergrowth of the convoluted scholasticism that pervaded late medieval philosophy. As we see in Kant – perhaps the finest exponent of differentiated critique – the task of modern philosophy is to sort out 'life, the universe and everything' into finely packaged concepts and categories. The contemporary legacy of this modern approach is a preoccupation with the limits of conceptual analysis: 'when does an ontological question become an epistemological one?', 'when does a moral claim become a political right?', and so on. The nature or meaning of 'life, the universe and everything' is removed from the field of contemporary philosophical problems and placed in the theological arena or, alternatively, within the domain of theoretical physics.

The terrain of contemporary thought has been deeply scarred by this excessive drive to differentiate, demarcate and delimit life's richly interlocking aspects. The challenge has come from two antithetical directions. First, there are those critics who explicitly strive to transcend the limits of analysis by reinventing a more plausible version of holism than that offered by the ancients. While Hegel is the most notable example, we might think of communitarianism as a contemporary variant. Second, there are those who seek to undermine the legitimacy of conceptual limits by flitting playfully across established boundaries of thought. One could connect Romantic critics of modernism to contemporary 'postmoderns' in this way. Rather than pursue an overall coherence within 'life, the universe and everything', this second type of critic pursues an undermining (aesthetic, anti-foundational, relativ-

ist) incoherence within life. Despite their resolutely opposed agendas, both types of critic end up with a disturbing lurch back towards holism.

This has led many contemporary theorists to stick with an albeit reconstructed version of the Kantian agenda, which adopts then adapts the project of differentiated critique. It is to Ansell Pearson's credit that he reminds us that there is a way of understanding life within Nietzsche's work (and that of his foremost contemporary advocate, Deleuze) that neither returns us to Kant nor takes us down the path of either explicit or surreptitious holism. With these two volumes he invites us to consider the possibility that while life must be conceptualized as a whole this does not negate the cause of differentiated critique; rather it fulfils it in a way only hinted at within (neo-) Kantian analyses. Whereas the Kantian drive for differentiation resides in the desire to order life, the Nietzschean and Deleuzean preoccupation with differentiation arises from a desire to surf the wave of life itself. As Ansell Pearson reveals, it is only by way of a transversal/transhuman analysis of life that we are able properly to advance the cause of difference and differentiated critique.

Along the way he is careful to distance himself from two common misconceptions that arise when (neo-) Nietzscheans talk about life, anthropomorphism and technologism. The anthropomorphic strain in Nietzscheanism is that which defines life in terms of its will, the will to power: 'to assert that life is will-to-power can only be the beginning of a philosophy of life, not its entire, consummate definition' (*Viroid Life*, p. 108). When life is dressed up solely as the will to power it tends to assume the garb of humanity, with all the normative baggage that this entails. Interestingly, and this is a real sign of the times, Ansell Pearson is drawn into an engagement with a more surreptitious form of normativism, which comes cloaked in the technological and technologized language of the 'cyber-gurus'. I take it to be one of the central, and most persuasive, claims of *Viroid Life* that the current fashion for viewing human evolution as superseded by the evolution of new cyber-technologies is a particu-

larly pernicious form of crypto-normativism – one that sucks the life out of humanity so that it can attempt a transfusion into the inert binary switches of computer hardware. Such an avowedly anti-humanist agenda, as Ansell Pearson points out, typically fails to recognize the implicit humanism which underpins its celebrations of the cybernetic.

Between anthropomorphism and (cyber-) technogism lies the transhuman. A transhuman understanding of life is one that refutes all ‘extraneous’ or ‘exogenous’ accounts of its evolutionary movement and considers instead a principle of non-linear, internal differentiation to be the very ‘stuff’ of life. A viroid conception of life is one which aims to give full expression to this founding principle. Where the moderns and their (modern) critics sought to comprehend ‘life the universe and everything’ in various ways, Ansell Pearson sidesteps this concern of modernity by invoking a Nietzschean and Deleuzian engagement with ‘life, the universe and everything different’.

The veracity of a viroid approach to life is explored through an interrogation of the domain of biology. The aim is to expose life’s immanently viroid nature and, concomitantly, expose the attempts by Darwin, Dawkins and others to suppress or control this differentiating component within nature. As he reminds us, this may not be a reassuring position to adopt, undermining as it does many of the assumptions we have about life and our place in it, but the task of viroid philosophy is to engineer difference rather than manufacture comfort.

As most of the contributors to *Deleuze and Philosophy* make clear, the aim of this style of philosophy is not lovingly to embrace difference as if it were the lapdog of human thought (which, after all, is the liberal appropriation of difference within contemporary thought) but to recognize difference within every trope of philosophy, as if it were a poison coursing through the veins of all concepts and categories. Only then will the processes of immanent differentiation advanced in the work of Deleuze become distinguishable from the Kantian task of differentiating the realm of the transcendent – ‘engineering thought rather than thinking in the image of philosophy’, as Diane Beddoes puts it. There is plenty of evidence in this volume of insightful and innovative essays that the engineers have been busily constructing new ways of thinking.

That said, there is an incredible lack of novelty whenever ‘politics’ is mentioned. There is more than a nod in the direction of politics on numerous occasions, but almost inevitably there is a failure to situate Deleuze within current debates in political theory.

While it is unreasonable to expect everybody interested in Deleuze to deal with contemporary political philosophy, there is a sense of disdain towards other traditions of contemporary political thought that smacks of Deleuzian home comforts. With regard to the politics that flow from reading Deleuze, the difference engineer begins to look very ‘samey’. If there really is hope for sidestepping the Kantian agenda of differentiated critique in the name of difference, rather than explicit or surreptitious holism, then the politics of this project needs to be more finely drawn out than it is by the contributors to this volume.

Iain MacKenzie

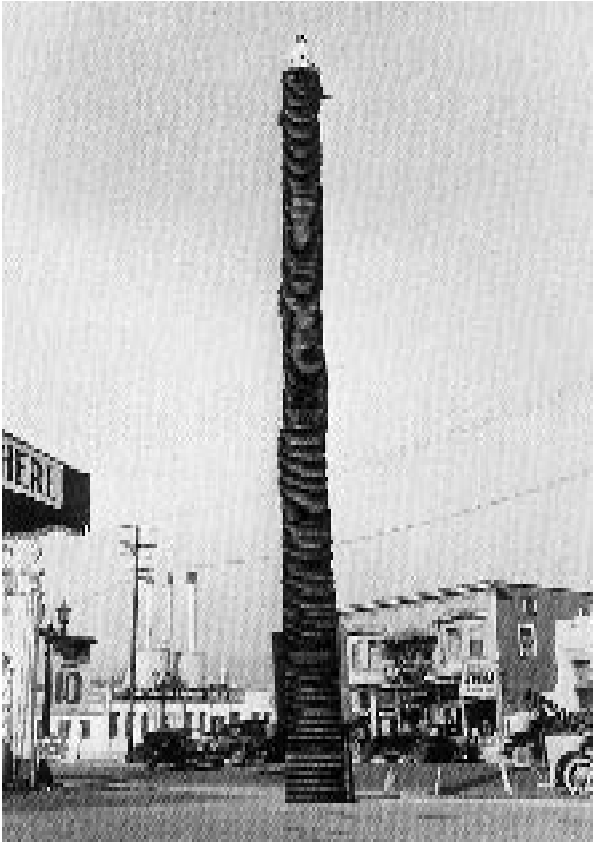
A need not met

Maureen Ramsay, *What’s Wrong with Liberalism? A Radical Critique of Liberal Political Philosophy*, Leicester University Press, London and Washington DC, 1997. vii + 271 pp., £14.99 pb., 0 7185 1811 X.

At a time when liberalism reigns supreme, serving the world over as capitalism’s official philosophy, a genuinely radical critique is urgently needed. For its vision of the nature of human beings and their relations with each other has not only come to form the ‘common sense’ of its erstwhile ‘moderate’ critics (from former conservatives such as Kenneth Minogue – whose 1963 *The Liberal Mind* remains a cogent critique – to former social democrats such as Tony Blair), but also permeates the thought of all too many of its left opponents. So what might ‘an accessible and comprehensive critique of the key concepts that underpin liberal political philosophy’ (jacket blurb) look like?

Such a book might examine liberalism’s basic convictions, principles and conceptual tools, countering its arguments at their strongest. It would seek first to uncover its internal tensions and contradictions and second, *pace* Rorty and others, to confront them with other reasonably plausible convictions; and it would do all this in an explicitly historical and political context. Such a book might be either forbiddingly large or interestingly brief. It would be as accessible as possible; cogently and carefully argued; and clear about its limitations. It might, perhaps, focus its discussions on a single extended example such as health care or employment.

The last desideratum apart, Ramsay’s book – a sequel to her impressive *Human Needs and the Market* – promises much. Her intention ‘to explain and criticize liberal concepts and values in order to expose the



empirical, theoretical, practical and moral deficiencies at the heart of liberal thought' (p. 2) is admirable, as is her historical frame of reference. There are chapters on human nature, freedom, equality, justice, rights, women's and children's rights, the public and the private, and wants and needs, all of which seek to explain and to refute. Things look good, despite the absence of Rawls's *Political Liberalism*, Bellamy's *Liberalism and Modern Society*, and Frazer and Lacey's *The Politics of Community*. That promise, unhappily, soon turns to disappointment.

First, and not least, something has gone seriously wrong at the copyediting and proofreading stages. Page after page appears as though a bucket of commas had been emptied over it – for example: 'Locke also, understands freedom as the right to non-interference' (p. 17 – the ubiquity of this error suggests that Leicester University Press thinks that verbs *require* to be separated from their subjects by a comma). Even quotations are thus mispunctuated. Nor is the book's semi-literate production limited to misusing commas: possessives are too often mis-apostrophized; Walzer appears as 'Waltzer' (p. 115); and, more importantly, clumps of words occasionally masquerade as sentences – for example, '[T]he ground for equal rights being the common humanity which transcends irrelevant and arbitrary differences' (p. 167). Some might think that this hardly matters. But this pernicious view offers needless hostages to the Right. Grammar and

punctuation, both central to the meaning of written English – as this book inadvertently demonstrates – are basic tools.

Perhaps Ramsay's arguments should not be dismissed on that account, since she offers a range of useful comments on aspects of liberal thought and its inadequacy. But the trouble is that too many of her arguments appear to have been constructed in haste, so that they merely repudiate what requires to be refuted.

For example, while she rightly distinguishes classical from social liberalism, she regards Kant as *unproblematically* a representative of the former; pays no regard to Mill's arguably transitional role between the two; and, though writing for an Anglo-American audience, omits any mention of Hobhouse. Thus, just because 'Kantian versions of rationality break the link between the interests of the individual and their moral responsibility, by insisting on the primacy of the rational status of duty over the interests and inclinations of the individual', it will not do to lump together 'Kant's idea of rational autonomous agents as ends in themselves and the utilitarian conception of rational individuals as best judges of their own interest' (p. 36). Nor would one gather from Ramsay's simply listing him among 'classical' liberals, defending the 'traditional liberal concept of freedom' (p. 38), that Kant thought of *obedience* to the moral law as freedom's supreme instantiation, so that he might be invoked *against* the liberal view of freedom as negative; or that he – no less than such contemporary critics of liberalism as Taylor (who describes himself as a liberal) and Macpherson – takes positive liberty to be 'a cluster of concepts, at the heart of which is the notion that self-rule or self-determination is valuable in itself' (p. 57). Again, Mill's *difficulties* with liberalism in respect of higher and lower pleasures are misrepresented (and his views on the subjection of women, among others, unfairly oversimplified); and the opportunity missed to press questions of theory and practice. Seeking (whether successfully or not) to avoid just those 'moral judgements about what is desirable and valuable' (p. 104) which Ramsay accuses him of importing, Mill does not argue 'that if people experienced both quantitative and qualitative pleasures they would prefer the latter' (p. 103), but rather that the judgement of those who actually experience both is decisive in determining how pleasures are to be evaluated in these terms. Nor does she exploit his manifest contradictions over slavery in her critique of preference satisfaction.

But perhaps these matters, and even my strictures about grammar and punctuation, are in the end quib-

bles over detail, execution and – what is inevitably problematic in any book with Ramsay’s admirable ambitions – depth; and perhaps they therefore miss its overall achievement. After all, were these the only drawbacks, the book might nonetheless remain a useful refutation of central liberal conceptualizations, values and attitudes with which ‘students of politics, government and moral and political philosophy’ (blurb) might arm themselves against contemporary doxa. With real regret, however, I cannot offer such a positive view. For arguments too often fail to hit their target; and liberalism’s strengths are too regularly underestimated. Not least because I share Ramsay’s conviction about the importance of such a project, I do not say this lightly, and so shall conclude by briefly indicating some of my chief reservations about the substance of her case.

Liberals do not, or need not, ‘take as given the inevitability of capitalist institutions’ (p. 4) – otherwise they’d hardly be eagerly defending them against unbelievers in, for example, the *Journal of Applied Philosophy*. Nor must liberals hold that ‘human beings are motivated by self-interest, in that each seeks to maximise their own happiness, pleasure or satisfaction’ (p. 12), as Ramsay herself notes in her later discussions of Kant and Rawls. Liberalism’s achievement in universalizing rationality is underestimated: all, rather than ‘some [,] liberals associate rationality with impartiality’ (p. 16). Further, to say that Marxists claim that people don’t ‘always know or pursue their own interests in the rational way that liberal theory implies’ (p. 22) is neither quite accurate nor, even if it were, sufficient to indict the liberal conception of rationality as *impartial* – a conception Marxists might be thought to share. Or consider this argument. ‘Marxism’s proper insistence on the social and historical nature of human beings provides a challenge to the liberal idea of the abstract individual with universal capacities and characteristics. If human beings are naturally social and mutually independent, then co-operation rather than competition is a natural relationship and a basis for social organization’ (p. 24). But the challenge here is to the abstract nature of liberalism’s individual, not to individuals’ universally having certain capacities: on the contrary, the latter is the *basis* of Marx’s claim about human beings’ natural sociability. And as regards liberalism’s ‘freedom’: certainly it is the case that ‘[I]f judgements, ascriptions and descriptions of freedom depend on evaluating the worth of what we are free to do, then it is unclear how negative liberty can be a value-free notion’ (p. 45); but liberals of course deny the conditional. In a parallel manner, it

is because ‘there must be some such [non-procedural, but substantive] solution [to the problem of competing conceptions of the good] if the good life or the good society is to be realized’ (p. 130) that almost all liberals abjure the good in favour of the right. In fact, most liberals would *concur* with Ramsay’s conclusion that ‘the notion of the public good is an ideological device which endorses partial interests which it represents as general interests’ – but *not* because ‘an account of the public good cannot be derived by aggregating the sum of individual interests’ (p. 34) so much as because *any* notion of the public good is regarded as ideological. Even those libertarian liberals (such as Machan) who are currently trying to overturn traditional aversion to any positive notion of the good life (again something Ramsay ignores) would argue that the *public* good is nonetheless no more than such a sum.

But to continue in this vein would be unhelpful. Suffice it to say that the need this book addresses remains unmet.

Bob Brecher

Minding the gap

Bernard Burgoyne and Mary Sullivan, eds, *The Klein–Lacan Dialogues*, Rebus Press, London, 1997. 228 pp., £14.99 pb., 1 900877 06 6.

This book will be of interest to all those who want to deepen their understanding of Lacan’s ideas and at the same time get a clearer sense of how these differ from those of the Kleinian strand of object-relations theory dominant in Britain. Its collection of papers and follow-up discussions by a group of well-known Kleinian and Lacanian psychoanalysts arose out of a series of lectures given during 1994 and 1995 in the interest of establishing some common ground between them. It provides an exhilarating opportunity to gain insight into Klein and Lacan’s theoretical approaches and, most illuminatingly, what they mean in the context of what goes on during the psychotherapeutic encounter between therapist and patient. In what ways would Lacanian therapy be different from Kleinian therapy? The papers also offer an engaging way of exploring some of the psychoanalytic detail which underpins the gap between modern and postmodern ways of thinking.

Most of the papers, presented in pairs – one on Klein followed by another on Lacan – are remarkably clearly articulated, well-organized, imaginatively con-

ceived and sensitive to the need for communication in their attempt to establish a conversation between two such potentially unneighbourly approaches. The papers range over issues which lie at the heart of psychoanalytic concerns: the infant and child in psychotherapy, interpretation and technique, phantasy, sexuality, counter-transference, the unconscious, ending therapy, and the place of Klein and Lacan in the 1990s. The papers themselves create a spacious climate of mutual tolerance and respect, as concepts and practice are patiently and sensitively explained and elaborated, and theoretical nettles gently identified if not always entirely grasped. But passion, dissent and, sometimes, exasperation do, inevitably, come to the surface at certain moments in the discussion when fundamental, seemingly irresolvable differences of opinion and philosophical stance are acknowledged.

For Kleinians, unlike Lacanians, drives are part of human nature, on the frontier of the biological and the psychical, and there is such a thing as relatively normal development, even if there are multiple failures in achieving it. Meanings can predate language, there are some biological absolutes of the human condition which are not just functions of the way culture organizes us through difference – we are born, differentiated by sex and we die. And in the realm of sexuality, Kleinians argue that successful, embodied sexual relationships *are* possible, if we can be less prone to omnipotent phantasy and more able to relate to other people's difference without the destructive and falsifying effects of our own projections. In contrast, Lacan argues that there can be no genuine sexual relation between men and women because the element mediating between the sexes is never an object but always a signifier. Lacan argues that we can attempt to bridge the gap between man and woman, as culture has done, by introducing the phallus as the signifier of power and strength, which then signifies difference. However this is quite different from the actual penis, which exists only in the real of what Kleinians call the paranoid-schizoid psychical position.

By the end of the book it is very clear that there are, between Klein and Lacan, deep-rooted differences in ideas about development, common sense, reality, the psyche, and in the Lacanian insistence that unconscious phantasies can only be discovered within the scaffolding of language, 'nesting' within the gap between two signifiers. For Freud and Klein, phantasy is the emotional expression of bodily drives, whereas for Lacan it stems only from the linguistic action of the signifier, 'like a little window through which the subject's reality is filtered' or like a magnet which will attract certain images and words to it which organize

and regulate the relation to meaning and desire. For Lacan, the pre-verbal world explored by Klein is still a world governed by a system of differentiated units – that is, expressions and gestures – so meaning can never be divorced from signification. In Lacan's theory there can be no correspondence between the ego and 'reality', including psychic reality. The ego, consciousness and common sense contain nothing that can be relied on except the surface symptoms, which allows the analyst to hear the noise of the open question that, Lacan argues, neurosis always represents. This lies at the heart of the unconscious and Lacanian analysis. Who am I identified with and who is the object of my desire? For Lacan analysis involves an 'unspooling' or deconstruction of the ego's central Imaginary identifications. The phallus or phallic signifier represents what makes order out of this Imaginary chaos – culture – but also symbolizes the gap, the inaccessible cultural part of the mother, earthed in the Symbolic, which makes her unable to yield to our desire for absolute possession and completion.

In spite of the powerful intellectual and imaginative scope of both the Kleinian and the Lacanian papers, after reading this book it is difficult to avoid the feeling that there is very little basis for genuine dialogue between them, because each theory, through its very conceptual precision and coherence, seems to leave out so much about what it is to be a human being. The assumption that we all begin life, whatever the quality of our parental care, in a world of symbolic breasts and penises riven through, like ourselves, with the intense emotions of love and hate seems scarcely more convincing, without the aid of some other theoretical contributions, than the assumption that we are all inscribed from birth with an irresolvable gap in our being which will eventually be captured in the enigma of the contradictory meanings of the phallus and the world of signification it engenders. Both seem to say plenty, but not everything, that is important.

Although both approaches offer a wealth of insights and ways of thinking human existence, neither seems satisfactory on its own. Perhaps the fact that many patients seem to experience relief from suffering in both forms of therapy suggests that something important has evaded adequate articulation in language. Perhaps both Lacanian and Kleinian therapists actually work with their patients much more intuitively and eclectically than their theories suggest.

In his paper, Eric Laurent suggests that in Winnicott's version of object-relations theory, the idea of the transitional object manages to retain the enigmatic quality of psychic reality which Lacanians find

so valuable in Lacan's idea of the meaning of the phallus. Laurent argues that this idea of the subtle and delicate fusion of inner and outer world, phantasy and the external world held together in the same fragile symbolic space rescues us from the positivist dimensions of some versions of Kleinian theory and practice. So we could argue that through their recognition of the crucial role of the mother's emotional as well as symbolic containment in our eventual entry into language (what Bollas calls her 'grammar' or 'way of being with the baby') and the possibility of achieving some fulfilment in embodied sexual relations between men and women as well as between 'masculine' and 'feminine' signifiers in art and literature, we need to invite both Winnicott and Bion to join in a dialogue with Lacan. Both sides need to develop the conceptual space for something more intuitive and empathic with more theoretical fraying around the edges. We cannot have a perfect theory, modern or postmodern, any more than we can be perfect human beings. Winnicott's work, together with that of Bion, McDougall and Bollas, suggests that psychoanalytic theory and practice needs to be nuanced and open-ended to do justice to the complexity of psychical reality and human existence. In this way the potential for common ground which seems to exist in much clinical practice might begin to show itself more clearly.

Rosalind Minsky

Metempsychosis

Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, translated by Daniel W. Smith, Athlone Press, London, 1997. xx + 282 pp., £45.00 hb., 0 485 11440 2.

When this book was originally published in France in 1969, Klossowski had been writing essays on Nietzsche for over thirty years. In between he had been a monk, an expert on Sade, a writer of perverse novels and an actor; afterwards he was to become a painter. Throughout these metamorphoses he maintained that he was a monomaniac, his guiding obsession being to interrogate the idea of personal identity, pursuing its instability and necessity in the face of the multiple impulses of the body. This work is in many respects the summation of Klossowski's own thought, as well as being possibly the most profound and sophisticated reading to date of Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal return. Its appearance was enormously influential among some of the most notable thinkers in France at the time,

including Deleuze and Guattari, Lyotard, Blanchot and Foucault (who wrote that it was 'the greatest book of philosophy I have read'). The founding tenets of 'libidinal economics' or 'the philosophy of desire' here find their contemporary source, expounded more subtly than in Lyotard or Deleuze and Guattari. Nevertheless, the work can be fiendishly dense; perhaps if more work had been done (by Klossowski and others) to unravel its arguments, the movement of libidinal materialism would not have been met with such derision.

For Klossowski, Nietzsche's critique of the forms and results of knowledge as 'error[s] without which a certain species cannot live', and as 'abbreviations of the impulses [or drives]' does not reveal a gulf between appearances and an unknowable thing-in-itself, but should rather be seen in terms of an analysis of the organization of impulses into variable and unstable forms: first the brain itself, then the ego and the 'fixity of language'. Klossowski appears to offer a psychological reading here, but in fact he powerfully undermines objections that Nietzsche's critique of truth is internally inconsistent with his claims for the doctrines of will to power and eternal return. He constructs a theory of the impulses or drives to demonstrate that thought, representation and language depend on an organization of emotions, mental and energetic traces, and variable intensities without which signification would be impossible. Nietzsche is shown to be less concerned with making abstract universal claims for his own theory than with exploring the boundaries at which thought itself must dissolve into incoherence.

Klossowski continues his argument through psychobiography. Nietzsche 'pursues, not the realization of a system, but the application of a programme'; he takes himself as an experiment in the limits of experience after the death of God. Not only truth and ideals, but the contents of inner life, are all lies or surface phenomena; Nietzsche is led to dream of an 'authentic depth' in the chaos of the impulses. The major problem that recurs throughout the book is: how is it possible to reduce thought to the action of *intensities* without giving up the will to give *intentions* and goals to one's life?

This is the vicious circle of the book's title, and it is illuminated by Klossowski's theory of the eternal return. Nietzsche expresses this idea as an ethical dictum, followed by an obscure warning: 'act as though you had to relive your life innumerable times – for in one way or another, you must recommence and relive it'. Klossowski insinuates that this idea only seems like an 'absurd phantasm' if it is taken to

imply the return of an *identical* self for eternity. In fact, the eternal return expresses the idea that in *one life*, I must pass through many identities, but I must continually *forget* these previous identities in order to sustain my coherence as a self. However, in glimpsing the *fortuitousness* of my present incarnation, I must affirm the fortuitousness of the past, in order to find myself as I am now; and the final rub is that I must accept that I will forget this moment too. In a kind of momentary anamnesis, all the intensive possibilities of the self are glimpsed as part of a greater coherence, of which my present self is only part – ‘a renewed version of metempsychosis’. That I must forget this vision in order to live and will is a sign of the vicious circle of which I form a forever eccentric part.

Klossowski concludes that Nietzsche, for six days before his final collapse, attained something like a participation in this greater coherence, at the price of madness. Nietzsche is presented as something like a hybrid of Christ and shaman, an explorer and sufferer of an almost impossible experience – the eternal return – the idea of which, Klossowski argues, may be the only vision of totality possible after the death of God. Furthermore, he argues persuasively that the influence of other contemporary forces, notably the reduction of intentions to intensity in science and the ‘planetary management’ of capitalism, which decomposes behaviour in order to invent new reflexes, conspire to make the thought of the vicious circle an inescapable one for the future.

Christian Kerslake

Disparate disputes

Karen J. Warren, ed., *Ecofeminism: Woman, Culture, Nature*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1997. xi + 454 pp., £41.95 hb., £20.99 pb., 0 253 33031 hb., 0 253 210577 pb.

The diversity of subject material dealt with in this substantial volume of essays (twenty-five in all) may be somewhat daunting to the reader interested but not well-versed in the common themes held to ground the unified field of ecofeminist discourse. Contributors to the collection come from a wide range of disciplines – anthropology, communication studies, philosophy, languages, education, science and sociology – and include a number of individuals actively involved in working with indigenous communities and international organizations on a variety of environmental projects.

The book is divided into three sections, dealing with empirical data, interdisciplinary orientations and philosophical perspectives. Contrary to expectations, neither Warren’s introduction nor the explicitly philosophical third of the volume gives the reader much indication as to the point of such a division or the assumed connection between the many, seemingly disparate, positions, arguments, and polemics espoused therein. Despite the fact that Warren is cited throughout as the voice of authority in ecofeminist discourse, her own contribution is somewhat disappointing in its theoretical simplicity and runs the risk of discouraging the serious reader with its overtly polemical style: ‘water ... is an ecofeminist issue’; ‘environmental racism is an ecofeminist issue’; ‘living conditions ... are an ecofeminist issue’; ‘sexist–naturist language is an ecofeminist issue’, and so on. Thankfully however, Warren’s style is not indicative of the approach taken by the majority of contributors.

The first section, ‘Taking Empirical Data Seriously’, includes local studies of particular environmentally challenged indigenous populations as well as broader engagements with the concrete issues concerning the efficacy of environmental policies based on feminist theory and practices. The second section, ‘Interdisciplinary Perspectives’, falls into two parts. The first contains writing with a general orientation toward the spheres in which women live their lives and the interactions out of which their experiences are composed (women and leisure, women and work, women and children, women and war). The second displays a more academic engagement with the relation between feminism, ethics and the role of other disciplines. The interdisciplinary aspect of this section is most obvious in the latter works, whose poststructuralist attitude towards the epistemic privileging of certain types of disciplinary discourse is most clearly expressed in Griffin’s contribution, ‘Ecofeminism and Meaning’.

The third section, ‘Philosophical Perspectives’, begins unpromisingly, with a familiar attack on the theme of anthropomorphism from the standpoint of feminist liberation theory (Plumwood). Equally problematic is Donner’s reactive argument against feminist attempts to move away from traditional universalizing theories of rationality and autonomy in order to preserve a site for ethical agency. In contrast with these is Gruen’s more positive approach to dealing with moral claims about human interactions with nature, presented in an analysis of competing, feminist-inspired conceptions of community. Also of interest to the reader seeking a positive – less reactive – methodological approach to themes of feminism and



ecology, taking into account their potential incommensurability, are two less obviously 'ecofeminist' works. Lee-Lampshire adapts a Wittgensteinian approach to the problem of the unwitting adoption of epistemic privilege in feminist theories which claim to represent the experiences of all women in relation to issues of the environment. This stresses an awareness of the dissonance between what is implied in being a subject and being a woman. Wilson attempts to reread Kant's theory of the 'concrete human subject' in isolation from the implications of his transcendental philosophy. This may confront the Kant scholar with a seemingly unjustified and arbitrary selection and conflation of different theoretical elements. Taken in its entirety, however, it poses an interesting attempt to bring together scientific discourse and women's narratives on a common, mutually productive ground.

The common theme uniting many of the contributions to this volume is a shared belief in and commitment to an ethical attitude towards difference: an attitude of inclusion and respect, grounded in feminist theory. In so far as this is perceived to be an ecofemi-

nist issue, analyses of the connections between feminism and environmentalism provide a more positive theoretical guide to the stakes of the debate than is available in the under-theorized or simplistic accounts of relations between women and nature. Related themes running through the volume are those of community, women's knowledge and futural thinking (a thinking which, whilst acknowledging its genealogy, seeks to move beyond the mythologies and dichotomies of the past).

Warren believes that this collection of work provides 'a balanced cross-cultural lens through which to begin to access the potential strengths and weaknesses of ecofeminism as a political movement and a theoretical position'. This claim is, I think, both unrealistic and misleading. Indeed, following one of the contributors to the collection, one might rather argue that 'ecofeminism is a shifting theoretical and political location which can be defined to serve various intentions'. In an era where feminist philosophy is recognizing the importance of multiplicity, the attempt to force a number of interesting and provocative empirical and theoretical studies under one politics and one theoretic-

cal umbrella fails to do justice to their potential for engaging in a whole realm of disparate disciplinary as well as interdisciplinary fields.

Kath Renark Jones

Just practising

Matthew Festenstein, *Pragmatism and Political Theory*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1997. viii + 237 pp., £45.00 hb., £13.95 pb., 0 7456 1626 7 hb., 0 7456 1627 5 pb.

For a long time tantamount to swearing in 'serious' philosophical circles, pragmatist talk is nowadays, at least in some quarters, becoming almost mainstream. Not that pragmatism has ever represented a single, neat theoretical package. Even among the inaugural works of C.S. Peirce, William James and John Dewey there are deep divergences – duly echoed now in the thinking of those, from Quine to Rorty, Davidson to Habermas, who invoke something of the pragmatist tradition in their work.

To call yourself a pragmatist you have to place some sort of priority on the concreteness of situated practice over the abstractions of theory. Thus James famously declared truth to be a matter not of some complex relation between concept and object, or language and world, but of what proves itself to be 'good in the way of belief' once our hypotheses are acted on. How this 'goodness' is to be gauged seems immediately to become a normative question: in general pragmatism offers a historicized, socialized image of philosophy which transfers central questions from the epistemological or metaphysical realms to the practical and political. In this way it hopes to avoid both any appeal to an unfeasibly distinterested God's-eye view *and* a slide into scepticism or subjectivism. But what specifically – and this is Festenstein's opening question in this clear, concise, and meticulously argued book – has it to offer political theory?

For the most part this is a book about Dewey and, secondarily, about how his political thinking shapes up in comparison to that of Rorty, Habermas and Putnam – each of them, in different respects, a contemporary heir. Festenstein's Dewey is the subtle negotiator of a sort of social-democratic *via media* between laissez-faire individualism and authoritarian collectivism, and between, as he himself once put it, the Scylla of rationalism and the Charybdis of relativism. This isn't necessarily the customary picture; Dewey's reputation has tended to be that of a nit-picking technocrat, methodical rather than visionary, a civil servant figure concerned with finding the most efficient ways of marshalling scientific, instrumental reason in the service of the liberal status quo.

For Festenstein this misses the fact that it is an ethical, rather than a crudely science-valorizing, basis which informs Dewey's thinking. His antipathy to 'the most pervasive fallacy of philosophic thinking' – namely, its tendency to parcel up experience and analyse it in abstraction from its socio-historical context – comes together (in a step which is anathema to more recent pragmatists) with a teleological, naturalistic ethics of individual self-realization. Through an account of freedom as involving the development of reflexivity and agency, and active participation in the moral life of one's time and place, Dewey presents individuality as something achieved rather than fixed, and so dependent upon positive cultural encouragement. Liberal democracy would ideally be constitutive of individuality in this normative sense: to the extent

that it isn't, its practices and thinking are up for critique.

Festenstein's research of Dewey's voluminous oeuvre is painstaking, and his criticism sympathetic without being in thrall. The latter's thinking emerges as a sophisticated, if flawed, quest for a resolution of habitual philosophical oppositions between individual and community, rationality and relativism, and rationalism and empiricism. As such, it's a precursor to current attempts to split the difference between liberalism and communitarianism, with ethical foundations more substantive than pragmatism is often given credit for.

Current examples of pragmatism-inflected political thinking get a more mixed reception. Habermas's emphasis on the communicative, intersubjective nature of rationality, and his epistemological fallibilism, fit easily enough for Festenstein within the general terrain of pragmatist political thinking. But his transcendental tendencies (his invocation of an ideal consensus as the yardstick by which given social practices are to be judged) provoke the sort of suspicion one might expect from a Dewey enthusiast. Rorty is upbraided for aspects of his ethnocentric model of liberalism, and for the voluntaristic, uncritical character of his ironists' utopia – but commended for his rather more consistent and powerful deconstruction of the pretensions to authority of the epistemological tradition. Putnam's 'internal realism' is seen as a promising fortification against outright relativism let down by the lack of argumentative support for his various hopeful forays in search of a solid footing for a Dewey-style critical democracy.

Noticeably, any hunch that these various shortcomings arise *because of*, rather than despite, these thinkers' pragmatist affiliations goes unaddressed. But Festenstein goes some way towards assuaging leftist qualms that pragmatism might involve a simple hypostatization of existing values and practices by insisting that, with Dewey at least, critique means more than just dusk-time painting of grey on grey. It's in its treatment of Dewey, though, that the book's real virtue lies. While it probably won't persuade sceptics to 'go pragmatist', it provides evidence enough both that there is an identifiable pragmatist tradition in political theory (whatever its shortcomings) and that Dewey's is its most formidable articulation.

Gideon Calder

Urbane academy

Lewis Edwin Hahn, ed., *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, Open Court, Chicago and La Salle IL, 1997. xviii + 619 pp., \$56.95 hb., \$29.95 pb., 0 8126 9341 8 hb., 0 8126 9342 6 pb.

This hefty collection of twenty-nine essays, with replies by Gadamer and a lengthy autobiographical statement, is the latest addition to an illustrious-looking series called 'The Library of Living Philosophers' dating back to 1939. The founding editor of this series tells us that its inspiration came from an assertion by F.C.S. Schiller that the 'interminable controversies which fill the histories of philosophy could have been ended at once by asking the living philosophers a few searching questions.' While the editor admits 'the confident optimism of this last remark undoubtedly goes too far', he avers that 'far greater clarity of understanding' could be produced if major thinkers are properly interrogated while still alive and that this is the conviction underlying the present series. It is ironic that someone such as Gadamer (born 1900 and still living), who has devoted so much of his work to contesting the idea that living philosophers can definitively clarify their meanings against the depredations of time and history, should be the latest inclusion in this series. And yet, strikingly, Gadamer takes his invitation extremely seriously, and is not patient with those who do still find his work unclear on crucial issues.

'Reflections on My Philosophical Journey', which opens the volume, typifies Gadamer's recent penchant for reminiscing on his own extraordinary academic career, in which he seems personally to have known every twentieth-century German-speaking intellectual one can think of. One realizes how much his own hermeneutic philosophy has been shaped by a life of teaching, and how pervasive has been his influence in the postwar German philosophical establishment, himself acting as a sort of Hermes figure pointing pupils in various directions. One appreciates how formative for his doctrine of the 'fusion of horizons' was the dilemma of German philosophy in the 1920s between historicism and relativism on the one hand, associated with figures like Dilthey and Spengler, and the objectivism of Neo-Kantianism on the other.

Gadamer's contention has always been that at the same time as recognizing the finite historicity of our existence, and renouncing Hegel's totality, philosophy must seek the truth that transcends all contexts. This volume reiterates his claim more forcefully (and sanctimoniously) than ever. Yet contributors who try to understand precisely how well his position

resolves relativism are often greeted with disappointingly woolly replies. Apel resumes his long-standing dispute over why there cannot be a regulative idea of 'better understanding' rather than just 'different understanding', while Hoy cogently addresses the issue of how hermeneutics can claim universality while simultaneously affirming diversity of perspective. Those who compare Gadamer with Heidegger (Grondin, Dostal, Smith) bear out what Habermas once aptly described as Gadamer's 'urbanization of the Heideggerian province': they show him agreeably demonstrating the irrelevance of the sort of extremities in Heidegger that made deconstruction possible, through a more diplomatic, more cosmopolitan 'dialogical' attitude to humanism and metaphysics. Others illustrate this more 'urbane' personality through his work on Greek philosophy, with his idea of the 'proximity of Plato and Aristotle' and of Plato's human soul as gradually 'striving for the good' through the 'right mix of life' (Dostal, Sullivan, Davidson). Several contributions on his aesthetic writings thematize his trenchant – if undialectical – vision of 'the absoluteness of art, its contemporaneity, priority, rightness, and normative power', which 'gives it overtones of transcendence in a desacralized world', making it "a last pledge" of a realm of wholeness and incorruptibility'.

In 1978 Gadamer warned: 'we may not absolutize ... the theoretical ideal of life above the practical-political'. Schott, however, shows that for a man whose life spans the entire twentieth century, Gadamer seldom mentions any concrete political event. His numerous autobiographical effusions are littered with the names of academic philosophers – but few politicians, and even fewer women. Although Gadamer probably did all he safely could to disown Nazi tyranny in the 1930s, there still remains the fact that he decided to stay in Germany throughout this period to advance his academic career (see Orozco in *RP* 78). This can only make us wonder at a man who, for all his urbanity, really does seem to have lived in an ivory tower during some of the greatest upheavals of our time and who once confessed to a colleague: 'I basically only read books at least 2000 years old'.

Austin Harrington