

Editorial collective

David Cunningham, Howard Feather,
Peter Hallward, Esther Leslie, Kevin
Magill, Stewart Martin, Mark Neocleous,
Peter Osborne, Stella Sandford

Contributors

Jon Beasley-Murray teaches Latin American
Studies at the University of British Columbia.
His book *Posthegemony* is forthcoming from
the University of Minnesota Press.

Warren Montag is Professor of English and
Comparative Literature at Occidental College.
His most recent book is *Louis Althusser*
(Palgrave, 2003). He is currently working on
a book on Adam Smith.

Tony Gorman is teaching and researching in
China. He has published two previous articles
on Gillian Rose and is currently working on a
study of Critical Theory and modernity.

Christopher J. Arthur is the author of *The
New Dialectic and Marx's 'Capital'* (Brill,
2002). His article 'The Spectral Ontology of
Value' appeared in *RP* 107 (May/June 2001).

Copypedited and typeset by illuminati
www.illuminatibooks.co.uk

Production and layout by Peter Osborne and
Stewart Martin

Printed by Russell Press, Russell House,
Bulwell Lane, Basford, Nottingham NG6 0BT

Bookshop distribution

UK: Central Books,
99 Wallis Road, London E9 5LN
Tel: 020 8986 4854

USA: Bernard de Boer, 113 East Centre Street,
Nutley, New Jersey 07100
Tel: 201 667 9300;
Ubiquity Distributors Inc., 607 Degraw Street,
Brooklyn, New York 11217
Tel: 718 875 5491

Cover: Suzanna Mooney, *Decommissioned
Camera Series II*, 2005 (2000 cameras
traded in by their owners in exchange for
new digital cameras)

Published by Radical Philosophy Ltd.
www.radicalphilosophy.com

© Radical Philosophy Ltd

COMMENTARY

England, Whose England?

Jon Beasley-Murray..... 2

ARTICLES

Necro-economics: Adam Smith and Death in the Life
of the Universal

Warren Montag..... 7

Nihilism and Faith: Rose, Bernstein and the Future of Critical
Theory

Tony Gorman..... 18

The Concept of Money

Christopher J. Arthur 31

REVIEWS

Hent de Vries, *Minimal Theologies: Critiques of Secular Reason in Adorno
and Levinas*

Espen Hammer 41

Julian Bourg, ed., *After the Deluge: New Perspectives on the Intellectual and
Cultural History of Postwar France*

Patrick french 43

Namascar Shaktini, ed., *On Monique Wittig*

Joanne Winning 46

Didier Eribon, *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self*
Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*

Alan Sinfield..... 49

Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery
in the Age of Revolution*

Peter Hallward 51

Andrew Sayer, *The Moral Significance of Class*

Michael Levin..... 53

Rudi Visker, *The Inhuman Condition: Looking for Difference after Levinas
and Heidegger*

James Williams..... 55

NEWS

Hunger in Niger and Zimbabwe

Lara Pawson..... 57

Marx Comes First Again, and Loses

David Murray and Mark Neocleous..... 59

England, whose England?

Jon Beasley-Murray

By their fear you shall know them. The USA responded to al-Qaeda's September 2001 attacks with a proliferation of flags reaffirming national pride and widespread support for the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, confirmed by George W. Bush's 2004 re-election. Spain reacted to the Madrid train explosions of March 2003 with silent vigils that shut down the country, and by replacing José María Aznar's Partido Popular government with a Socialist Party that would withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq. By July 2005, the UK had already given Tony Blair a third term, albeit with a reduced majority and despite general anti-war sentiment. Rather than patriotism or protest, London's tube and bus bombings inspired anguish and self-mockery: anguished analyses of British-born 'bombers from suburbia'; self-mocking websites such as www.iamfuckingterrified.com. Others, however, were less anguished and only accidentally self-parodic: 'Bombers Are All Spongeing Asylum Seekers' declared the *Daily Express*. Meanwhile, arsonists attacked a mosque on the Wirral, and hate crimes rose sixfold in the weeks following the 7 July bombings.

Whereas the US and Spanish responses to terror were fairly coherent, their alchemy of affect into politics more or less straightforward, the effect of the London attacks has been more confused. An overhyped stoicism, bolstered by folk-memory narratives of the Blitz or IRA mainland campaigns but leavened by understandable twitchiness, has combined with various forms of hysteria, whether liberal hand-wringing, illiberal violence or libertarian excess ('beer not afraid'), and it has been distanced through irony. The bombs did not particularly play into New Labour's rhetoric of security at home and belligerence abroad, but at the same time Blair is riding higher in the polls than ever before, apparently on the principle that the person who caused the mess is best placed to clear it up.

For Paul Gilroy, the mess that is Britain's overseas entanglement and the messiness of its reactions to terror on the tube are both best referred to deeper, post-imperial roots.* British attitudes to race and to geopolitics alike are conditioned by the ambivalence of 'postcolonial melancholia', on the one hand, and an emergent 'unruly and unplanned multicultural', on the other. The country's melancholic mood derives from its refusal to face up to the loss of an empire which had structured its political institutions and given a sense of coherence to its culture. Rather than working through this loss, Britain acts it out in the 'racist violence [that] provides an easy means to 'purify' and rehomogenize the nation', which is then followed by 'shame-faced tides of self-scrutiny and self-loathing' and interspersed with 'outbursts of manic euphoria'. But Gilroy also

* Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Multiculture or Postcolonial Melancholia*, Routledge, London, 2004; published in the USA as *Postcolonial Melancholia*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2005; Paul Gilroy and Herman Ouseley, 'Race and Faith Post 7/7', *Guardian*, 30 July 2005. Quotations are from *After Empire/Postcolonial Melancholia*, unless otherwise indicated.

detects a 'spontaneous tolerance and openness evident in the underworld of Britain's convivial culture'. He argued in a recent dialogue in the *Guardian* that 'wounded London's response' to the July attacks, such as 'the shrine at King's Cross and the crowd at Stockwell station', showed 'vividly' that British history 'offers valuable lessons about how to get along convivially in a multicultural polity'.

The country's predicament offers opportunities as well as pitfalls. If we could only identify and analyse the central role that colonialism and race thinking played in the constitution of the modern state, and then also defend and explain the countervailing trend towards conviviality, Britain might stand firm against 'US models that are identified with an inevitable future of racial conflict'. Indeed, the 'rebirth of English tolerance and generosity' might even 'one day teach the rest of Europe something about what will have to be done in order to live peacefully with difference'.

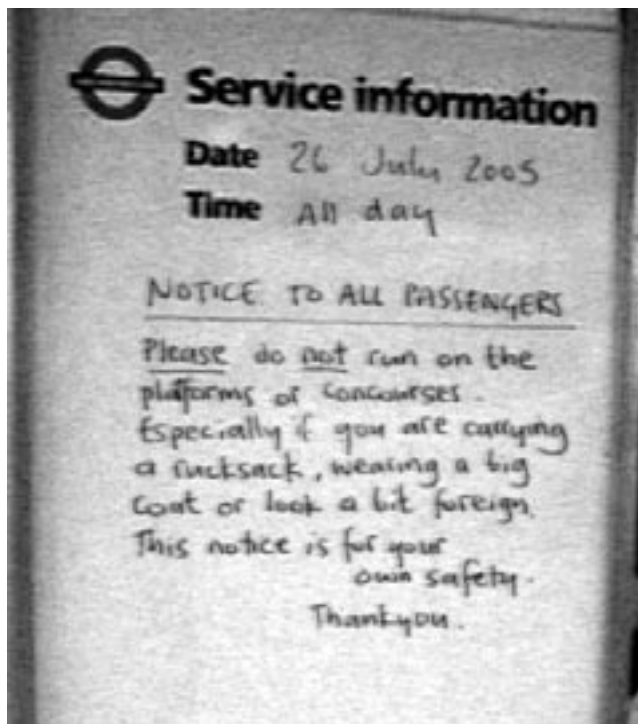
Cheap

There is, it should be evident, some irony in Gilroy's position. He suggests that Britain might become 'Great' again, forging a path separate from an embattled and incorrigible United States, and taking a lead within Europe; but the first step towards that goal would be the acknowledgement that Britain is in fact no longer Great, and the abandonment of its geopolitical pretensions. It is perhaps no wonder that the figure who most permeates this book is George Orwell. Orwell's 'authentically geo-pious Anglo patriotism' operates as a hinge between the early-twentieth-century intellectual internationalists and exiles (W.E.B. DuBois, Hannah Arendt, Sigmund Freud) who populate the first half of the book and the twenty-first-century pop culture performances (Ali G, *The Streets*, *The Office*) that take centre stage in the second. Orwell and his dislocated Englishness mediate the 'intuitive estrangement' of Freud and what Gilroy

terms Ali G's 'daring act of patriotic love'.

Orwell combines 'worldly consciousness' with 'parochial attachments to England's distinctive environment'. As indeed does Gilroy.

To recover a worldly consciousness, Gilroy would have us return to 'the cosmopolitan hopes of a generation that, like Orwell himself, in rejecting both Fascism and Stalinism, articulated larger loyalties: to humanity and to civilization'. This is the generation of modernist intellectuals from Freud and DuBois through Arendt and Jean-Paul Sartre to Frantz Fanon and Malcolm X. Their cosmopolitan humanism, Gilroy argues, is articulated during the 'special moment' between the rise of Fascism in the 1930s and African decolonization in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Its epicentre was the late 1940s, the point at which the United Nations adopted its 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights', but which also saw the partition of



India, the establishment of the state of Israel, and the foundation of apartheid South Africa. In the shadow of Nazism, a 'planetary debate over 'race' and racism emerged from this phase of nation building and geopolitical realignment' that 'demanded a complete political and philosophical response to race lore'.

Gilroy suggests that modernist intellectuals embarked upon the necessary rethinking that would reveal the centrality of racism to modern politics, and also laid the ground for a cosmopolitan democracy that could succeed colonialism. That project was cut

short by the rise of culturalist theories of race that replaced the biological racism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Culturalism leads to the right-wing articulation of a 'clash of civilizations' but also to the debilitating insistence on absolute differences that, in Gilroy's eyes, renders contemporary anti-racism ineffective and even counterproductive. These are the 'cheap appeals to absolute national and ethnic difference that are currently fashionable', invoked by apologists for the war on terror and defenders of identity politics alike.

'Cheap' is one of Gilroy's favoured epithets: he rails against the 'facile notions', 'casual talk' and 'squeamish reluctance' of his opponents, but he reserves particular ire for 'cheap antihumanist positions', 'the cheapest invocations of incommensurable otherness', 'cheap patriotism', 'cheap managerialism' and 'cheap consensus'. The repetition is striking. But why, in politics as in housing, should the expensive be valorized over the affordable? After all, in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell himself had a rather more nuanced assessment of the 'cheap luxuries', from the cinema to the newly available 'cheap smart clothes', with which the poor in the 1930s mitigated the effects of unemployment. Gilroy seems to take 'cheap' to be a synonym for 'inadequate' or 'inauthentic'. But this equation of market price with political value carries overtones of exclusivity typical of modernism but surely less palatable for cultural theory today. It reeks of Orwell's famous sensitivity to the smell of working-class life, the 'villainous cheap scent' that, we are told in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 'only the proles used'.

Vulgar

Gilroy finds himself on uncertain ground when he invokes the market, whether as metaphor or as object of analysis. But he is convincing in his discussion of the state. The premiss of mid-twentieth-century modernist internationalism was, Gilroy argues, an unflinching inquiry into the racist grounds of the contemporary state. Note that it is racism, not race, that supplies these grounds: with Sartre, Gilroy insists that race is racism's product, and so a derivative rather than a generative difference. Gilroy also follows Freud in suggesting that the root of racism lies in a fundamental division within a community (again, at its core, not at its periphery) arising from 'the conflict between the social obligation to love one's fellow citizens and the unhappiness involved in the impossible attempt to do so'. Minor differences are therefore presented as intractable, absolute and natural distinctions between the human and the 'infrahuman'; the effects of this mechanism of differentiation, presented as causes, are projected by the state onto first the national territory and later, with colonialism, the planetary stage.

The state is very much the villain of the piece for Gilroy. 'Raciology', or Manichaeic race thinking, is 'a product of modern political culture with special ties to its philosophies of power, government, and statecraft'. European colonialism merely extended state logic to a global scale. Public torture, for instance, never disappeared from the repertoire of European governance; it just migrated to the colonies, as is evident from histories of the Congo or the Caribbean, or the bloody suppression of the 1857 Indian mutiny. The 'practice of blasting prisoners to death by tying their bodies over the mouths of cannon', spattering 'blood and fragments of flesh' over onlookers, is surely just as spectacular and as visceral as the treatment of Damiens the regicide famously described in the opening pages of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. Moreover it is not as though colonial practices were somehow 'sealed off from the mainstream': metropolitan statecraft and imperial governance informed each other, the periphery serving as 'a laboratory, a location for experiment and innovation that transformed the exercise of governmental powers at home and configured the institutionalization of imperial knowledge to which the idea of 'race' was central'. Foremost among these imperial knowledges is the discipline of cultural anthropology. But political theory

and conceptions of economic progress are also marked by their colonial provenance, transforming the raciological assumption of naturalized difference into a temporal distinction between the developed regions and their developing counterparts condemned to lag behind.

If Freud's response to the pathology of civilization was 'fatalistic', Gilroy draws hope from other modernists such as DuBois and Fanon, who offered 'acts of imagination and invention that are adequate to the depth of the postcolonial predicament' that they described. And if even DuBois suggests that the 'color line' means that "race" is a fatal, unchanging principle of political cultures', Gilroy optimistically declares that his 'refusal of that fate is what defines the approach to anti-racist agency I want to sketch out'. Gilroy wagers on the possibility of an explicitly 'civilizing' project that, in his *Guardian* piece, is also taken as 'a means of building democracy and citizenship'.



It may be true that today's war against terror, with its absolute demarcation of difference, spectacular destruction of the inhuman, opportunistic suspension of legality, and shallow rhetoric of 'messianic civilizationalism', has deep roots in the practices of colonial governance; also that the voices of modernist cosmopolitan humanism are now discredited on the Left and the Right alike, along (Gilroy says) with the internationalist drive of mid-century feminism and socialism. Yet Gilroy still believes we can take on the challenge of 'articulating cosmopolitan hope upward from below rather than imposing it downward from on high' and so 'invent conceptions of humanity that allow for the presumption of equal value'. To take up this challenge, however, we are moved from the political philosophy of modernism to the cultural studies that finds in Orwell's work 'the source of [its] traditions of dissenting cultural reflection and analysis'. Gilroy puts his hope in 'a "vulgar" or "demotic" cosmopolitanism' whose value lies 'in its refusal of state-centeredness and in its attractive vernacular style'. The second half of *After Empire/Postcolonial Melancholia* is devoted to this.

Smelly

Here, Gilroy shifts from the high culture of mid-century European and Atlantic intellectual life to the low culture of an ordinary twenty-first century. This is also a shift from 'The Planet' to the 'distinctive environment' of 'Albion'. Gilroy analyses a series of contemporary British cultural phenomena, from the blunt nationalism of football terrace chants ('Two World Wars and One World Cup') to the anxious masculinism of Nick Hornby or Tony Parsons and the complex ambivalence of *The Office*. But he is at pains to demonstrate the ambivalence at the heart even of the rowdy supporters of England football, who have to acknowledge despite themselves that the country's paltry sporting prowess is but a melancholic substitute for lost geopolitical importance. The fans, too, are victims, and Gilroy insists on recognizing 'the dignity and value of the worthy lives that motto ["Two World Wars"] has helped to lead astray or divert into the arid lands of British nationalist fantasy'. Even *Changing Rooms* and *Ground Force* are taken to harbour utopian potential in their 'liberating ordinariness that makes strangeness recede in a fog of paint fumes and sawdust'; their melancholic sorrow lies

in the assumption that such change can only be effected within the bounded plots of an Englishman's house and garden.

In the end, then, Gilroy cannot fully put his faith in the 'small triumphs' of the 'ordinary, spontaneous antiracism' that he finds in contemporary music and popular culture, however 'vibrant' or 'vital' it may be. It is all too likely that a generation could be misled either by 'manipulative political leaders' or by 'hip-hop consumer culture' and the other 'stultifying US styles and habits' in which Gilroy somewhat strangely finds few redemptive possibilities. This is where we see the depth of Gilroy's ambivalence about market processes. Why, if a demotic cosmopolitanism is self-evident and spontaneous, is it so easily veiled or seduced by pathological melancholia, state command or market mediocrity? Why, in short, do the affective regimes of ordinary, unruly, everyday life in Madrid, New York or London support or subvert political order in such different ways? I agree that the answer must lie in part in differing imperial histories, though Spain too lost an empire, perhaps even more traumatically than did the formerly Great Britain. I suspect that what is required is a more nuanced analysis of the relation between affect and politics, one that does not, by simply opposing a vibrant demos to a calcified state, repeat the very populist gestures it sets out to criticize.

Gilroy has been criticized for his 'populist modernism' before – not least by Kobena Mercer, who took him to task as long ago as 1990 for his celebration of 'black cultural practices' that have 'spontaneously arrived at insights which appear in European traditions as the exclusive results of lengthy and lofty philosophical discussions' ('Black Art and the Burden of Representation', *Third Text* 10, Spring 1990). As we see in *After Empire/Postcolonial Melancholia*, and as in all populisms, Gilroy wants to have his cake and eat it: both championing the spontaneous wisdom of the people and insisting on what in the *Guardian* he called the intellectual's 'fundamental' task of 'education'. Populism sets its store by the people but never fully trusts them, hence its characteristic double articulation of mobilization and demobilization. It puts its faith in the nation's ordinary common sense and sentiment, but at the same time seeks to exclude those who do not accord with its version of common sense, to mark them as somehow not fully part of that national community. Here, as so often, the rhetoric is directed primarily against political elites, specifically the New Labour government that has betrayed (Gilroy suggests) the faith accorded it by the 1997 electorate. But there is equal distrust of the cheap or petty, suburban or rural, 'small-minded Englishness' of those who are perhaps not 'vulgar' or 'ordinary' enough.

Yet surely the point of a truly Orwellian patriotism, if we really were to consider resurrecting this rather quaint project, is that you cannot pick and choose: true solidarity has to contend with the physicality and materiality of the most unpleasant of affects and habits. For Orwell, the politics of affect figured above all in the 'physical repulsion' incarnated in the notion that 'the lower classes smell'. How, Orwell asked in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, can you have 'affection for a man whose breath stinks – habitually stinks'? Consensus or hegemony are not at issue here: Orwell points out that it is irrelevant how much 'you may admire his mind and character'. The point of conviviality is not the liberal politics of agreement, but the challenge of living together despite what is indeed an almost pre-political sensation of difference. If an anti-racist patriotism has any sense at all, 'England' must belong to everyone. But of course at this point 'England' starts to fade, leaving only its increasingly marginal state apparatus – marginal despite its paroxysms of nervous violence, as in the killing of Jean Charles de Menezes at Stockwell. Yes, there will be points of historically conditioned affective intensity (melancholia or shame, nostalgia or pride, anguish or joy), tied to images or sensations that are coded as national. And a television corporation or cricket team, or even a government, might work within these codes to incite or dampen particular affective responses. But why should such overcoding also structure a politics of liberation?

Necro-economics

Adam Smith and death in the life of the universal

Warren Montag

Louis Althusser began *Reading Capital* with the statement, 'We have all certainly read and are all reading [Marx's] *Capital*.' While Althusser is undoubtedly addressing here his seminar, the focus of which was precisely Marx's *Capital*, the sentence that follows elevates the act of reading this particular text to the status of the universal: the entire world has read and is reading *Capital*. Marx has been read for 'nearly a century' not only by 'us' (that is, all of us) but for us and to us even, and especially when we are not aware of it. And this paradox – that of our having read a text without knowing it – is made possible by the fact that *Capital*, Marx's theoretical work, is not limited to or contained by a book or set of books: 'we have been able to read it every day transparently in the dramas and dreams of our history, in its debates and conflicts.'¹ It is thus written in the history of the 'workers' movement' and therefore in the words and acts of its leaders and its partisans, as well as its adversaries, whose works represent both a commentary on and a continuation of Marx's text. Althusser insists, however, that the very universalization of *Capital*, the text, which undoubtedly occurs simultaneously with the universalization of the capital which is the object it seeks to analyse, renders a reading of Marx's words, 'to the letter', all the more urgent.

To take Althusser's position seriously today, forty years since he articulated it to his seminar, is to recognize that coextensive with, but distinct from, the theoretical imperative that requires us to read Marx 'to the letter' is the correlative necessity to read Adam Smith. For if the last forty years have shown us anything it is that we all have read and are still reading Smith, that he is read for us and to us far more than was ever the case with Marx and that his words shape our dreams and destinies especially when we cite them without knowing it, taking his words as our own. Smith is then the universal element within which our theory

and practice takes shape, within which what lives on in Marx's thought has its existence. This universality does not derive from the force of argument or empirical proof; the universality of Smith, a universality once contested and now reasserted, is immanent in a certain global balance of forces. Smith is the very idea of this now more or less stable balance of forces, the idea it has of itself.

How, then, is it possible to read Smith or to make sure that the Smith we read is not himself already a reading, Smith read for us rather than by us? Perhaps the best way, or even the only way, to begin to read him is to examine a reader in the act of reading Smith. I propose, then, to take as my starting point a reader who neither admits that he is reading Smith nor in his reading is particularly faithful to the text or texts he reads, but whose reading, by virtue of its singular force, opens a certain space for thought, making it possible to read Smith in a new way.

The virtue of greed

I will begin by following Hegel's reading of Smith, not where he explicitly refers to Smith in the discussion of the 'system of needs' in the *Philosophy of Right*, but in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* at the point where reason understands that its essence cannot exist in observation alone but only in its own actualization. Hegel argues that reason's actualization of itself necessarily takes the form of a community (*Gemeinschaft*), the universal community, not as an ideal or in a formal, juridical sense, but as a reality produced by concrete individuals. He is careful to note, however, that the universal is produced by individuals who not only do not labour with the aim of producing the universal community, but who, on the contrary, seek only to satisfy their own needs, even at the expense of others. It is at this precise point that Hegel invokes Smith, specifically

Smith's concept of the market, as the concrete form of the universal:

The *labor* of the individual for his own needs is just as much a satisfaction of the needs of others as of his own, and the satisfaction of his own needs he obtains only through the labor of others. As the individual in his *individual* work already unconsciously performs a universal work, so he again also produces the universal as his conscious object; the whole becomes, as *a whole*, his own work, for which he sacrifices himself and precisely in doing so receives back from it his own self.²

The reference to Smith here is clear. As he argues in the *Wealth of Nations*, an individual in 'a civilized society ... stands at all times in need of the cooperation and assistance of great multitudes'. And, despite the apparent qualification introduced by the phrase 'in a civilized society', Smith a few lines later posits cooperation as the necessary condition of human existence *per se*, going so far as to ascribe it to the natural condition of the species. The individual member of 'almost every other race of animals' is 'entirely independent and in its natural state has occasion for the assistance of no other living creature', while the human individual remains dependent and has for mere survival 'almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren'.³ Read from Hegel's perspective, then, society or community is not simply necessary for humanity's development and progress, it is necessary from the point of view of human life itself. The species cannot reproduce or survive in the absence of cooperation. The life of the individual, for Hegel, depends upon the 'life of a people' (*dem Leben eines Volks*) which furnishes 'the universal sustaining medium' necessary to human life. It is thus only the 'power of the whole people' (*die Macht des ganzen Volks*) that confers upon the individual sufficient power to exist. In the universal there is life; in the particular only death.⁴ The term 'people' should be understood here as a biological entity, the concrete form of the universal that arises in the course of the natural history of humanity and the irreducible foundation of life, human life, itself.

Yet if the cooperation necessary to the sustaining of life itself characterizes the life and power of a people, this cooperation itself must be explained, and it was precisely in explaining this cooperation that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European philosophy divided into two opposing camps. Smith alludes to this division as he develops his analysis of the optimal form of cooperation. In particular, he is compelled to confront the argument that there exists in

the human individual a social instinct as powerful as self-interest that drives individuals to assist others in the satisfaction of their needs with the same urgency that impels them to satisfy their own. Here, Smith's discussion of Hutcheson's moral philosophy in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is particularly interesting. Because Hutcheson, following Shaftesbury and Butler, postulates the existence of what Smith calls an 'instinctive good-will',⁵ he is led to devalue those actions which originate from other motives, especially self-interested motives, so that, regardless of the effects of such actions, their self-interested origins deprive such actions of any consideration of benevolence. The latter becomes, in effect, the principle in relation to which even the mere attempt to secure one's survival – that is, the principle of self-preservation – is subject to moral condemnation. Significantly, Smith sees Mandeville, otherwise his predecessor in so many ways, as tending merely to invert the philosophy of benevolence. The 'fellow-feeling' or benevolent inclination that ought to reign over our sentiments is redefined as a base, nearly animalistic passion that the most hardened criminal feels, given that its involuntary, instinctual character can no more be described as virtuous than the supposedly selfish passions of greed and lust.

Further, greed ought to be judged by its effects rather than by its motives, and the effects of the mass of individuals acting at the behest of the passion of greed are far superior to the effects of self-denial and benevolence. Therefore lust and greed, if not virtuous in themselves, lead to the production not only of a prosperous world but a world which can be regarded as virtuous in so far as it will relieve the sufferings of the poor more effectively and to a far greater degree than any system of charity based on self-denial or asceticism. For Smith, the problem is that Mandeville refers to all self-interested actions as vices (even if 'private vices are public benefits'), a reduction that prevents him from distinguishing between the rational and laudable self-interest of a merchant seeking to maximize the return on his investment and the vicious behaviour of a common thief seeking to convey my property into his own possession. Smith does not regard the 'popular ascetic doctrines'⁶ to which Mandeville's system, as he read it, constituted a response as a serious threat to the prosperity of society. The social passions that he groups together under the label of benevolence are not even common enough to interfere with the degree of self-interest necessary to progress. The cooperation that constitutes the necessarily universal existence of human individuals derives from each seeking his own betterment at the expense of others. Precisely because

individuals believe that their actions will lead to their advantage, they act in such a way that will produce the very universality that they appear to deny. For Smith, this ‘veil of ignorance’ that prevents individuals from knowing the benevolent consequences of their self-interested actions is necessary to the design of the whole.⁷ As Seneca put it in *De Providentia*, a crucial text for Smith, the problem of evil in a world governed by providence is a problem of knowledge: ‘What seem to be evils are not actually such.’⁸ Thus, individuals are governed by self-interest that they may better serve their fellows by producing and exchanging as much as they possibly can. In the famous passage in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith remarks of ‘the rich’ that

in spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity, though they mean only their own convenience, though the sole end which they propose from the labors of all the thousands whom they employ, be the gratification of their own vain and insatiable desires, they divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements. They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, which would have been made had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants, and thus, without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interests of the society and afford means to the multiplication of the species.⁹

It is here, in relation to a passage that certainly furnished one of the major reference points for Hegel’s reading of Smith in the *Phenomenology*, that the precise effects of Hegel’s reading become clear. First, in Smith’s work, the discrepancy between the intentions and knowledge of individual actors and their actions on the one hand and the consequences of these actions on the other is, as we have seen, a necessary and permanent feature of society. It is in fact, as Smith himself clearly says in the lines following the passage from the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* cited above, the providential design of a society that is itself part of a universal Providence, neither a secular theodicy nor an economic theology but a continuation in the human world of the Providence that governs all things. Interestingly, Hegel, who does not reject providential thinking (even if by historicizing it he ends up positing an end that can only be perpetually deferred), cannot allow the dislocation between consciousness and action, between intention and consequence, to become functions of a stable system, the very principles of a social equilibrium. Instead, this dislocation marks the site of a contradiction that propels Smith’s system beyond itself, namely into the becoming con-

scious of universality, in which consciousness begins to undertake the work of its own rational actualization, not merely discovering and observing a world but making it. By rejecting the theodicy proper to Smith’s theory, Hegel allows us to see the essential role of the concept of theodicy, understood both as a natural and as a human system for Smith. For this concept alone will allow us to understand the emergence of another notion that otherwise would appear absent in Smith’s works, that of life itself.

From biopolitics to necropolitics

The importance of life as a political concept has been underscored in recent years, beginning with Foucault’s reflections on biopower, and continuing with such thinkers as Giorgio Agamben and Achille Mbembe. Of course, one might immediately object to the inclusion of Smith in the discussion invoked above. For this line of thought has defined itself as political, concerned with life in so far as it constitutes the object of sovereignty and government. Further, it might be argued that even if we can agree with Hegel that a certain concept of life is present in Smith, it is undoubtedly quite different from that imagined by contemporary theories of biopower, life prior to its capture by politics to the extent that human individuals must survive and reproduce in order then to be subjected or governed. Is it, then, life understood in its natural state, prior to its social existence; bodies as they must exist before they are directed, managed or even destroyed? Such a question might appear naive: after all, for the theoreticians named above is not life always already inscribed in the political? Has not Foucault in particular demonstrated the meticulous attention to detail characteristic of a biopolitics that leaves no aspect of life unexamined?

Agamben approaches these problems in *Homo Sacer* by referring to the distinction in Greek between *zoe* and *bios*. The former Agamben calls ‘bare life’, the life ‘common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods)’, whereas *bios* represents the form of life available to those who inhabit the polis, a political life specific to humanity by virtue of language. Thus the two senses of life in classical Greek serve not so much to distinguish the human from all other living things as to divide the human into two realms: the *bios*, or realm of the polis in which not simply living but the good life becomes possible, and *zoe*, the realm of the *oikos*, or household, the site of mere survival and procreation, that which is common to humans and all other living things. This distinction is crucial to Agamben’s argument: if, for a millennium, bare life remained (and indeed was placed) as an object of

reflection outside of the sphere of the political, ‘the decisive event of modernity’ was ‘the entry of zoe into the sphere of the polis – the politicization of bare life as such’. This transformation is nothing less than (and here Agamben cites Foucault) ‘a bestialization of man’ and (citing Arendt) a ‘decadence’ of modern societies brought about by the ‘primacy of natural life over political action’.¹⁰

‘Bestialization’ and ‘natural life’: these terms,



designed certainly to evoke the ‘dehumanization’ of individuals and groups in the face of genocide, may have another, quite different, function as well. The isolation of the human realm of the polis, the place of rational debate and deliberation, from the subhuman realm of the *oikos*, the site of production and reproduction, has the effect of separating what we would now call the realm of the political from the realm of the economic. Thus, the horrors of the modern world are those of a biopolitics in the service of sovereignty (to follow Agamben’s modification of Foucault’s historicism), defined as the power to decide the state of exception. It would appear, then, that the *oikos* is a stand-in for the economic which marks it as a pre-political backdrop that is simultaneously ‘natural’ and therefore outside of the sphere of human action (and, increasingly, that which must be allowed to exist free of human interference, like a delicate and exotic ecosystem) and ‘bestial’, a degraded realm in which what is specifically human disappears and the human becomes indistinguishable from the animal. We may well ask whether the bracketing of the economic in the current analyses of sovereign power does not constitute simultaneously the return of a repressed humanism (with its transcendence of mere nature and its hierarchization of life into the human, the subhuman and inevitably

the superhuman – so that those who degrade humans to the level of beasts are themselves beasts, with all that such a definition entails) and the placing out of bounds (and Arendt was absolutely explicit about this) the economic, a movement which renders unthinkable any relation between the economic and the political. This dissociation is often marked, as if producing a kind of surplus, by a denunciation of Marx, who has come to represent both the theoretical error of positing any sort of relation between the economic and the political and the horror of the reduction of the human to the animal said to have characterized the peculiar form of totalitarianism for which Marx was responsible.

Thus, Achille Mbembe, in his essay ‘Necropolitics’, takes Marx (who, according to his argument, belongs to the tradition of terror which culminates in colonial genocide and the Nazi state) to task for ‘conflating’ the mere ‘labour’ necessary ‘for the maintenance of human life’ and ‘work’, which transcends the ‘endless cycle of production and consumption’ through ‘the *creation* [emphasis added] of lasting artifacts that add to the world of things.’ On the one side mere work, necessary to bare life, its products destined for immediate consumption in order for life to continue; and on the other a creative, genuinely human activity undertaken freely outside of any necessity, natural or historical, and whose creations ‘last’ by virtue of their transcending the animal realm of bare life to which they precisely contribute nothing. Mbembe argues that the conflation of labour and work thus defined is determined by the fact Marx ‘blurs the all-important divisions among the man-made realm of freedom, the nature determined realm of necessity, and the contingent in history’.¹¹ Marx’s failure to distinguish between the realm of freedom and the natural realm of necessity within human existence, which therefore remains suspended between the man-made freedom of the polis and the ‘nature determined realm of necessity’ that characterizes the *oikos*, his refusal to differentiate between the political and the economic, has had devastating consequences for humanity. Because the economy, according to Mbembe, lies outside the effective sphere of human action, revolutions inspired by Marxism must try unsuccessfully to force unwilling populations to submit to their attempt to dominate the

sphere of economic relations, which is in fact part of the natural realm of necessity. Their very failure to impose man-made designs on nature results in their resorting to an act of will, namely terror, a fight to the death, to bring about the telos that their faith has instructed them surely awaits. But the critique of Marxism (which is otherwise perfectly banal and drawn from the ideological repertoire of Cold War liberalism) is important here only in so far as Marxism, for Mbembe, is one possible variant of the evolution of biopolitics into necropolitics, 'politics as the work of death', and sovereignty as consisting primarily of the right to kill. The figure of the modern Homo Sacer as understood by Agamben is found in its purest state in the Nazi death camps; Mbembe shows that the populations of European colonies had long been regarded as bare life whose destruction could not be thought of as murder.

I would argue that this line of thought, which moves from biopolitics to necropolitics and which poses Homo Sacer as a central figure of modern politics, is both provocative and productive. There is no question, however, of accepting or rejecting it as if the work of the late Foucault, Agamben and Mbembe constituted a unified body of propositions, and this heterogeneity is not simply the consequence of the different emphases and interests of the three authors named above. Instead, I want to ask a question, or set of questions, that is simultaneously posed and held in abeyance in this theoretical constellation. It is held in abeyance in so far

as these theoreticians insist on a dualism of life, the separation internal to humanity of human and animal functions, the separation of the polis and the *oikos*, the political and the economic, the man-made realm of freedom and the natural realm of necessity. If we can speak of a necropolitics, can we, and indeed must we, also, simultaneously, in one and the same gesture, speak of a necro-economics? Mbembe has implicitly contested Foucault's description of biopolitics as the inverse of the operation of sovereignty: while the latter brings death or permits life (*faire mourir et laisser vivre*), biopower operates by making live and letting die (*faire vivre et laisser mourir*).¹² Following Agamben in insisting on the coexistence of sovereign power



and biopower, Mbembe assigns modern politics a far more active relation to death, which indeed becomes its primary objective. The question of necro-economics compels us to return to the notion of 'letting die' or of 'exposing to death' and not simply death in battle. This should not be taken as an alternative to necropolitics as understood by Mbembe but, again as its complement, as if the two were one and the same process understood in different ways. To think this possibility, however, requires us to abandon the perspective of any dualism, a difficult task indeed, when we have been assured that the only alternatives to dualism are conflation, blurring and indistinction.

To proceed I will resume my reading of Hegel reading Smith, pausing only to note that this Hegel is far from and opposed to the Hegel invoked by Mbembe (which is, in fact, Hegel read by Kojève and therefore – as Althusser remarked¹³ – an existentialist Hegel in which the confrontation between consciousnesses takes place in the solitude of a state of nature). For Hegel, Smith's rejection of any pre-social human existence, his declaring as necessary to mere life cooperation and therefore not simply the labour of dissociated individuals perhaps exchanging after the fact, but a certain minimal form of society and therefore politics, renders him a thinker of the immanence of the universal in human life by virtue of the necessarily collective labour which makes human life possible. He is therefore for Hegel the thinker of universality not in a juridical or moral sense but in so far as it is realized

in the production of life. The question we must now pose – for, despite the ritual denunciation of Hegel that one finds in so much theory today, it is not Hegel (or Marx) whose 'central tenets'¹⁴ govern the world today but Adam Smith's – is whether Hegel's reading

of Smith is a tenable one. To put it in another way, is the market, understood globally, if not universally, that natural–human sphere of the production and reproduction of life, the life of a people, the life of people? As I argued earlier, Hegel could make Smith the thinker of the universal and of life only by depriving his system of its providential character, turning the unconsciousness of Smith’s producers into a temporary failure of knowledge that could only destabilize and call into question their relation to the world of their making, setting it on the course to that becoming other characteristic of the moments of Spirit’s long return to itself. If, to part company with Hegel, we allow Smith to think the global market as a theodicy that is itself part of a larger natural teleology that exceeds the grasp of the human intellect, what is the relation of the market to life (and, correlatively, to death)?

Killing and letting die

I will answer this question by returning to the famous passage from *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, cited earlier, in which Smith sketches out the providential nature of the ‘distribution of the necessaries of life’:

[the rich] are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among its inhabitants and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interests of the society, and afford means to the multiplication of the species. When Providence divided the earth among a few lordly masters, it neither forgot nor abandoned those who seem to be left out in the partition. These last too enjoy their share of all that it produces. In what constitutes the real happiness of human life, they are in no respect inferior to those who would seem so much above them. In ease of body and peace of mind all the different ranks of life are nearly upon a level, and the beggar, who suns himself by the side of a highway, possess that security which kings are fighting for.¹⁵

Jacob Viner has examined in some detail the function of the concepts of providence and theodicy in the history of economic thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, both as a model of a system that cannot fail and whose putative failures are nothing other than a failure of knowledge, and consequently as a justification of inequality, as an only apparent evil necessary to the (all too often invisible) moral function of the whole.¹⁶ While his observations are certainly pertinent to Smith, they do not exhaust the effects of the notion of theodicy on Smith’s conception of the market. It also serves to identify the market as

a meta-human realm which neither individuals nor collective entities can master or direct. In fact, it is constructed in such a way that evil, originally absent from the whole itself, arises only from human attempts to ‘interfere’ with the workings of a providential design whose magnitude escapes our knowledge or control. Providence, thus understood, is not a system of absolute determination, but a design or plan accessible to humanity through the exercise of reason and through the rational pursuit of self-interest, which we must choose to follow. Its perfection in no way inhibits individuals or whole societies from turning away from the only true way to reason and justice.

Hence, Smith’s own rather pronounced necropolitics, his interest in death, and the infliction of death not only by the state, but by the individual himself at the moment he understands he ‘is the just and proper object of the hatred and contempt of his fellow creatures’. For Smith, if society is naturally necessary to the sustaining of human life, ‘the dread of death, the great poison to the happiness, but the great restraint upon the injustice of mankind, which while it afflicts and mortifies the individual, guards and protects the society.’ Every man ‘in the race for wealth, and honors and preferments ... may run as hard as he can and strain every nerve and muscle, in order to outstrip all his competitors’; if he were, however, to ‘jostle or throw down any of them’ he would become the object of ‘hatred and indignation’ and as such liable to punishment. A necessary part, then, of collective production of life, a process driven by self-interest, is an awareness of the ever-present force of justice which takes, or ought to take, life with a machine-like regularity that will immediately attend to the excess of self-interest that leads an individual to step outside the realm of fair competition and engage in theft or fraud to acquire the possessions he desires. In fact, the sociability necessary to human existence is itself only possible through the constant example of the taking of the life of the individual judged guilty. Without this example before them, men ‘feel so little for another with whom they have no particular connection in comparison with what they feel for themselves’ that, in the absence of a terror of merited punishment, they would, ‘like wild beasts, be at all times ready to fly upon him; and a man would enter an assembly of men as he enters a den of lions’. Further, the desire to inflict capital punishment is simultaneously rational and rooted in the human passion for vengeance, a simultaneity which again expresses the working of providence: the production of life both requires and induces the exercise of the right to kill. Thus, ‘a man

of humanity ... applauds with ardor, and even with transport, the just retaliation which seems due' to crimes against the lives and properties of others. And if the transport one feels at an execution appears itself ignoble, we must understand that, like the passionate pursuit of self-interest, the instinct of self-preservation, it is the actually existing as opposed to ideal means nature has provided to achieve 'the end which she proposes'. This arrangement of means and ends is the surest sign that the 'oeconomy of nature is in this respect exactly of a piece with what it is upon many other occasions'.¹⁷

The phrase 'oeconomy of nature', which here marks the junction of the political and the economic, allows us to make the transition from Smith's necropolitics, his founding of life on death, of the production of life on the production of death, to his necro-economics. If societies, by virtue of the oeconomy of nature, must exercise, and not merely possess, the right to kill, the market, understood as the very form of human universality as life, must necessarily, at certain precise moments, 'let die'. In order to approach this question, we may turn to Smith's discussion in the *Wealth of Nations* of the precise means by which the world's rich, led by the invisible hand, distribute to the rest of the earth's inhabitants the 'necessaries of life'. Apart from the small sum that the world's beggars succeed in 'extorting' (Smith's term) from them, this distribution takes the form of the payment of wages. Here, and I refer to Chapter 8 of Part I of the *Wealth of Nations*, we no longer confront a world of autonomous individuals led by self-interest to truck, barter and exchange for their advantage, a theoretical framework which could easily accommodate the labour contract, understood as an exchange between individuals. Instead, Smith explains the antagonism that, in part, determines the rate of wages – that is, the extent of the distributions made by the world's rich – as collective in nature:

what are the common wages of labor, depends everywhere on the contract made between those parties, whose interests are by no means the same. The workmen desire to get as much as possible, the masters to give as little as possible. The former are disposed to combine in order to raise, the latter in order to lower the wages of labor.¹⁸

I will leave to the side the fact that the very notion of collective action invoked here poses a series of questions and problems that Smith does not, and perhaps cannot, address given the constraints of his theory. Suffice it to say, though, that the competing 'parties', a term that allows him to move freely between the individual and the collective, function exactly as individu-

als whose competition and opposition produce, without their knowledge or consent, a 'nearly' equal distribution of life's necessities. Appearances are indeed deceiving: the nature of the market is, of course, such that all the advantage in this contest between workmen and their masters lies with the latter. The workmen cannot quit, nor can they refrain from work in protest over wages for more than a few days. Their ability to maintain themselves, the very subsistence, depends on their earning a wage. The masters, in contrast, have sufficient stock in most cases to 'live a year or two' without employing labour. This advantage allows them 'to force the workmen into compliance with their terms'. And their terms are often not very favourable: Smith's masters 'are always and everywhere in a sort of tacit, but constant and uniform combination, not to raise the wages of labor above their actual rate'. Further, they will 'sometimes enter into particular combinations to sink the wages of labor below this rate'. The market appears, then, to have placed few, if any, limits on the ability of the masters to increase their profit simply by lowering the amount they expend on wages. The limit Smith does in fact set on the lowering of wages is the limit of the market itself: it is none other than the bare life of the workman, whose 'wages must at least be sufficient to maintain him ... at a rate consistent with common humanity' and even 'somewhat more; otherwise it would be impossible for him to bring up a family and the race of such workmen could not last beyond the first generation'. Such a postulate might seem to condemn the great majority in any society to a life of hard labour for their mere subsistence; in fact, it is the foundation for the only rational means to increase the rate of wages and thus improve their lives. A reduction of wages to the level of bare life paradoxically (dialectically?) allows the fund available for the payment of wages to accumulate to such an extent that the only outcome can be the employment of more hands.

When in any country the demand for those who live by wages; laborers, journeymen, servants of every kind is continually increasing; when every year furnishes employment for a greater number than had been employed the year before, the workman have no occasion to combine in order to raise their wages.¹⁹

Yet there exist certain societies, and Smith adduces examples only from the non-European world, where the nature of the 'laws and institutions' does not permit them to acquire greater wealth; societies he deems 'stationary' and incapable of growth, in which the downward limit on wages appears far more variable

that the phrase ‘consistent with common humanity’ would appear to suggest. For in China, as Smith imagines it, not even a high rate of infant mortality such as is consequent to the poverty of the Scottish Highlanders (where, he has heard, perhaps only two out of twenty children survive) will suffice to allocate wages to the degree necessary to maintain the labourer. Instead, even in the face of high infant mortality, the fact that many thousands of families subsist on such scant resources as ‘the carcass of a dead dog or cat, for example, though half putrid and stinking’, which is ‘as welcome to them as the most wholesome food is to people of other countries’, means that in order for the labourer to subsist, his children must be destroyed, ‘exposed in the street or drowned like puppies in the water’.²⁰ Here, the rigour of the market as a mechanism that adjusts the proportion of labourers to the fund available for wages by liberally distributing malnutrition to the social ranks whose numbers exceed their ability to obtain subsistence, thereby ‘destroying a great part of the children’ without any agent ‘intending it or knowing it’, must be supplemented by direct human agency.

Market death

The case of famine – and here Smith privileges eighteenth-century Bengal rather than late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century France, where nearly 2 million French citizens perished in the famines of 1694 and 1708/9 – is perhaps even more instructive.²¹ ‘In a country where the funds destined for the maintenance of labor were sensibly decaying’ wages would be reduced ‘to the most miserable and scanty subsistence of the laborer’.²² It becomes clear at this point that the term ‘subsistence’, as denoting the ‘rate below which it seems impossible to reduce’ wages, has no fixed social or biological limit. A decaying wage fund lowers the demand for labour so far that the subsistence of the individual workman is no longer necessary, given the vast numbers of unemployed prepared to take the place of those fortunate enough to have found employment. The rest

would either starve or be driven to seek a subsistence either by begging or by the perpetration of the greatest enormities. Want famine and mortality would immediately prevail in that class, and from thence extend themselves to all the superior classes, till the number of inhabitants in the country was reduced to what could be easily maintained by the revenue and stock which remained in it.²³

If it appears that a kind of infallible rationality immanent in nature itself restores even by means of

mortality an equilibrium between workmen and the wage fund sufficient to guarantee the mere life of the labourer, such a ‘calamity’, as he calls it, can arise only as the consequence of ‘improper regulations’ and ‘injudicious restraints’ imposed by governments on trade. The market, if allowed to work without interference, will always and everywhere prevent what he calls dearth (shortages of food as a result of decline in production) from turning into famine. Smith’s theory of famine constitutes one of the most contested and debated sections of the *Wealth of Nations*, cited frequently by Amartya Sen,²⁴ among others, for its empirical and theoretical failings. While I have no quarrel with those who seek to refute Smith’s arguments, a task as important today as it has ever been, my aim here is to understand his discussion of famine, with all its theological overtones, as symptomatic of conflicts that animate his work as a whole.

At first glance, the position that ‘famine has never arisen from any other cause but the violence of government attempting, by improper means, to remedy the inconveniences of a dearth’, and its corollary that ‘the unlimited, unrestrained freedom of the corn trade ... is the only effectual means preventative of the miseries of a famine’,²⁵ appear so categorical as to be absurd, nothing more than a declaration of faith without any necessary connection to historical reality (Mike Davis’s *Late Victorian Holocausts* can be regarded as the definitive empirical refutation of this doctrine.) It is here, however, around the very question of famine and therefore of life itself – the point at which Smith can no longer continue to divide and subdivide subsistence so that we are no longer discussing individual lives of workmen and their families (or more specifically children), given that, as Smith has demonstrated, the life of the individual is no longer a reliable or useful unit of analysis, but the life of a population – that the stakes of Smith’s position become clear. The subsistence of a population may, and does in specific circumstances, require the death of a significant number of individuals: to be precise it requires that they be allowed to die so that others may live.

In particular, a qualitative distinction between dearth and famine – that is, between shortages that bring malnutrition, disease and a small increase in mortality, and larger, catastrophic increases in mortality causing significant decline in a population over a relatively brief period of time – appears increasingly questionable. Critics have focused on what appears to be no more than a leap of faith, an unquestioning belief in the providential hand of the market: where there exists

free commerce and communication, the scarcity occasioned by the most unfavourable seasons can never be so great as to produce a famine; and the scantiest crop, if managed with frugality and oeconomy, will maintain, through the year, the same number of people that are commonly fed in a more affluent manner by one of moderate plenty.²⁶

This has appeared as little more than a gesture of theoretical/historical denial, an attempt to explain away those famines (far more frequent after than before Smith) in which perfectly unhampered markets did nothing to prevent famine, and on the contrary seem to have exacerbated them. But it is possible to extract from the *Wealth of Nations* a more moderate and defensible position which is, however, no less grounded in an economic theodicy.

Without holding Smith to the argument that markets will maintain the same number of people in years of scarcity as in years of affluence (an argument that poses again all the problems of defining the verb 'maintain', the limit of which, as we have seen, is pushed from subsistence to sub-subsistence), we can nevertheless credit him with the position that the market is a more rational mechanism for managing dearth than any other available alternative, and that if indeed dearth declines into famine, the mortality rate, however great, must necessarily be less than it otherwise would have been. And once again this rationality is not the consequence of the will or knowledge of those individuals who are its bearers, nor does its distribution of food in times of scarcity (whether absolute or relative) depend upon the benevolence of those concerned. On the contrary, it is precisely the grain merchant's seeking the greatest profit he can realize without the slightest intention of allaying the hunger of others that will lead him to carry out that distribution and, more importantly, do so in a way that will protect the hungry from their own improvident and irrational impulses.

Left to their own devices, those threatened with starvation and moved by the pangs of hunger will consume the available food supply 'so fast as must necessarily produce a famine before the end of the season'. Indeed, any misguided attempt on the part of a government to regulate prices in order to increase access to food will inevitably produce such a result. Merchants who raise prices in the face of rising demand are not only right to do so from the point of view of their self-interest ('it is in years of scarcity, when prices are high, that the corn merchant expects to make his principal profit'), but the unintended effect of their profit is the disciplining of the hungry by the market itself, which distributes to

them only the meagre portion that their falling wages will procure. Smith addresses the possible objection that merchants will withhold or hoard supplies in order precisely to drive up prices and increase profits, thus actively preventing food from being purchased by those who most need it and thereby contributing to, if not actually causing, famine. The merchant, he tells us, must exactly calibrate price to supply, so that, if he raises his prices without warrant, or holds back his product when no real scarcity exists, he will be ruined by those who undersell him or rush to fill the vacuum. He 'hurts himself much more than he can hurt the particular people whom he may hinder from supplying themselves'. In opposition, 'if he judges right, instead of hurting the great body of people, he renders them a most important service.'²⁷

For whatever difficulties the 'inconveniences of a dearth' cause those who are by high prices prevented from consuming as much as they want or need, these inconveniences are not nearly as severe as those they might feel were they allowed to consume as they like. Again, to give Smith his due, the 'inconveniences of dearth' may not be restricted to the pangs of hunger and the effects of malnutrition; nothing excludes a greater than normal mortality rate. His point is merely that the market is the best of all possible forms of supply and that, truth be told, it rations not simply food, but life itself, allowing the greatest possible survival rate in a given circumstance. Nothing in Smith's own argument compels us to follow him in his leap of faith and hold that the market will maintain the same number of people in times of scarcity as in times of plenty. But even if there are those who perish slowly from malnutrition and the disease that accompanies it, or from starvation, but over a longer period of time than one might see in a catastrophic famine in which millions may perish in a few months (as in the case of Bengal in 1770), we will be secure that the rationing by the market of food precisely because it is not the effect of any human design will proceed in the most reasonable manner possible.

Yet, as his numerous critics have shown, the rationality of the market during times of scarcity resides, for Smith, solely in the determination of price. If steep rises in prices are accompanied, as they often are, by falling wages and widescale unemployment, the market no longer rations food to the otherwise avaricious and short-sighted consumer, but precisely places it out of reach, or diverts it elsewhere where the fund of wages is growing and greater profits are to be made. Although Smith does not consider this objection in his discussion of dearth and famine, he offers the

elements of a response in the discussion of wages in Chapter 7 discussed earlier. There, where ‘the funds destined for the maintenance of the laboring poor are fast decaying’, the equilibrium of the market not only can but will by a necessity greater than the market itself be achieved by a ‘reduction’ of the ‘number of inhabitants to what can easily be maintained by the revenue and stock which remained in it’.²⁸ The instruments of this reduction are ‘want and famine’, and the form it takes mortality. And thus Smith can say with Seneca that ‘what is evil only appears as such’. Death establishes the conditions of life; death as by an invisible hand restores the market to what it must be to support life. Smith, perhaps understandably, drew back from the conclusion that any form of famine relief – not simply an attempt to lower prices, but perhaps even more importantly any attempt at a mass distribution of food by the state, drawing from public granaries without cost to the penniless (as was the case in eighteenth-century China, which avoided famines not only on the scale of Bengal but even on the scale of early-eighteenth-century France) – could only dissuade merchants from engaging in so precarious a trade. Such efforts would lead to a decrease in the production and supply of food and not only postpone but aggravate the inevitable day of reckoning.

Thus, we seem to have arrived at a reading of Smith more Hegelian than that of Hegel himself; Smith postulates an equilibrium or harmony productive of life that is paradoxically created and maintained by the power of the negative, of death: that the allowing of death is necessary to the production of the life of the universal. Smith’s economics is a necro-economics. The market reduces and rations life; it not only allows death, it demands that death be allowed by the sovereign power, as well as by those who suffer it. In other words it demands and requires that the latter allow themselves to die. From this we must conclude that underneath the appearance of a system whose intricate harmony might be appreciated as a kind of austere and awful beauty, a self-regulating system, not the ideal perhaps, but the best of all possible systems, is the demand that some must allow themselves to die. This of course raises the possibility that those so called upon will refuse this demand – that is, that they will refuse to allow themselves to die. It is at this point that the state, which might appear to have no other relation to the market than one of a contemplative acquiescence, is called into action: those who refuse to allow themselves to die must be compelled by force to do so. This force, then, while external to the market, is necessary to its existence and function. This, to

borrow a phrase from Carl Schmitt, is the moment of decision which makes possible the very systemacity of the market system.

Let us begin not with the extreme cases of dearth or famine, but merely with the case of a reduction in the workmen’s wages (and therefore a reduction in their subsistence forced on them by their masters). As Smith notes, a reduction in wages can be of such magnitude that it is ‘severely felt’ by wage earners, whose ability to purchase ‘provisions’ is significantly compromised. In the face of the masters seeking to increase their profit in this particular manner, the workmen may ‘yield, as they sometimes do, without resistance’.²⁹ In fact, their unwillingness to resist even a severe reduction in their level of subsistence may derive from their acute awareness of the competition for work characteristic of a specific market. Their lack of resistance may also be determined by a recognition of the natural advantage of the masters discussed earlier, that is, their ability to outlast the workmen thanks to the stock they possess.

Yet market forces alone, for reasons Smith treats only elliptically, are ‘frequently’ insufficient to prevent the resistance of workmen. They often respond to a wage reduction by ‘a defensive combination’ which is ‘always abundantly heard of ... they have always recourse to the loudest clamor and sometimes to the most shocking violence and outrage.’ Smith explains such behaviour with disarming honesty: ‘They are desperate and act with the folly and extravagance of desperate men who must either starve, or frighten their master into an immediate compliance with their demands.’³⁰

In such a situation, when market forces alone do not protect the masters from the indignation of those faced with starvation (which, as recent theoreticians have reminded us, does not automatically or immediately lead to death), the civil magistrate must intervene by rigorously enforcing the laws against the combination of workmen. The threat of ‘punishment or ruin’ will thereby break their resistance and allow the market to protect them as it will. Smith, so willing elsewhere to pass judgement on laws that he finds inefficient or unjust, is strangely silent on the matter of anti-combination laws that form an unalterable backdrop to the struggles he describes. They seem unjust, in that they prohibit only the combination of workmen, but the injustice, from the point of view of Smith’s system, is only apparent: in reality, they free the market to reward the workmen to the greatest extent possible while protecting them from the effects of their own avarice and short-sightedness.

The case of grain merchants, ‘dealers in corn’, whose product, unlike that of pin makers, is necessary to the mere survival of a population, is one to which Smith devotes a great deal of attention. The peculiarities of the trade mean that the corn merchant not only ‘deserves the full protection of the law’ but in fact requires it. Their role as provisioners of the nation exposes them ‘to popular odium. . . . In years of scarcity, the inferior ranks of the people impute their distress to the corn merchant who becomes the object of their hatred and indignation.’ The rationing of grain, which the merchant’s search for profits effects, is represented in the popular imagination as ‘engrossing and forestalling’ (that is, as hoarding and price speculation), a representation which, Smith argues, ‘may be compared to the popular terrors and suspicions of witchcraft’, the victims of which were ‘not more innocent of the misfortunes imputed to them’.³¹ The ‘imaginary crime’ imputed to corn merchants, however comparable to that of the unfortunates accused of witchcraft, is far more severely punished. Such punishment may take the form of a government moved by ‘popular odium’ and the threat of disorder to order the merchants to sell their stock at lower prices than the market would otherwise permit. The effect of such an improvident act is to allow the inferior ranks of society the immediate gratification they demand, while in fact exposing them to the famine that their immoderate consumption of all available grain will in a short time bring about. It is as if the bodies of the poor undergo such transformations in times of shortfall that they are able to consume far more food than they can during times of plenty.

Yet far more menacing is the danger that the merchant will be ‘utterly ruined and . . . his magazines plundered and destroyed’ by mobs driven by ‘hatred and indignation’.³² The inferior ranks of society do not, and indeed cannot be expected to, understand that their distress, even their destitution and slow starvation, are necessary and that with the market’s rationing of food must inevitably follow a rationing of life itself, an allowing of some to die, so that others, a majority perhaps, may live. The mob, faced not with absolute scarcity – that is, with the demonstrated absence of food at any price – but with a relative scarcity in which enough food exists to feed an entire population, though which, by virtue of price, lies beyond their means, may refuse mortality or even slow starvation and simply seize the stores themselves. It is here that the sovereign power must intervene, not necessarily to kill those who refuse to die, but to ensure, through the use of force, that they

will be exposed to death and compelled to accept the rationing of life by the market.

Thus alongside the figure of Homo Sacer, the one who may be killed with impunity, is another figure, one whose death is no doubt less spectacular than the first and is the object of no memorial or commemoration: he who with impunity may be allowed to die, slowly or quickly, in the name of the rationality and equilibrium of the market.

Notes

1. Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, New Left Books, London, 1970, p. 13.
2. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977, p. 213.
3. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 2 vols, Liberty Fund, Indianapolis, 1981, vol. 1, pp. 26, 25.
4. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, p. 213.
5. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Liberty Fund, Indianapolis, 1986, p. 301.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 313.
7. See the commentary of Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la Biopolitique: Cours aux Collège de France, 1978–1979*, Gallimard, Paris, 2005, pp. 282–90.
8. Seneca, *The Stoic Philosophy of Seneca: Essays and Letters*, Norton, New York 1958, p. 32.
9. Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, pp. 184–5.
10. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1998, pp. 3–4.
11. Achille Mbembe, ‘Necropolitics’, *Public Culture*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2003, pp. 19–20.
12. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Vintage, New York, 1978, p. 136.
13. Louis Althusser, ‘L’homme, cette nuit’, in *Écrits philosophiques et politiques*, vol. 1, pp. 239–42.
14. Mbembe, ‘Necropolitics’, p. 20.
15. Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, pp. 184–5.
16. Jacob Viner, *The Role of Providence in the Social Order*, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 1972.
17. Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, pp. 84, 83, 86, 90, 77.
18. Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, p. 83.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 83–6.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
21. For a discussion of the French famines, see Cormac Ó Gráda, ‘Markets and Famine in Pre-industrial Europe’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 36, no. 2, Autumn 2005, pp. 143–6.
22. Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, pp. 90–91.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
24. Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famine: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1981.
25. Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, pp. 526–7.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 526.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 527, 533.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 84, 85.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 527, 534.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 527.

Nihilism and faith

Rose, Bernstein and the future of Critical Theory

Tony Gorman

In a succession of books the late Gillian Rose and Jay Bernstein have sought to defend and elaborate upon the Adornian inheritance both within Critical Theory, contra Habermas,¹ and beyond Critical Theory, contra post-structuralist and postmodernist thought.² In these works, Rose and Bernstein are clearly engaged in a shared project and present a common front to the philosophical world. The central features of this shared project are a commitment to the method of immanent critique, genealogy and phenomenology without historical completion, as a means of rescuing lost forms of knowledge, political wisdom and ethical life. Their aim is to trace the historical roots of the deformation of reason, as it is reflected in modern/postmodern social theory, jurisprudence, politics and aesthetics, in order to open up new ways of resuming the values of classical theory (i.e. the Platonic–Aristotelian *praxis* and *phronesis*) within the present. However, this work of recovery is tempered by the recognition that the deformation of reason renders impossible the direct expression and reinstatement of these values. Accordingly, they conceive Critical Theory to be an essentially negative and aporetic project: its task is to narrate and explain the deformation of reason as it is reproduced and reinforced in the human sciences from the standpoint of an expanded notion of rationality, while remorselessly criticizing as hopelessly utopian all attempts, including its own, to transcend in thought the limitations that deformed reason imposes in actuality.

However, in the *Broken Middle* (1992),³ Rose implicitly departs from this shared consensus with Bernstein. The most immediate expression of this change in orientation is Rose's explicit criticism of Adorno, which builds upon and further elaborates the critique of negative dialectics stated in her 1987 paper 'From Speculative to Dialectical Thinking: Hegel and Adorno' (which would have been more aptly subtitled 'Rose and Adorno').⁴ In addition to the critique of

Adorno, *The Broken Middle* introduces two innovations not contained in Rose's first three works. First, drawing heavily on Kierkegaard, it advances, embraces and defends a notion of faith. Second, Rose switches the axis of genealogical origin from the Greek polis to the Talmudic Judaic community. Rose's motivation for this changed point of departure is two-fold: first, to show that faith is a necessary condition of love without domination in personal relationships; second, to demonstrate in opposition to Christian dogmatics that grace is not opposed to law but is the means of its deliverance. The genealogical function that Talmudic Judaism is made to serve in *The Broken Middle* is the idea of a post-sacrificial, ethical community, conceptually prior to the Christian separation of love and law and the modern diremption of law and ethics, and yet mediated by tradition and reason and thus open to history. Rose then reconstructs the fate of modern Judaism from the standpoint of this fictional community to show how modern Judaism and Jewish secular thought re-present the broken Talmudic mediation and how this in turn is a consequence and expression of the antinomies of modernity as a whole. Rose situates herself within the text as the 'single one' who must negotiate the 'breaks' between the universal (the modern state and the discourse of human rights) and the particular (religion and ethnicity). This engagement is pursued through an immanent critique of Christian and Judaic political theology, psychoanalysis, anthropology, political theory and literature. In this extended narrative, the Marxist dimension of the first phase of her work almost completely drops out of the account. Rose in effect abandons her earlier project of a Hegelian Marxism in favour of a Kierkegaardian Hegelianism.⁵

Bernstein, on the other hand, has continued to pursue the project as originally defined. The most comprehensive expression of this to date is his magisterial reconstruction of Adorno's ethical thought,

Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics (2001). In this work, Bernstein presents a detailed interpretation and reconstruction of Adorno's 'ethical' texts – *Minima Moralia*, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *Negative Dialectics* – abstracting their central propositions and reconstructing them within the context and language of recent post-analytical philosophy. On the one hand, this violates Adorno's philosophy, his express insistence on the unity of philosophical form and content and the necessity of the use of modernist forms of literary expression to resist the assimilation of its content to the forms of traditional theory. Bernstein in effect systematizes Adorno's anti-system by integrating it within his own field of concepts and categories. This would be relatively innocuous if Bernstein was merely offering an explication of Adorno's thought, but he goes beyond this limited ambition to seek to 'press Adorno's thought into a form that enables its fuller appreciation and ideally its further extension and elaboration'.⁶ Bernstein offers no self-reflection on his own philosophical style, nor does he appear to notice that the transposition of Adorno's speculative discourse into the philosophical register of contemporary post-analytical thought stands in need of justification. By contrast, Rose in *The Broken Middle* remains faithful to the spirit of Adorno in respecting his requirement to find a literary form adequate to a speculative discourse in the very act of repudiating the letter of his thought.

On the other hand, Bernstein undoubtedly succeeds in rendering Adorno's ethical thought more perspicacious. Taking Adorno as his constant point of reference, he delivers a devastating critique of Kantian constructivism in epistemology and ethics, before going on to present a powerful analysis of 'Auschwitz' and its sources in modern instrumental reason and the impossible necessity of assimilating it to our ethical self-understanding. He concludes with an outline of his own independent moral argument for an 'ethical modernism'. Bernstein's 'ethical modernism' is a vision of ethical socialism as unrealizable yet residual in the present. This vision has negative and positive aspects. Negatively, it demands resistance to the domination of the abstract over the concrete, the dead over the living or the reduction of living beings to the status of mere things. In short, it calls for resistance to the reifying tendencies of capital and 'rationalized' reason. But since reification is an all-pervasive feature of modern social life, we are all implicated in reifying structures and practices, so we can never be sure exactly what would count as an effective protest against reification rather than a means of reinforcing it. The critique of capital therefore does not necessarily legitimate

an anti-capitalist politics. Positively, however, ethical modernism is grounded in the free acknowledgement of human dependence on nature. Therefore it does demand an ethic of solidarity with living beings in their animal vulnerability and with the environment. It requires a reinstatement (practically, not just theoretically) of the ethical values of caring, sympathy, pity and compassion in the face of their erosion by instrumental reason and rationalized moral norms.

In this article, I shall attempt to show that Rose's 'break' with Adorno also represents a departure from the common project she shared with Bernstein. I shall analyse the roots of their divorce and seek to mediate their reconciliation. The split between Rose and Adorno has more than local significance; it returns us to issues that go to the very foundations of Critical Theory both in its historical formation in the inter-war period and its theoretical origins in the Hegelian aftermath. I suggest that the reconciliation of Rose and Bernstein allows for a more inclusive notion of Critical Theory than that to be found in Adorno and Horkheimer and opens up the possibility of a different, more positive, response to the problem of nihilism in modernity.

The article is divided into three parts. In the first part, I set the scene for a critical dialogue between Rose and Bernstein by first outlining Adorno's reading of Kierkegaard in *Kierkegaard: The Construction of the Aesthetic* (1932) and then proceeding to an assessment of Rose's refutation of Adorno's interpretation in *The Broken Middle*. In the second part I bring Rose's *The Broken Middle* and Bernstein's *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* into critical dialogue with one another to show how their divergent conceptions of ethics are mutually incompatible with one another. My aim here is to demonstrate that Rose's fideism and Bernstein's ethical socialism, as it were, fail towards one another. In the third part, I draw out the wider implications of the separation between Rose and Bernstein and the possibilities that their reconciliation would open up for Critical Theory.

Kierkegaard's pseudonyms

Adorno's *Kierkegaard: The Construction of the Aesthetic* established the style and much of the content of his mature philosophy.⁷ It is therefore no accident that Rose should elaborate on her 'break' with Adorno by explicitly challenging his early reading of Kierkegaard in *The Broken Middle*, and implicitly throughout the work as a whole. I shall first summarize the main thrust of Adorno's immanent critique of Kierkegaard before going on to detail Rose's response to it.



Adorno claims that 'Kierkegaard's realm is ruled by logical immanence'. The pseudonyms that Kierkegaard deploys are not 'living bodies' but cyphers of a pre-conceived dialectical schema, albeit skilfully disguised by the author's 'geniality of presentation' and 'irony of method'. Unmasking this artifice calls for a two-step mode of interpretation: first, the pseudonyms are situated within the dialectical schema, and second, certain key words and metaphors are singled out for particular attention, as they 'reveal what the dialectical scheme seeks to conceal', namely its excess materiality.⁸ The precipitates of the critical process turn out to be a constellation of interrelated concepts: the 'interieur', 'melancholy', 'mourning', 'despair', 'image' and 'myth'. What these terms ultimately disclose is the isolation of Kierkegaard as a solitary (and economically parasitic) intellectual entrapped in his own self-woven world of semblance. But the constellation also serves as an allegory of a redeemable reality beyond illusion.

Perhaps the central concept at work here is Adorno's notion of the 'mythical'. Interspersed throughout his

reading of Kierkegaard is an account of the genesis of myth, which draws heavily on Benjamin. For Adorno, the mythical element is a mimetic representation of an undifferentiated natural state in which desire and the desired are found in unity. The image is produced by means of the recollection of the original dream-state. Thus, 'myth' is a fusion of past imagery and present consciousness. The bourgeois 'interieur' is an example of the 'arrangement' of the products of such recollected 'proto-historical' images in the present.⁹ Yet, for Adorno, Kierkegaard is only correct up to a point in maintaining, following Socrates, that when consciousness (the idea) recalls the dream, the mythical is reconstituted in a new form 'as image'; for that is merely the undertow of the 'idea', not the 'authentic' image. Here Adorno is holding out for a notion of the 'image' that is not simply the dialectical obverse of recollection but one that remains faithful to the content of the object recalled even as it is partially occluded in the act of recollection itself. This leads him to assert that the 'most authentically mythical' is recollected 'when the image startles up what has been from the caverns of pre-history'.¹⁰ Adorno further underlines this point when he states that 'natural being is dialectical in itself',¹¹ meaning that the object retains its own integrity over and above the constructive activity of consciousness.

Adorno aims to demonstrate that Kierkegaard's 'system' conforms to Hegel's idealistic logic, with the 'stages' of the aesthetic and the ethical mirroring the categories of being and essence, and the 'religious' supplanting the concept. Consequently, it too remains within the realm of the mythical. The only difference between Hegel and Kierkegaard is that Hegel's concept encompasses 'transcendent being', while in Kierkegaard's final 'religious stage', 'immanent consciousness' reaches its ultimate limit. Therefore, according to Adorno, Kierkegaard represents the culmination of the history of German idealism no less than Hegel; both thinkers seek and fail to find a means of escape from the solipsism of modern self-consciousness. The final stage of 'immanent consciousness' is the romantic or Fichtean 'I', in which the opposition between ego and non-ego falls within subjectivity itself. As a result, the 'I' can only relate to the products of its own imaginary self-positing and not to the object as it is in itself. For Adorno, Kierkegaard personifies the isolated romantic ego trapped in its own immanent subjectivity that has grown melancholy having attained insight into the inner negativity and illusory nature of its own form-giving activity. The source of this insight is then dramatized as a 'collision' with the 'Absolute paradox':

a coming into relation with that which is absolutely other to itself. Consumed by guilt for its own presumption to absolute autonomy, consciousness then sacrifices itself as an act of propitiation to the unknown (God) in the belief that it has thereby accomplished the 'ontological reconciliation' of spirit and nature, for in the dialectical schema nature does not appear except as spirit. But it deceives itself; the belief that spirit has absorbed nature into itself is an illusion, and the self-immolation of the spirit is only a mythical propitiation that remains entirely within the orbit of semblance. Having 'volatized' itself, consciousness lives on in a state of 'objective despair'.¹²

For Adorno, then, Kierkegaard promotes a 'theology of sacrifice'.¹³ On these grounds, he charges him with being the Antichrist. True Christianity, Adorno informs us, aims at 'reconciliation' and not at 'the nameless execution of the paradox'. In calling for the 'mythical sacrifice of reason', Kierkegaard remains at the level of natural religion superseded by Christianity. Furthermore, Kierkegaard's 'paganism' substitutes an illusory 'hope against hope' for a genuine worldly hope in a *possible* future. His 'mythical sacrifice of reason' places an obstacle in the way of genuine ontological reconciliation by precluding the 'enigmatic step that leads out of mere nature by remaining within it' and where, 'free of resignation,' nature/spirit 'perseveres as desirous instinct and eloquent consciousness'. This reconciliation is to be accomplished not through sacrifice, but precisely through the renunciation of sacrifice. Ontological reconciliation therefore is redemption from sacrifice, in which 'sacrifice disappears'.¹⁴

In *The Broken Middle*, Rose takes up the cudgels against Adorno, on behalf not of Kierkegaard, but his pseudonym Climacus, *de silentio*. Rose enters two main objections to Adorno's interpretation. Contra Adorno, she maintains that a reading of Kierkegaard must begin with the 'pseudonyms' and not with the 'schema'. Rose's central protest against the 'tradition of Kierkegaard interpretation' (including Adorno's reading) is that it has consistently conflated the biographical author Kierkegaard with his pseudonymous narrators, and it has therefore failed to attend to the specificity of the pseudonymous texts themselves. The key to Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship is 'systematic illusion' and its aim is to present an authorship without authority. It aims to re-educate the overeducated in the way of faith. This cannot be done directly since no one person can make another free.¹⁵ Human authorities necessarily breed dependencies. The author must, therefore, relinquish authority in order to release the reader to assume it.¹⁶ And she

can only do this by ironically withdrawing behind a mask or veil of facetiousness. Rose therefore insists that in reading Kierkegaard we excise all reference to the biographical author, for it is 'the authorship which confesses, not the confession that gives rise to the authorship'.¹⁷ Indeed, Rose contends that even when Kierkegaard writes under his own signature it is intended as a 'heteronym' – a fictitious persona. In what follows, I shall endeavour to respect scrupulously these strictures in my reading of Rose and Bernstein, where I shall be doing some impersonating of my own, with a touch of facetiousness too.

For Rose, Adorno's refusal to risk undergoing the play of dramatized illusion enacted within the Kierkegaardian corpus by schematizing it in advance represents a further instance of his propensity to judge the dialectic rather than surrender to its speculative movement. This is her first objection. The second is that Adorno 'has so dedicated his own discourse to the *idea* of "sacrifice" that he utterly misses the point that nothing is sacrificed; and that no sacrifice ever occurs in *Fear and Trembling*'.¹⁸ Both Adorno and Rose are therefore dedicated to a philosophy of redemption without sacrifice or resignation, but as we shall see they seek it in opposite directions.

Rose's insistence on the priority of the pseudonyms in Kierkegaard's texts reveals the Socratic intent of *The Broken Middle*. The Socratic problem in its Kierkegaardian form is 'how to further the passion of *faith* of another whose *erotic* passion one has aroused and attracted to oneself'.¹⁹ As we have seen, the answer is by adopting a persona, or rather a series of personae, in order to educate the desire of the cave dwellers. In *The Broken Middle*, Rose becomes an actress, impersonating many authors (Kierkegaard, Hegel, etc.) with the aim of bringing the reader in relation to her own 'plenitude' so as to release her for freedom and love.

For Rose, faith in an omnipotent creator is a necessary condition of (being able to) love. Only an omnipotent creator can love freely without demanding love in return.²⁰ Absolute or unconditional love between adult human beings is mutually destructive for it requires a total surrender of two selves to one other. Such an absolute mutuality is not sustainable; almost inevitably it must give way to an asymmetrical relation of (relative) dominance and subordination. One human being cannot love another absolutely and freely. Only if one feels oneself to be loved absolutely and unconditionally *prior* to entering into the erotic relationship is one able to love absolutely and freely: to risk loving without the guarantee that one will be loved in return.²¹ And such an absolute sense of one's essential desirability

can be attained solely through faith (in an omnipotent, all-loving God). Rose, however, stresses that the God relationship is one that we can never fully achieve but must ever 'fail towards'.²²

This is the substance of Rose's reading of Kierkegaard's rereading of the Biblical story of the binding of Isaac in *Fear and Trembling*, as it were, 'shot through a pistol' (i.e. stripped of its labour, difficulty and aporia). Following Kierkegaard, Rose stresses the fact that Isaac was not sacrificed; that at the last moment an angel intervenes to stay Abraham's hand and Isaac is set free. But Rose also points out that (in contrast to the master-slave dialectic, which fictionally enacts the beginning of natural self-consciousness), Abraham risks not his own self but that of his son. And, although Abraham, as it were, gets Isaac back, he does not get him back for himself; rather Isaac is returned to him as the promise of the future of Israel. In sum, Abraham so trusts that God loves him (that he is loved absolutely) that he is able to let Isaac go. In Rose's speculative phraseology, 'violence-in-love' (exclusive love) gives way to the 'love-in-violence' (surrendering the beloved), which marks the transition from 'being loveable' to 'love-ableness,' the capacity to love, suffer loss and not despair but risk loving again. For Rose, therefore, faith is not predicated on an act of self-renunciation or self-sacrifice. As Kierkegaard sought to demonstrate through the four different versions of the Akedah he relates in *Fear and Trembling*, only Abraham's undeviating trust in the providence of the outcome qualified him as a 'knight of faith' rather than a 'knight of infinite resignation'. Faith requires a form of self-relinquishment based on the opening up of the whole self to that which is beyond it, rather than an act of self-repression or a ritualized form of self-abasement. To employ Kierkegaard's metaphors, faith is not like swimming against the tide (which is the mode of resignation), it is not a striving, but more akin to a 'mysterious floating'.²³

Another way of saying that nothing is sacrificed in the act of faith is to say that nothing is exchanged. Abraham does not have faith in order to get Isaac back; he simply has faith – and Isaac is returned. It may be objected that regardless of Abraham's religious psychology, an exchange has indeed taken place. In return for staking his fidelity, Abraham not only receives Isaac back but also secures the divine election of his nation. Anthropologically speaking, the (greatest possible) quantitative sacrifice is recouped as (the greatest possible) gain in identity.²⁴ However, it is not possible to abstract from the inward disposition of the religious believer and still hope to understand the nature of

faith. This is why anthropological and sociological accounts of religious belief become reductive once they go beyond analysing the social functions and effects of religious values to speculate on their truth content. From the point of view of an anthropology or sociology of religion, what matters is not the truth of the religious beliefs themselves but the sincerity with which they are held en masse. The truth or otherwise of the religious disposition itself is a philosophical and theological concern not a sociological question. The traditional language used to describe religious experience is complicit in sustaining this confusion, in so far as many of its central concepts, such as 'guilt', 'conversion', 'redemption', 'staking oneself', 'losing'/gaining oneself back, and so on, are invariably couched in economic terms. This makes it almost impossible *not* to understand faith as involving some form of exchange. However, a faith that understands itself in such terms is self-disqualifying. Although it would seem that, Kierkegaardianly speaking, a would-be believer already knows, as it were, this side of the 'paradox' – that if she takes the 'leap' she stands to 'lose' her sinful self and to 'gain' a new, redeemed, self – in fact she knows neither of these things. A knowing faith is a contradiction.

The only analogy that I can think of which really captures the supra-economic nature of faith is that of gambling. Although the analogy has previously been deployed by apologists for fideism, most notably Pascal,²⁵ it usually incorporates faith into an exchange model in order to meet the sceptic on her own grounds. These analogies fail, however, because they take their exemplary gambler to be a prudent gamester who carefully calculates the odds. The proper analogy is with the reckless gambler who stakes everything on a whim. Everything tells her she will lose; but she nonetheless fully expects to win. Yet her motivation for playing is only nominally to win the pot; inwardly she is not interested in winning per se. She has already forsaken all her worldly goods in the act of placing the bet and that will remain the case even if she gets back tenfold their value. The random act of placing the bet represents a decision not to decide, a retreat from willing, a suspension of self. She plays for no worldly reason. Rather, she delivers herself up to the moment of Chance, to Fate, in the confidence that it will smile kindly upon her. But if it doesn't, she will deliver herself up to it again, and again. This is not an expenditure without reserve for the purpose of attaining a higher status. Indeed, it is not really an expenditure of any kind; it is instead an interval of potentiality suspended between grace and damnation.²⁶

Gambling is, of course, not faith, but it is analogous to faith. Faith too requires an absolute trust in the 'unknown'. It is this capacity to let go (of oneself) and to trust absolutely in the 'unknown' that converts the 'unknown' into a person (for to place absolute trust in a mere thing is idolatry).²⁷ In other words, the self-surrender intrinsic to the moment of faith 'finitizes' the 'unknown' (i.e. transforms an abstract relation into a personal relationship) without compromising its absolute alterity (i.e. the hidden God).²⁸ In faith, the 'unknown' literally comes into being. Faith is the undertaking of an absolute trust. It is absolute in the sense that the 'object' of that trust, which must be related to as a subject, remains constantly unknown (hidden) and hence unchangeable, although the relation of trust is ever-changing (i.e. it is psychologically, sociologically and historically mediated). Faith therefore necessarily precludes a rational assessment of the evidence for and against there being a God.²⁹ The risk of faith is not the banal anxiety that it turns out that there is no God (for the presence of 'God' is coeval with faith itself; God goes out of existence when he is not being apperceived), but that of placing an absolute trust in a relative value. Yet, taking that risk, succumbing to it, and overcoming it, is essential to the process of being educated for freedom.

For Rose, however, the education of faith necessarily involves negotiating the always-already historically contingent but prevailing forms of political and legal authority. In particular, Rose contests the Lutheran interpretation of Romans that opposes freedom through grace to the coercion and unfreedom of life under the law, both moral and legal.³⁰ Rose denies that the law is the antithesis of grace, for it is 'law which arouses power – sympathetic and antipathetic; law which binds and looses, to which power responds against itself or for itself. Law is abundant and abounding: it is not the contrary of grace which tempers its letter with mercy and equity.' Therefore faith involves 'risking out' into a world always already invested in law. The prohibition creates the desire for its own transgression. In the beginning, there is anxiety before the law: faith is an authentic response to this anxiety. However, Rose also contests the corollary of the Pauline understanding of the relation between faith and law, restated by Kierkegaard in *The Concept of Anxiety* to the effect that the 'profound tragedy of Judaism' is that knowing only guilt before the law it has no conception of the actuality of sin and consequently the Jew remains in bondage to the law, unable to attain atonement through grace.³¹ On this construction, Judaism remains a religion of sacrifice. Rose points out in opposition

to this that 'The Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, was developed *after* the fall of the Second Temple and at the end of priestly sacrifice.' Rose further objects that the Rabbinic Judaism of Talmud Torah is always 'within' the law – 'on the one hand 613 commands, on the other perpetual negotiation of their meaning' – and that therefore the Jewish experience of sin is actual and thus atonement is actual too and 'annually renewable'.³²

To conclude this section, then, Adorno's interpretation of Kierkegaard is essentially Feuerbachian: consciousness creates a myth, the 'paradox', and then sacrifices itself to its own idol. In response, Rose denies that the 'paradox' is a myth (while conceding that it can only be referred to aesthetically); rather it is the incursion of revelation into representation. Adorno's reading of the 'paradox' as an anti-rational principle to which consciousness sacrifices itself incorporates that which, *pace* Kierkegaard and Rose, exceeds representation and exchange within an economy of exchange and representation. Moreover, he avers that in trading itself in exchange for 'ontological reconciliation', consciousness has sold itself for fool's gold of its own making. The absurdity of understanding faith in such crude economic terms should be self-evident. As Rose wryly observes, by way of a quotation from T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, in Adorno 'there is no place to be like Phlebas, the Phoenician, who forgot "the deep sea swell/ And the profit and loss"'.³³

Hard-hearted judge and beautiful soul

I shall now turn the axis of the discussion from Adorno and Rose to Rose and Bernstein. I shall begin by outlining the areas of convergence between *The Broken Middle* and *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* before going on to discuss the areas where their contents diverge and enter into conflict with one another.

The central thesis of *Disenchantment and Ethics* is that the domination of instrumental reason over all aspects of social life in modernity has produced an ongoing crisis of nihilism. The manifest symptom of this crisis is an almost universal condition of 'affective scepticism' – a disjunction between values (which no longer have [objective] validity) and ends (which no longer have [objective] value).³⁴ As a result, the 'material inferences'³⁵ that connect ethical demands to ethical responses, the very grounds of our practical-rational moral agency, are all but severed. In short, the modern world has suffered an ethical catastrophe. There has been a wholesale destruction of (moral) authority, (moral) knowledge and (moral) experience.

Moreover, the ‘moral centralist’ theories – utilitarianism and Kantian ethics – developed in response to this ethical vacuum act to reinforce the separation of ethical demand and response that is responsible for the catastrophe in the first place; for both theories require that responses to ethical demands be determined by reference to a universal theoretical principle rather than to perceptible suffering (the violation of the ‘auratic uniqueness’) of the individual.

The Adornian view of modernity, derived from Weber and endorsed by Bernstein, is also largely shared by Rose. Indeed, Rose’s critique of the sociological tradition in *Hegel Contra Sociology* – to the effect that modern Social Theory, in taking its stance on either validity or value, has reinscribed and thereby reinforced the ‘diremption of law and ethics’ constitutive of modern social life – parallels Bernstein’s critique of modern ethical theory in *Disenchantment and Ethics*. The notion of our ‘ruined ethical life’ also provides the background for Rose’s discussions of faith and politics in *The Broken Middle*. Rose repeatedly insists on the need to ‘witness’ the diremption of the law and ethics in its actuality and its attendant violence, rather than retreat into a private cynicism or seek exile in ‘other-worldly’ communities. Similarly, Bernstein claims that the response to the crisis of nihilism takes two broad forms: ‘hurt’ – cynicism, boredom, despair, resentment, and so on; and ‘flight’ – the ‘attempt to build a haven of symbolic renewal’ in an unredeemed world.³⁶ However, Bernstein is no more sanguine than Rose about the prospects for alternative communities; on the contrary, they both believe that their fate is to be corrupted within by their opposition to the overly rationalized world without. This is why although, on the one hand, Bernstein draws on virtue ethics and communitarianism to critique Kantianism and liberal political theory, respectively, for being complicit in the destruction of ethical life, on the other hand he maintains that the latter correspond to the reality of our ruined ethical condition (utilitarianism and Kantian ethics are ‘ethics for hard times’) in a way that the former simply do not. In other words, our ethical situation cannot be transformed simply by exhorting people to change their ‘way of seeing’.³⁷ The root cause of nihilism is located in the categorical and institutional structures of rationalized reason rather than in the pathologies of social agents which are their effect.

Rose and Bernstein therefore see the predicament of modernity in much the same terms. Where they diverge is in their response to it. At first sight, Rose’s notion of ‘witness’ seems broadly in keeping with the

‘negative dialectic’ position propounded by Bernstein. But on closer examination they turn out to be quite different, indeed diametrically opposed. To bring out these differences, I must first outline Bernstein’s reconstruction of Adorno’s ethical thought in more detail.

For Bernstein, the destruction of ethical experience is grounded in the hegemony of ‘instrumental reason’. Instrumental reason is defined in turn as ‘any form of reason that conceives of itself (necessarily falsely) as determined by pure reason itself apart from and independent of its object’.³⁸ This is the ‘principle of immanence’ that extends beyond instrumental reason narrowly conceived as means–end technical rationality to incorporate formal logic and mathematics.³⁹ The main vehicle of instrumental reason is what Bernstein names the ‘simple concept’, which abstracts from the concrete particularity of objects to classify them under general categories. The operation of the ‘simple concept’ in science negates the sensuous particularity of natural objects, and so impoverishes the field of experience. Extended into the moral sphere, it likewise abstracts from the moral qualities of individuals as agents to classify their actions as tokens of types. The permissibility of actions is then determined by the test of universalizability, subject to the logical constraints of theoretical reason (consistency and non-contradiction). As a result, theoretical reason supervenes on moral practices. This has a twofold deleterious effect on ethics. First, it renders invalid the (premodern) forms of practical, material inferences that informed factual and ethical responses alike. Second, it creates a problem of moral motivation: why should individuals take a practical moral interest in a theoretical law? As a result, morality has increasingly been reduced to rational procedural rules for the regulation of strangers who are morally indifferent to one another, and ethics has been banished to the private sphere, where it is undermined by its exposure to a disenchanted world. In sum, the critique of theoretical reason consists in showing how reason cannot constitute its objects, and the critique of moral reason consists in showing that the auratic uniqueness of individuals⁴⁰ is the ground of moral motivation rather than abstract moral norms.

Bernstein’s response to our ethical predicament as he sees it is his notion of ‘ethical modernism’. This is not advanced as a theory of ethics, but as a form of praxis. From this perspective, rationalized reason cannot be challenged head-on (the mistake of virtue ethics and communitarianism); instead, it must be subverted indirectly by counterposing the ‘complex concept’ to the ‘simple concept’. The ‘complex concept’ does justice to the radical independence of the object

through a form of reflective or intransitive judgement (for which Kant's aesthetic judgement is the model) as opposed to the subsumptive, 'transitive', judgement of instrumental reason.⁴¹ But this is not exclusive to the aesthetic sphere; rather, the witness to the violence of instrumentalized reason in modernist art (both epistemically and morally) is itself grounded in the resistance to the denial of violence against the auratic uniqueness of the individual in its animal vulnerability. By not fully subsuming the object under the concept, the 'complex concept' opens up the possibility of new experience. As Bernstein neatly puts it, 'indeterminacy in the concept corresponds to possibility in the object.'⁴²

Ethical experience is to be re-enanted by reactivating the material inferences grounded in the unmediated response to animal/human suffering. It demands that we once again identify with animal/human suffering and be affected by it. The learned moral responses of sympathy, pity and compassion are to be retrieved as the basis of a reflective moral practice. However, Bernstein consistently states that he is not propounding a 'new ethics'. As he puts it, 'Negative dialectics broaches, aims at, reveals the possibility of the regime of the complex concept, but always remains this disenchanted side of it.'⁴³ The reach of instrumental reason is such that we are all implicated in its violence, big and small. To survive in modernity we have to affect a 'coldness' towards the suffering of others even if we do not feel it (though in many cases it is all too genuine). Thus, we are all part of what Adorno, once more drawing on Benjamin, calls the 'guilt complex of the living'.⁴⁴ We must therefore remember the victims of the violence that we are implicated in perpetrating and atone for their injuries with expressions of guilt, regret and remorse. Ethical experience in modernity is now 'fugitive', a relatively rare occurrence.⁴⁵ Such fugitive ethical experiences must be celebrated as holding out the promise of an ethical future. Individuals who respond to ethical demands without recourse to rationalized moral norms, but on the basis that they are confronted with a situation that demands an ethical response, may be considered moral exemplars. They are reactivating the (premodern) charismatic authority of making norms that (as in traditional ethics) are 'situationally indexed' to the

(moral) matter at hand. In capturing moments of 'fugitive ethics' and in recovering the forgotten past and reified nature occluded by instrumental reason, ethical modernism is also making 'metaphysical experience' possible again. In sum, therefore, ethical modernism is a form of resistance to the dehumanizing effects of instrumental reason, as it were, from the inside out.

The fault lines between Rose and Bernstein should be becoming apparent by now. Although both share a concept of *Bildung* as a 'teleology without a telos', their respective orientations appear to be going in opposite directions and to have different priorities. For Bernstein, the goal is to chart a 'progressive retreat from mastery over nature to a reconciliation with it'.⁴⁶ By contrast, for Rose, the educational intent of her authorship is to bring the 'single one in relation to the absolute'. For Rose, the way to nature (love) is through God (the Law as Revelation); for Bernstein, the way to 'God' (or its placeholder in modernity, 'metaphysical experience') is through nature (response to the auratic uniqueness of the individual in its animal



embodiment). But, in fact, nature in the (intransitive) sense that Bernstein employs the term hardly gets mentioned in *The Broken Middle* or indeed in Rose's other works. Indeed her insistence on the ubiquity of the law would seem to place her in the Hegelian idealist tradition for which it is a case of 'normativity all the way down' in contrast to Bernstein's counterclaim that it is 'dependency all the way up'.⁴⁷ It is therefore by no means fortuitous that in the *Broken Middle*

Rose's equivalent of Bernstein's moral exemplars are primarily political actors – Varnhagen, Luxemburg and (the young) Arendt.⁴⁸

For Rose freedom presupposes independence from nature rather than reconciliation with it. This explains the ascetic, one might say Nietzschean, dimension of her authorship with its disdain for self-pity and preparedness to confront the violence of our animal nature as a noble enemy.⁴⁹ Moreover, Rose's insistence on the necessity of risk-taking as an integral part of the cultivation of desire implies that being a perpetrator and victim of violence is not, as it is for Bernstein, a regrettable part of modern existence, but inescapable, for which we must continually offer reparation, while (as in Hegel) recognizing it as a necessary means towards the end of freedom. For all these reasons, on Bernstein's account, Rose's rereading of Kierkegaard in *The Broken Middle* can be subjected to essentially the same form of critique that Adorno originally subjected Kierkegaard to in the *Construction of the Aesthetic*. For Rose's account appears to conform to the 'principle of immanence', in so far as it does not fully acknowledge the dependence of reason on its objects. The prime instance of this is Rose's attempt to vindicate the 'paradox' as a means of genuine transcendence that both bestows love on the 'single one' and grants them the power of love-ability. The problem here, from Bernstein's point of view, is that the movement from being loveable to loving others is mediated by a 'form' – the paradox – and this serves to suppress the material inference that would otherwise lead, as it were, directly from the demand for love (charity) to the appropriate response. Although Rose might respond that what is involved here is a 'failing towards form', this would not obviate the objection, for it is the 'form' that is the stumbling block. The additional clarification that the 'paradox' is an aesthetic name for what is essentially unrepresentable, and therefore not a 'form' at all, goes to the heart of the issue here, since from the point of view of Bernstein's naturalism there is no possible object to which it could refer. Ergo it must be an illusory form.

This difference has far-reaching implications for their ethics. To focus this contrast, I shall briefly compare their respective understanding of the notions of love and fidelity. Bernstein, following Adorno's discussion of the subject in *Minima Moralia*, brings out the equivocations of the concept of fidelity in modern marriage. Fidelity as an ethical norm may be enforced in support of patriarchy and its negation may be used to legitimize a shallow emotivism. Since the latter is the prevailing tendency, Adorno argues (and Bernstein

follows him in this), for a notion of 'political love': 'Love means not letting immediacy wither under the omnipresent weight of mediation and economics, and in such fidelity it becomes itself mediated as a stubborn counterpressure.'⁵⁰ Bernstein upholds Adorno's thought that there is a case for maintaining fidelity on a voluntary basis when the involuntary moment of love has come to an end, as an act of ethico-political resistance. This is in sharp contrast to Rose, for whom, as we have seen, the imperative is to 'repeat forwards' – to risk the loss of the other, to free the lover (and oneself) to love again. From a Rosean point of view, the Adorno/Bernstein defence of fidelity would appear to be an act of 'infinite resignation'. Conversely, from the Adorno/Bernstein perspective, Rose would appear to be, paradoxically, defending infidelity in the name of faith. Rose's Kierkegaardian notion of love as 'repetition forwards', the constant readiness to love anew, would seem to repeat only the self-deluding romanticism of Kierkegaard himself. Rose would no doubt respond that the judgement of romantic immaturity delivered on Kierkegaard (and by extension her own authorship) serves to conceal the anxiety of her judges. In her defence, she would call upon the distinction drawn by Kierkegaard in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* between a lower and a higher form of temptation. The lower form of temptation is the enticement to the pleasures forbidden by the moral law and for which the remedy is virtue; the higher form (*Anfechtung*) is the temptation not to trespass the law, not out of consideration for virtue, but as a means of fleeing from the 'paradox', a temptation which can only be overcome through faith. In the latter instance, the moral category of 'wrong' is transformed into the religious category of 'sin'. It is doubtless true that the profession of a religious faith can be (and frequently is) used to justify wrongdoing. Equally, however, the moral consciousness may embrace virtue so as to avoid the 'spiritual trial' of being a sinner and so experience a crisis of faith. This is the temptation not to be tempted, not to risk, not to live. It is to substitute judgement for action, righteousness for forgiveness. Because both morality and faith can be expressed insincerely, there is ultimately no way of distinguishing their true and false expressions with certainty (even to oneself, although this is not to say that we can have no insight into our true motives). Thus, *Anfechtung* repeats at the religious stage the predicament faced in the moral sphere by Kant's grocer, who has no way of knowing the purity of his intentions.

The dialectic between Rose and Bernstein staged above has a familiar ring because it essentially repeats that between the 'hard-hearted' judge and the 'beautiful

soul' in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Bernstein (from Rose's perspective) is the moral consciousness that judges without acting; while Rose (from Bernstein's perspective) is the 'active individual' lost in her own world of semblance, as religious faith can now only be a form of flight. Whereas Rose values desire over need, Bernstein privileges need over desire. For Bernstein, Rose presents subjectivity without substance, the actress lost in her impersonations ('Being Gillian') with no base to return; for Rose, Bernstein presents substance without subjectivity (or a reflexively self-negating subjectivity), dedicated to mourning a world that has failed to notice it has died, whereas in fact it is the mourner who is failing to live.

Rose and Bernstein, R & B, 'rhythm and blues'.

Dialectic of faith

Rose's defence of Kierkegaard's fideism and the adoption of the Judaic model of polity over the classical Greek polis represents a radical departure, not just from Adorno but from Critical Theory as a whole. To see this, we need briefly to place Critical Theory itself in historical perspective. The roots of Critical Theory can be traced back to the immediate post-Hegelian era. Emil Fackenheim concludes his study of the *Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought* (1967) with a coda on the 'Crisis of the Hegelian Middle'. The 'Hegelian synthesis' in which religion and the state are comprehended in their speculative unity was recognized by Hegel himself to be an ideal not an actual reconciliation. The subsequent history of modernity has served to undermine totally the possibility of even an ideal reconciliation. As Fackenheim notes, the religious and the political dimensions of the Hegelian synthesis disintegrated into the seemingly absolutely opposed extremes of Kierkegaard's anti-rational fideism, on the one hand, and Marx's militant atheistic humanism, on the other.⁵¹ From its inception in the 1920s up until the present day, Critical Theory has followed a trajectory in which the orthodox Marxist emphases on Marx's account of economic crisis, class struggle and the seizure of power by the proletariat have been gradually jettisoned, while Marx's accounts of reification and alienation have been retained and fused with a Nietzschean-Weberian account of rationalization and devaluation. On these terms, the central pathology of modern societies is no longer injustice and exploitation but meaninglessness and nihilism.⁵² For the most part, therefore, Critical Theory takes it as read that 'God is dead': religion lives on only as the spirit of egoism in civil society, as 'moral religion' or as self-deluding mysticism.⁵³ As in Marx, the meaning of religious

faith is exhausted by its being understood as either a form of consolation and solace or as a means of protest against injustice and social oppression. For itself, faith is dismissed as illusory. Furthermore, Critical Theory also follows Marx in implicitly assuming that political emancipation from reification and alienation would remove the social basis of religion and that thereafter it would wither away.

As we have seen, Rose contests both these conclusions. In so doing, Rose does not deny the 'secularization thesis' that institutional forms of religion are in decline or conforming to the law of the market; but maintains that, in so far as the ultimate ground of religion is faith in a transcendent reality, the existence of religion transcends its social function. Faith is not an illusion; it is not even a necessary illusion: it is a form of truth. As such, in principle, it is part of the solution to nihilism rather than part of the problem. Bernstein seems to follow the Critical Theory tradition in dogmatically precluding the notion that religious faith provides a basis of ethical motivation and material inference to be 'reactivated' alongside other forms of intransitive understanding. In addition, both Rose's account of faith and Bernstein's notion of 'fugitive ethics' belie their analysis of nihilism as all-pervasive and ethical life as entirely ruined. Rose did not have a faith (other than in the sense of a critical conformity to the religious traditions by which she was formed); she simply had faith.⁵⁴ Rose's account of faith is not esoteric in principle; on the contrary, it merely articulates a form of religious experience that is common in modernity both inside organized religion and outside of it. Similarly, Bernstein's notion of 'fugitive ethics', as instanced by disinterested, immediate forms of ethical response to the suffering and needs of others, is not so rare as he supposes, as his own examples show; nor are modern subjects so completely devoid of meaning and motivation as he imagines. In short, the sociological assumptions underpinning the account of nihilism shared by Rose and Bernstein need to be re-evaluated because they contradict the affirmative possibilities of faith and hope that they identify in their respective accounts of our 'broken' modernity. This is not to deny that nihilism constitutes the core problem of modernity, or that moral universalism is a contributory factor to the problem (i.e. it is not to side with the Habermasian wing of Critical Theory), but to maintain that there is a social basis for resistance to the nihilistic destruction of ethical life. However, before Critical Theory can begin to reflect on the political forms such a resistance to nihilism should take, it must first restore its faith in modern humanity.

Notes

1. Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno*, Macmillan, London, 1978; *Hegel Contra Sociology*, Athlone, London, 1981. J.M. Bernstein, *Recovering Ethical Life: Jürgen Habermas and the Future of Critical Theory*, Routledge, London and New York, 1995.
2. Gillian Rose, *The Dialectic of Nihilism: Post-Structuralism and the Law*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1984. J.M. Bernstein, *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992.
3. *The Broken Middle: Out of Our Ancient Society*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992.
4. 'From Speculative to Dialectical Thinking: Hegel and Adorno', in *Judaism and Modernity: Philosophical Essays*, London, Blackwell, 1993, pp. 53–64.
5. For a defence of the claim that *The Broken Middle* represents a break with the critical Marxist project of her earlier work, see my essay 'Gillian Rose and the Project of a Critical Marxism', *Radical Philosophy* 105, January/February 2001, pp. 25–36.
6. J.M. Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, p. 39.
7. Theodor W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis and London, 1989. See the Foreword to the text by Robert Hullot-Kentor, 'Critique of the Organic', pp. x–xxiii.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 120–21.
15. *The Broken Middle*, pp. 13, 9, 82. Rose cites the following passage from Kierkegaard's *Journals* in support of this claim: 'one man cannot make another quite free, because the one who has the power is imprisoned in it and consequently always has a false relation to him who wishes to be free. That is why there is finite self-love in all finite power.'
16. Rose's model here is Kierkegaard. 'Whether at the most intimate "personal" moments in the papers or the journals, or strolling insignificantly in the street – precisely when remaining "what he really is" – the author is masked and middle, always *inter* and *inter*, mediating and vanishing, the reader launched' (cited on *ibid.*, p. 20).
17. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 82. As Rose puts it, 'only an infinite power can make another free without corrupting itself'. This comment introduces the excerpt from Kierkegaard's *Journals* cited above, which continues: 'It is only a miserable and worldly picture of the dialectic of power to say that it becomes greater in proportion as it can compel and make things dependent. Socrates knew better; the art of using power is to 'make free'. But between men this can never happen, though it may be always necessary to stress that this is the greatest good; only omnipotence can do so in truth.' The author therefore must literally play God.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 23. Rose maintains that faith enables 'forward repetition' as opposed to 'backward repetition'. These terms are taken from Kierkegaard's *Repetition*. Rose expresses her point as follows: '[Forward] repetition would be the passage from beloved, loveableness, to love-ableness: from knowing oneself loved, 'loveable' to finding oneself graced with a plenitude of being-able-to-love, and thus to risk loving again and again, regardless of any particular outcome – disastrous or successful. To be love-able: to love singularly, to forgive, to release, and hence to love again and again ... such grace needs no words in its passion-action.'
22. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
23. From *Fear and Trembling*, cited in *ibid.*, p. 15. The meaning of faith and its relation to nihilism cannot be stated at all in propositional terms (therefore it cannot be communicated philosophically other than analogically), but it can be inadequately expressed poetically. Take, for example, Yeats's well-known poem 'An Irish Airman Foresees His Death': 'A lonely impulse of delight/ Drove to this tumult in the clouds/ I balanced all, brought all to mind/ The years to come seemed waste of breath/ A waste of breath the years behind/ In balance with this life, this death.' W.B. Yeats, *Selected Poetry*, Pan, London, 1974, p. 69. Here nihilism is expressed as the unity of total renunciation of past and present with consummate meaninglessness. It is a form of Stoic freedom, what Kierkegaard terms 'infinite resignation'. Faith is the renunciation of *this* renunciation. But this negation of the negation is not accomplished through an act of will but through an act of self-forgetfulness akin to that which occurs when being reunited with an old and beloved friend. This is not a sacrifice of self but a self-augmentation free of self-regard.
24. I owe this formulation to Peter Nesteruk, 'Ritual and Identity in Late Twentieth Century America', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 43–69 n56. Nesteruk develops an original notion of 'disjunctive reciprocity' to convey the way a quantitative good may be sacrificed for a qualitative reward in terms of identity-confirmation. Although this results in an expanded notion of the economic beyond merely monetary or barter exchanges, it is nonetheless totalizing in so far as it precludes all supra-economic relations as 'metaphysical', including Bataille's notion of pure expenditure without reserve. The following remarks are intended in part as a response to Nesteruk's position. I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for our stimulating conversations, which have helped me clarify my thoughts on this matter.
25. Blaise Pascal, *The Pensées*, trans. J.M. Cohen, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1961, pp. 155–9.
26. Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Gambler* is undoubtedly the greatest literary expression of the dialectic between gambling, faith and nihilism. There are in fact three gamblers in the story and they are all reckless. Although he has renounced the world, the narrator Alexis refuses to risk himself, taking refuge instead in being a petty gambler at roulette; Polina finally risks all but becomes fixated on Alexis and therefore remains at the stage of infinite resignation; the 'Grandmamma' occupies a position halfway between the two other central characters, risking both her faith and her money but retaining both and therefore standing above and below the threshold of faith. The story insinuates the positive concept of faith by, in Rosean terms, showing how its central characters fail towards it.
27. For Hegel, Spirit can only recognize itself as Spirit but this entails overcoming the opposition between religious

- consciousness (faith) and the object of faith (God). As Hegel puts it in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977, Sect. 681, p. 415): ‘The distinction which was made between actual Spirit and Spirit that knows itself as Spirit, and between itself, qua consciousness, and qua self-consciousness, is superseded in the spirit that knows itself as truth; its consciousness and self-consciousness are on the same level.’ For Hegel, religious consciousness in the various stages of its evolution towards the ‘true religion’ of Protestant Christianity either works with an image of God from which it is alienated or else an abstract God to which it can have no relation; in self-consciousness, on the other hand, consciousness recognizes through faith the unknown god is no longer beyond the individual, absolutely other, but the essence of its consciousness as a self, its truth as subjectivity. Hegel and Kierkegaard disagree about how this recognition of spirit by spirit should be communicated philosophically but they are in agreement regarding the dialectical nature of the dynamic of faith itself.
28. Faith is the substitution of divine Eros for natural desire and will. Whereas merely willing to believe in God does not entail that there is a God who exists in whom to believe, truly desiring a relationship with God establishes the God-relationship. This is the meaning of ‘truth as subjectivity’.
 29. See Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1941, ch. 2. Accepting that faith is recalcitrant to rational assessment does not necessarily entail a commitment to an irrational fideism. The possibility of a reasonable form of fideism can be established on the basis of a theological, philosophical, anthropological, psychological, aesthetic and political reconstruction of the history of religion that allows for the distinction to be drawn between true and false forms of religious faith. This is again a task undertaken in their different ways by both Hegel and Kierkegaard.
 30. *The Broken Middle*, p. 86. Rose summarizes the reduction of Pauline teaching in the following epigram: ‘without law, no sin; without sin, no grace.’ This results in the ‘anachronistic pitting of law against grace, sacrifice against the law so that “Judaism” is characterized both as a living religion of the law and at the same time as an ancient culture of temple sacrifice ... [that] is made to serve a deeper distinguishing of Judaism from Christianity which speciously re-reduces the Christian judgement that Judaism is a religion of empty external observance’ (p. 100).
 31. *Ibid.*, pp. 87, 86, 85.
 32. *Ibid.*, pp. 100–101.
 33. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 103.
 34. *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*, p. 6: ‘Affective scepticism specifies a situation in which agents can find no good reason, no motive, for pursuing a particular form of practice (intellectual or practical) that can be separated, at least in principle, from the question of the internal coherence of the practice.’
 35. Bernstein’s account of material inference ‘tracks’ the account of material inference in Robert B. Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1994, pp. 168–70. Material inferences are forms of reasoning that are not derived from formal logical rules but are based on the relations between the relevant concepts employed, e.g. ‘A is to the west of B, so B is to the west of A. Bernstein adapts this to cases that involve an ethical response: ‘from “He is bleeding badly” to “I’ll apply a tourniquet”’ (*Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*, pp. 264–5). The response to injury does not involve a separable descriptive and normative moment; it is a single inference. Bernstein claims that it is the tendential elimination of such material inferences in modern life that is responsible for the disenchantment of ethics, since in the past they were the basis of the ‘empirical bonds that connected human subjects’. *Ibid.*, p. 161.
 36. *Ibid.*, p. 19 n33.
 37. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
 38. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
 39. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
 40. ‘Aura is the apprehension of an object in its uniqueness, a uniqueness that is temporally and spatially bound, where the spatio-temporal binding of the apprehension is the condition for preserving its uniqueness.’ *Ibid.*, p. 112.
 41. *Ibid.*, p. 306. For Bernstein, the complex concept is contrasted to the simple concept in the same way as Kant contrasts the reflective judgement to determinative judgement in *The Critique of Judgement*, viz. ‘if the universal (the rule, the principle, the law) is given, then the judgement which subsumes the particular under it is *determinative*.... If, however, the particular is given and the universal law has to be found under it, then the judgement is *simply reflective*.’ Bernstein then maps these two forms of judgement onto a further contrast between transitive and intransitive understanding. Whereas in transitive understanding the object is grasped and understood in a way that is independent of the object, in intransitive understanding the object is understood intrinsically in a way that cannot be directly communicated but only poetically/rhetorically approximated. The transitive understanding of the object presupposes the intransitive understanding of the object as irreducible to both intransitive and transitive understanding. Intransitive understanding’s indeterminate grasp of the object is more true to the concept of the object than transitive understanding’s determinate and directly communicable but necessarily abstract and partial attempt to comprehend it. Since intransitive reflection guides the operation of the transitive understanding, it is the ground of the latter and not vice versa.
 42. *Ibid.*, p. 350.
 43. *Ibid.*, p. 359.
 44. *Ibid.*, p. 397.
 45. See ch. 9, ‘Ethical Modernism’.
 46. *Ibid.*
 47. *Ibid.*, p. 293. Bernstein takes this thesis from John McDowell and summarizes it as the claim that if ‘receptivity can be seamlessly incorporated in the spontaneity of thought’, then it follows that ‘features of the world can be regarded as wholly within the space of reasons; what is manifest in experience is always already categorically articulated, and thus a component of a meaningful whole.’ It must be conceded that Rose’s work does not directly address the epistemological questions at stake here. However, her reading of Hegel in *Hegel Contra Sociology* brackets out the question of the relation of Spirit to Nature. The dialectical inversions of the relation between the conceptual and intuitional moments in knowledge are expounded phenomenologically even in the *Logic* as falling entirely within Spirit. To this extent, her reading is closer to the post-

Kantian idealist interpretation of Hegel presented by Robert Pippin (in *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989), which in turn has a similar understanding of the relation between spontaneity and receptivity to McDowell's, than to Adorno's/Bernstein's notion of the non-identical.

48. *The Broken Middle*, ch. 5, 'Love and the State, Varnhagen, Luxemburg and Arendt', pp. 183–246.
49. See Rose's essay 'O Untimely Death./ Death!', in *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 135.
50. Cited in *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*, p. 48.
51. Emil Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1967, p. 241. For an extended comparison of Fackenheim's and Rose's concepts of the 'broken middle', see my essay 'Whither the Broken Middle? Rose and Fackenheim on Mourning, Modernity and the Holocaust', in Robert Fine and Charles Turner, eds, *Social Theory and the Holocaust*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2000, ch. 3.
52. For a discussion and justification of this development in Critical Theory, see J.M. Bernstein, *Recovering Ethical Life: Jürgen Habermas and the Future of Critical Theory*, Routledge, London and New York, 1995. ch. 1, 'Critical Theory – The Very Idea', pp. 10–34.
53. The work of Michael Theunissen is a notable exception in this respect.
54. A full assessment of Rose's relation to Christianity and religion based on her complete authorship must await another study.

Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy



conference

Spheres of action: art and politics

Saturday 10 December, 10.00 am–5.00 pm
Tate Britain, Millbank, London SW1P 4RG

Three of Germany's leading thinkers on philosophy, art and the media debate the changing relationship between art and politics.

Peter Sloterdijk, Professor of Philosophy and Rector of the School of Fine Arts, Karlsruhe; author of *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1983), *Rules for the People Park* (1999), subject of a controversy with Habermas, and *Spheres* (1999–2004).

Peter Weibel, artist and media theorist, Director of the Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe; author of *Fast Forward: Media Art* (2004) and *The Open Work, 1964–1979* (2005).

Boris Groys, art historian and theorist, professor at the School of Fine Arts, Karlsruhe; author of *Stalin's Total Work of Art* (1988), *Ilya Kabakov* (1998) and *Über das Neue!* (1999).

£15 students, £25 waged, including drinks reception
Tickets Tate Britain, <https://tickets.tate.org.uk/selectshow.asp>

In recent issues of *New Left Review*

Politics, economics and culture of a contemporary non-conformism



Matthew Gandy
Rem Koolhaas in Lagos—thriving market or dystopia?

Gopal Balakrishnan
Re-reading Machiavelli for the 21st century

Giovanni Arrighi
The failure of us world government and China's ascent

Slavoj Žižek
Human rights as an alibi for Western military interventions

Christopher Prendergast
Moretti's evolutionary models for literary history

Jean Baudrillard
The French 'No' vote as anti-consensual revolt

Han Dongfang
The struggle for labour rights in China

Subscribe online now for just £32 and get a free Verso book:

www.newleftreview.org

The concept of money

Christopher J. Arthur

In the history of philosophy the greatest minds have been aware that the existence and power of money pose a problem. One need only mention Aristotle, Kant, Hegel and Simmel. Of course, if one accepts, as I do, that *Capital* is a work of philosophy as much as of economics then pride of place must go to Marx, who was fascinated from early on by the ability of money 'to make opposites embrace'. Within economics proper there has always been a split between those who dismiss money as a veil occluding the 'real economy' and those who grasp that what is new about the modern world is the hegemony of monetary relations. Orthodox (in effect Ricardian) readings of Marx place him in the former camp but in truth he is better understood as recognizing the importance of money in shaping economic processes. However, here I do not enter into such exegetical disputes; I present my own take on the concept.

That money is a philosophical puzzle might seem surprising when we consider its familiarity to us. Yet familiarity is no guarantee of knowledge. What is always at hand physically may yet be hard to fathom ontologically.

Systematic dialectic

This article shows that money is a philosophically interesting phenomenon. Before I treat its intricacies I first argue against naturalism in value theory. I then argue that value arises out of a peculiar social form in such a manner that the moments of its concept have to be *distributed* over money and commodities for it to be real. This social form is posited in the practice of exchange such that value exists only in commodity relations – or, rather, only when the dialectic of commodity relations results in money. I shall argue that the concept of money requires elucidation through drawing on the resources of Hegel's logic. Money models Hegel's logic of the 'Concept'; the price form is the objective correlate of Hegel's doctrine of judgment, and the metamorphoses of commodities and money correlate with the objective concept, while capital is 'Idea'.

This discussion is part of a broader project to achieve a systematic dialectical reconstruction of the categories of Marx's *Capital*,¹ for which it serves as a test case. *Systematic* dialectic is a method of exhibiting the inner articulation of a given whole. Science in treating such a totality must take the shape of a *system* comprising a set of categories capturing the forms and relations constitutive of the totality. Hence the presentation of the totality in thought is a *systematic dialectic of categories*. However, more is involved in my theory than method. Ontology is also at issue. Hegel's logic has two characteristics besides its systematicity: (i) the forms of thought are said to be sufficiently autonomous to be *self-moving*; (ii) the conceptual framework is therefore said to be 'the truth' of reality. This is why he called himself an idealist. I believe the form of value has a similar ideality, but it is a real ideality which imposes itself on the content of economic life.²

The relevance of Hegel's logic to my reconstruction of Marx's categories flows from the *reality* of that abstraction in exchange predicated on the *identification*, as 'values', of *heterogeneous* commodities. This 'practical abstraction' has a substantive reality quite independent of any methodological point about abstraction in theory construction. The use-value character of the commodities concerned is 'suspended' for the period of exchange. As a consequence of this absencing, the commodities acquire a new determination: the character of exchange-value. The different goods concerned play the role of *bearers* of this social determination. They become subject to the *value form*. So the value form of the commodity creates a split, between value as the *identity* of commodities premised on equivalent exchange, and their material *diversity* differentiating them from each other as use-values. Hegel's logic, too, springs from the evacuation of contingent empirical instantiations to leave the category as such. In my view a significant homology obtains at the level of ontology between the movement of exchange, generating a *practical* abstraction from the natural specificity of commodities, and the

movement of thought, generating a system of *logical* categories. In both, the self-moving forms impose a formal unity on the real material they address. As a result, it is possible to illuminate the forms of value with the categories of Hegel's logic.

Value as a social form

My approach to critical political economy claims that determinant of economic categories is *social* form, not the *natural* basis of the economic metabolism. I reject the naturalistic approach that sees in labour, its allocation, and its productivity, the natural determinations reflected in forms of social recognition such as prices and profits. Instead, I see social practice *constituting* social forms, centrally the value form, within which is inscribed productive activity. Following from this, value itself is not given *prior* to its forms, but is rather constituted in and through the development of exchange relations.³ My 'value form' approach to money holds that money is no 'veil' of the 'real' material content of economic relations; it is essential to value relations, not merely the shape in which an underlying matter is expressed. I argue that only money makes value *actual*. This view contrasts with that of naturalism, in which money is of importance merely as a numeraire.

What is essential to commodities is not to be found *inherent* to them through some reductive abstraction. It arises only in exchange relations and hence must be discovered in the *relation* of one commodity to another, as determined in and through their *outward* forms, and especially their relation to money. So the search for value may take two routes: one route is to go *into* commodities to find in each the same substratum, for example labour time; the other route is to go *out* from commodities to their relations to see if these relations posit value as a form of their social existence.

The reductive procedure is characteristic of orthodoxy. It accepts that use value is negated in exchange because it is heterogeneous, while value is homogeneous, but it still finds a common feature to commodities (other than the common participation in the value form), namely origin in 'abstract' labour. I reply that labour always naturally takes the form of *concrete* labour, which is as heterogeneous as use value itself. Because production units are dissociated one from another labours become social only in so far as their products are exchanged. The consequence is that these labours are socially cognized in value only as abstract. In truth the peculiar abstractness of the labour producing commodities is the *result* of the social reality of exchange, not its ground.

If naturalism were correct in this context then money would be no problem for theory. Since all commodities would be seen as inherently valuable, including gold, then gold would be merely a numeraire, a typical commodity in being a value, but special in its designated function as a measure of the others, and as medium of their circulation. However, it makes no sense to presuppose that a commodity in isolation *has* value. Value has a purely social reality, and it emerges from commodity relations.

If, however, value is a socially constituted form, its concept cannot be glossed in the usual way, for example by analogy with a natural feature of commodities, such as weight. Because of this, money has a peculiar role in ensuring that the actuality of value is posited in practice. The universal aspect of commodities is secured only in so far as it is posited through their common relation to a universal equivalent, namely money. This money form does not *re-present* the presupposed 'value' of commodities; rather, it *posits* it as their form of social being. Once value is presented explicitly 'for itself' (rather than a mere immanence) in money, it posits the commodities as values 'in themselves'. Money 'posits the presupposition' that commodities count as values.

One way of thinking about my proposal to make form central is by analogy with Kant's 'Copernican revolution' wherewith he made the objects conform to their cognition. In our case the commodities must conform to how they are *practically* known through the forms of value. Instead of commodities being given as values and measured in money, money is what allows commodities to be known as values in the first place, through transcendently synthesizing the commodity manifold. Money is not simply the provision of a standard of comparison for commodities already inserted in the value dimension; it *constitutes* the value dimension. Money makes the value dimension coherent by situating commodities in a common relation to a single point of view *on* them which is yet not *among* them, having been excluded *from* them. The monetary form is the condition of possibility of a unitary sphere of value relations. Money, posited as the universal equivalent form of value, is itself essential to the actuality of value.⁴

Let us turn, then, to examine the notion of a *universal equivalent*. From the observation that all commodities are exchangeable, directly or indirectly, in definite proportions arises the postulate that all the many exchange values possessed by a commodity share a unitary essence, an *inherent* power of exchange. The simplest form of value implicit in commodity relations

is 'The value of A is expressed in B.' I follow Marx in seeing the commodity in 'relative' form (A) as the commodity whose value is manifested, and the commodity in 'equivalent' form (B) merely as the material shape of the value of A.⁵ Moreover, as Marx insightfully observes, B is present here as a *natural body*, it is not present as a value. It is not a value because there is not yet posited the presupposition that there is any such thing as value prior to this relation. Even if we assume this is a *value relation*, value cannot be present in the natural body of either commodity because the heterogeneity of such bodies requires the form of value to abstract such features away. In this sense value is what the commodity as a natural body is *not*. As Marx saw, if A cannot thus express value in its own body, it yet posits the body of B as the locus of the value it must exclude from itself.

Ideally value is determined in opposition to the heterogeneity of use value. But value must *appear* if it is to have any actuality. Immediately a commodity appears as a use value; but, because the value of a commodity is defined in opposition to its own use value, it cannot appear *there*. However, in the *form* of exchange value, the value of A appears as the natural body of B. So there are here two worlds, which predicate themselves on use value in *inverted* fashion. In essence value is *not use value* (of A), but as appearance value is *use value* (of B). The peculiarity of the equivalent form is that in it the commodity's natural body counts not as itself but as value. So the two worlds, the 'sensuous and supersensuous',⁶ are here immediately one. This is the germ of money, in which the supersensuous clearly has the upper hand, albeit that it takes shape as a thing.

Money as the universal equivalent is likewise present as a natural body. But it achieves its status as the actuality of value only by virtue of its relations to commodities, unifying them in their common relation to what they are not. All commodities must exclude one commodity from the relative form in order to serve as unique equivalent. The natural body of gold is equivalent to *value as such* according to the commodities in relative form. However, this is not like pieces of iron counting as weight as such, because iron already has weight, hence serves as representative of the class of weighty things. But gold is not yet known to have a value; rather, it is posited as all commodities' value by them. We do not say the weight of a loaf expresses itself in pieces of metal as metal but in balancing off the iron *weight*. The expression 'iron weight' is merely metonymic because weight is simply a property of iron, but in the case of 'gold

money' it really is the case that gold is simply the shell of a 'social substance' posited in the relation of commodities and money, rather than gold naturally having value. In weight, weighing is secondary to the givenness of weight, but in value, the expression of value in a price is primary and the reflection of value into commodities is secondary. Everything then acts backwards as if such a 'value' may be presupposed as a given property of commodities.

Since value is not yet grounded, it is not possible to take gold as *already* value, hence a suitable measure for commodities. Gold can figure here only as it *immediately appears*, namely as a natural body. Its goldenness is not the utterance of its own value, but the outward manifestation of the commodities' value. So commodities can actualize their universality only *outside* them since they are not *instantiations* of a *pre-given* essence. Thus money is the actuality of value in that it opposes itself to commodities as their universal equivalent by appearing in a commodity alongside them to which they can relate in exchange.

Labour money

At this point I digress in order to make clear that I accept a version of the so-called 'labour theory of value'; but on my view this is not a 'content' unproblematically taking form as value. Rather, it is the dialectic of the value-form itself that posits the presupposition that the magnitude of value is (indirectly) determined by labour time. For the purposes of this article I merely need to stress (i) that the magnitude of value can only be expressed in money price, (ii) that even if labour is the 'source' of value this does not make it value itself, nor even the 'measure' of value.

The most egregious confusion of the measure of the source with that of the result is perpetrated by those who advocate *labour money* on the ground that the source is the only accurate measure of value itself. This is an artisanal utopia designed to secure independent production against the predatory merchant class. It is worth elucidating the fallacy of labour money. There are two possibilities: either the money circulates or it does not. In the latter case there is a warehouse at which the front door receives goods and issues the labour equivalent; at the back door the labour money exchanges for goods priced in it. What will happen when a carpenter arrives with a table which he claims took twenty hours to build? The warehouse may say 'We have other people who can do it in ten; you will have to learn to do it also because we cannot waste society's labour resources through such inefficiency as yours'; or they might say 'The

warehouse is full of tables, we want you to go and make chairs.’ In effect the warehouse would have to take on the function of a national planning office and the utopia of the independent artisan vanishes. In the other case, in which money circulates, the carpenter takes the table to a shopkeeper who says ‘I don’t care if it took you twenty hours, I know guys who can make it in ten, so I’ll give you a ten-hour note – take it or leave it’; or he may say ‘I have lots of tables so I’ll only buy if you take an eight-hour note; but I’m real short of chairs – I’ll pay double your time for a set of four.’ The upshot is we have a market economy allocating labour via price in which money functions just as it does now regardless of denominated labour hours, the link between hours and money is broken. Once again the independent artisan vanishes.

The concrete universal

In the first edition of *Capital* Marx draws a very illuminating analogy to make the strangeness of the relation between money and commodities clear: ‘It is as if alongside and external to lions, tigers, rabbits, and all other actual animals ... there existed also in addition the animal, the independent incarnation of the entire animal Kingdom.’⁷

This example is a reminiscence of Hegel’s point:

‘Animal as such’ cannot be pointed out; only a definite animal can ever be pointed at. ‘The animal’ does not exist; on the contrary, this expression refers to the universal nature of single animals, and each existing animal is something that is much more concretely determinate, something particularised. But ‘to be animal’, the kind considered as the universal, pertains to the determinate animal and constitutes its determinate essentiality. If we were to deprive a dog of its animality we could not say what it is. Things as such have a persisting, inner nature, as well as an outward existence.⁸

Now the peculiarity of (commodity) money is that as ‘the universal commodity’ it can be ‘pointed out’.⁹ The universal aspect uniting commodities is presupposed to be value, and in money this ‘inner nature’ is posited as ‘a thing’ beside them.

Is money, then, a ‘concrete universal’ in Hegel’s sense of the term? Let us explore this idea. Hegel rejects in general the analytic opposition between the universal as wholly abstract and the singular as concrete. His dialectical view is that the universal is no mere abstraction, no mere abstract commonality; it is a concrete universal that comprehends within itself its particularizations.¹⁰ Now, as we have just seen in the passage where Hegel discussed ‘the animal’, it is

not the case that the concrete universal exists alongside the individuals.¹¹ The universal is understood as the inner essence of the singulars, making them what they are. Why, with the concept of value, if this is to be considered as such a concrete universal, is it not found within the commodities but outside them, incarnate in a money commodity that counts as their universal essence? It is because commodities as such are materially heterogeneous and share no inner nature. The generation of value as a concrete concept is secured only when money as a material existent gives commodities a universal form in price. While the universal thought-form comprehends its particularizations in thought, the value-form comprehends its particularizations through the objective relation in which such money stands to commodities.

It follows there is a difference between applying Hegel’s logic and my homology thesis. In the first case the hypothesis would be that there is a universal immanent to commodities which can be abstracted by thought. In contrast I argue the movement of exchange models Hegel’s concept in practice. This is why a material bearer of the universal moment is required alongside the singular commodities it comprehends as values. Hegel explicitly mocks the idea that the universal exists as particular apart from its instantiations. He writes:

The universal must be distinguished from the particular, according to its proper determination. Taken formally, and put side by side with the particular, the universal itself becomes something particular too ... as if someone who wants fruit, for instance, were to reject cherries, pears, raisins, etc., because they are cherries, pears, raisins, but not fruit.¹²

However, in our homology just this situation obtains. Marx writes:

Though a commodity may, alongside its real shape (iron for instance), possess an ideal value-shape or an imagined gold-shape in the form of its price, it cannot simultaneously be both real iron and real gold.... If the owner of the iron were to go to the owner of some other earthly commodity, and were to refer him to the price of iron as proof that it was already money, [he would get a dusty] answer.¹³

The peculiar necessity for value, as a concrete universal, to appear in a shape capable of interacting with commodities, means it must take the shape of the analogue of ‘the animal’, namely a locus of universality alongside the singulars. But since the only relation commodities have is to other commodities, a single commodity must be posited in this role.¹⁴ Paradoxically, in order for their universality to be differentiated

from all singular commodities, it has to be incarnate in a unique commodity. Money is absolute singularity of value because it is not, like other commodities, a single locus of value among others; it is uniquely posited as incarnating in singular shape the dimension of value.

Value as concept

In what follows I explore the homology between the value categories and those of Hegel's logic. To illuminate the form of money I shall draw on Hegel's Doctrine of the Concept. I begin with its initial sections that together make up the so-called 'Subjective Concept': The Concept as Such, the Judgment, and the Syllogism. First I recapitulate Hegel's presentation; then I show its relevance to money.

'The Concept as Such' has three moments: Universality, Particularity and Singularity.¹⁵ Since the Concept as Such is purely formal, Hegel stresses that 'Singularity' is not to be taken to mean single things, singulars (the latter appear in judgments, we shall see, when the formal moments split into distinctly separate finite instances). Now an important subtlety flowing from the difference between 'singularity' and 'the singular' is that the movement of particularization is doubled.¹⁶ At a purely formal level the Concept particularizes itself to Singularity, but at the level of reality there are many identical singulars, each of them particularizations of the Concept. According to Hegel, as the immediate presence of the singular each is a qualitative 'One' which presupposes its numerical difference from other Ones, and in this way maintains the exclusivity characteristic of determinate singleness.¹⁷ Yet as the implicit instantiation of a universal it is capable of reflecting it. Hegel expands on this reflection as follows:

The singulars do not confront one another as merely immediate beings; such plurality belongs to the sphere of Being. Singularity, in positing itself as determinate, posits itself not in an external difference but in the difference of the Concept. It therefore excludes the Universal from itself; yet since this is a moment of singularity, the universal is equally essentially related to it.¹⁸

This return into itself of the Concept takes shape as judgment. The judgment is the stepping of the concept into finite determination, says Hegel; that is, the parting of Universality/Particularity/Singularity.¹⁹ But in the Judgment the separate moments of the Concept are yet related of course.²⁰ The abstract paradigm of the Judgment is 'The Singular is the Universal'.²¹ The moment of particularity validates this judgment if the singular is in truth a determinable particularization

of the universal.²² From this form the Concept passes into the 'syllogism'.²³

Hegel says this about the relation of the conceptual and the real:

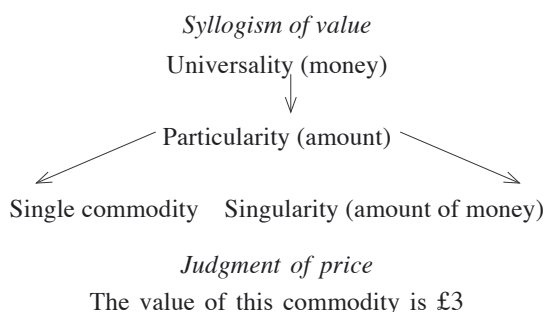
Everything is a syllogism. Everything is a concept, the existence of which is the differentiation of its moments in such a way that its universal nature gives itself outward reality through particularity, and in this way ... makes itself singular. Or, conversely, the actual is a singular which raises itself by means of particularity to universality and makes itself identical with itself.²⁴

Now let us see how all this can be drawn upon to articulate the form of value. The 'Value Concept' must be articulated formally as Universality/Particularity/Singularity we know. We have also seen that there must be a material bearer of this form. This is money. Money gives the pure concept of value a phenomenal existence. Moreover it appears concretely as an amount of value, because 'amount' is the only particularization of value logically possible. So the singularity of the concept is given as an amount of money, for example £3. Recall this is the singularity of value, not a singular instance of value. But singular values are posited for us in the shape of commodities.

This brings us to the judgment, which in our material instantiation of Hegel's paradigm is, e.g., 'This commodity is valuable.' The determinate judgment 'how valuable?' can be expressed only in money. Thus the coat is shown to be valuable in virtue of selling for £3. Here the coat as a singular instance of value is validated by the universal form of value, namely money, through the particular amount of it given in the form of price. As Hegel says of the judgment: '[We] see one and the same object double, first as its singular actuality, and then in ... its Concept: the single raised into its universality.'²⁵

This doubling assumes in our case a material separation; money is really present apart from the commodity because only thus can the value of the commodity be presented to it. Both sides are required for the concept to realize itself. It is impossible for value to exist only in pure form, adequately captured by money; there has to be something to be valued in money; hence this pure form shapes commodities as value. This material dimension of value means there are two kinds of particularization of value. The commodity as priced is particularized ideally as a simple sum of value measured in money; but the commodity as material object is multiply particularized concretely in bodies of value. There are multiple similar coats of the same value, where there is only one coat price. In the coat,

commodity value exists consubstantially with use value as if, like use value, it existed naturally in this material form. There are, as it were, bits of value in the world. As tied to a material shell these values are numerically distinct and can be destroyed both materially and through revolutions in market conditions. The trick is to see how these sides of value, money and commodities, interpenetrate. The following table shows it:



In this table the double movement of particularization results in both the presence of money as an amount of itself and the presence of the single commodity, which in virtue of the parallel particularization contains an amount of value. These moments are explicitly reflected against one another when a commodity is worth such and such an amount of money. A definite commodity has a valid measure in terms of the standard of price (a topic we shall reach shortly). The syllogism of value supports the judgment of price: the value of this commodity is £3.

The commodity as always materially singular seems opposed to value because of its immediacy as a natural body. Money as pure form of value appears opposed to use values. However, the link exists materially in the price form. Here value has particularized itself to a definite amount of money. Conversely, commodities are raised above their material singularity to the status of particular embodiments of value. But there is no immediate identity in these particular shapes of value, only a relation, because one side of the equation is the value in ideal shape, as a moment of a universal concept, and on the other value is posited in single material shapes. Thus, when money, as the tangible concept of value, is particularized, it is not therewith constituted as a singular; it remains a notional particularization. This is because money is value as ‘the concept as such’ which differentiates itself only notionally. Thus it cannot become immediately singular. Conversely the commodity is a singular because of its numerical difference from others, and it is ‘a value’ only because it is valued by a particular amount of money. However, as ‘a value’ the commodity cannot, in standard fashion, be itself immediately an instance

of the universal, just because it is not value outside the mediation of the price form. Notwithstanding that it is implicitly value, its actual valuation requires money.

We see that the two-way determination of the Concept I cited from Hegel is here present in my table. He spoke of the universal determining itself through particularity to the singular, and said its complement is the rising of the singular by means of particularity to universality. According to Hegel, ‘everything is a syllogism’ in this way. But the value concept is not inherent to a specific thing (like ‘animality’ is to a dog); its moments are materially distributed across money and commodities. The mediating moment between money as universal and the commodity as singular is particularization when the right amounts of value are equated in price. All commodities worth £3 are worth an identical £3, which shows that money is simply the universal concept, whereas commodities are the real world instantiations of value, each separately worth £3, and all together worth a multiple of this (that is, another particular amount, not a class of separate amounts).

Money is the bearer of the pure concept of value, and as an amount of itself is its own measure; then the real determinacy of value is given in judgments of worth. To say ‘X is worth so much money’ presupposes X is an empirical singular – for example, a coat – and its value conceptualization appears separately from it in an amount of money. The two-way movement from the conceptual to the real is mediated in the particularity of price. But for the coat to be elevated to a value, money must meet it half-way by appearing in an empirically applicable form; this requires a standard of price.

If a commodity is worth so much money, the universal constitutes it as value through its measure; schematized phenomenally it is the judgment of price – for example, ‘this commodity is worth £3’; price posits a commodity is value, and judging it by our standard gives its amount. Money has a peculiar dual existence. On the one hand, as ‘absolute form’ it sets itself against commodities as their most abstract determination, locating them in the value dimension, hence providing the form of measure; on the other hand actual valuations of commodities by money as it is present in their price form requires that money appear in a concrete shape that can be set equal to a commodity, as if it were a thing like them. It is important, then, that money as the form that makes commodities commensurable should be distinguished from the determinate standard of price – for example, gold coins, dollar bills, and so on. The provision of such a standard, and the practice of its use, then gener-

ates the illusion money is just a numeraire. Money as a 'piece' of itself pretends to be something that has value (which may be claimed of gold, just to confuse things) rather than being the necessary form of value.

If it is assumed that commodities are values, money supplies their common measure, and the most suitable such measure is a numeraire, a commodity like gold. But money is dramatically underestimated if it is seen simply as the measure of an existent universal property – for example, 'power of exchange' because a commodity proves it has such a general power (as distinct from participating in ad hoc barter) only in so far as it is realized in price form. Then it acquires general exchangeability with any other priced commodity, through sale and purchase.

Implicit in the judgment of price is a measure relation which makes it look as if gold as standard of price is a numeraire rather than being the form of measure, itself necessary because commodities have no common dimension prior to money. In price, money acts as if it were just a numeraire, and commodities act as if they were inherently valuable. But in truth value achieves conceptual determinacy only through price.

So far it has been shown that the inner moments of the concept of value exist materially in money and commodities when the relation of these is established in price, whereby the universal form of value (borne by money) is particularized to an amount of itself, and identified with the particular value of a single commodity.

We do not need to consider most of the judgment-forms covered by Hegel because we are concerned only with the quantitative determination of value, there being no qualitative difference. Similarly, when we pass to the forms of the syllogism, the only form relevant is that which Hegel calls the syllogism of equality.²⁶ Given in our case, it is the inference that if the value of A equals the value of B, and the value of B equals the value of C, then the value of A equals the value of C. Given that value is actual only in price this implies the transitivity of prices.

Hegel argues that a self-sustaining system of truth is achieved when the premisses of every syllogism are results of other syllogisms. This is obviously true if we shuffle the order of the syllogism of equality of price. Whatever two equalities are taken first, transitivity ensures the third. We have a consistent value space instead of a set of contingent prices, still less a mess of ad hoc barter. In the set of complementary prices, the concept of value is thus articulated as a unitary whole. It has a universal range of reference, and singleness of form as the totality itself.

This brings me to the end of the first section of the logic of money, its 'formal' concept in the price form. Next we shall draw on the second section of Hegel's 'Doctrine of the Concept', 'Objectivity', in thematizing exchange.

The metamorphoses of commodities

When judgments of worth coincide they result in an exchange. This move from the 'subjective' conceptuality of value to its positing in real transactions corresponds to Hegel's logic of 'Objectivity'. Hegel's first category of Objectivity is that of an immense 'collection' (*Zusammensetzung*) or 'heap' (*Haufen*) of things.²⁷ He then develops the logical order of their interactions in 'Mechanism', 'Chemism' and 'Teleology'. The heap becomes a universe governed by an inherent dynamic.

In thematizing the dialectic of exchange, and 'the metamorphoses of commodities' (Marx), we begin with the simple exchange of one commodity for another. This corresponds to Hegel's logic of 'Mechanism'. He begins with such a primitive notion of objective movement because this sphere is marked by the explicit difference of things from each other as mere numerical difference.²⁸ The unity of the Concept is thus very much in the background until objective movements bring out and unify its moments, and a transition to 'the Idea' results. So, in our terms, we do not begin with the social instantiation in exchange and circulation of a homogeneous sphere of value; agents may have confused ideas about judgments of worth until some objective law situates their behaviour. But just as logically correlated judgments allow a conclusion to be drawn, agreement in judgments of worth may allow a bargain to be concluded. As a dyadic transaction this may itself lack social validity; but just as the ideality of value implies the necessity of transitive prices, so in objectivity the activity of arbitrage tends to realize the unity of markets (the 'law of one price' expresses the identity of value with itself objectively).

The exchange of one commodity for another is impeded by the recalcitrance of use-value considerations. The 'action' of giving commodity A for commodity B requires the 'reaction' of giving commodity B for commodity A. The well-known difficulty of assuring a double coincidence of wants enters here as an external condition. Even if it is presupposed that both commodities are of identical value and thus share common ground, this 'centre of attraction' remains too implicit to have effect. Only given the presence of money as 'value for itself' is a principle of totalization explicitly put. With money, as we have seen, commodities are brought within the value Concept.

Hegel's principle of 'Chemism', pertaining to the affinity of different but complementary determinations, is the parallel we require. The blind process of action and reaction in exchange is refigured as purchase and sale. This is the process by which money as the fluid universal precipitates the singularity of the purchased commodity, while the sold commodity is sublimated to value in universal shape. The function of money here is to realize objectively the amount of value the commodity had notionally in price. The two opposite movements, sale and purchase, exist at the same time in every transaction; but if they are differentiated sequentially as a sale followed by a purchase, a new logic and a new function of money emerge. The unity of the two transactions is present objectively as 'finite teleology', to use Hegel's term.²⁹ This is when I sell in order to buy. This sequence (C–M, M–C) is the objective correlate of the syllogism of prices earlier mentioned.

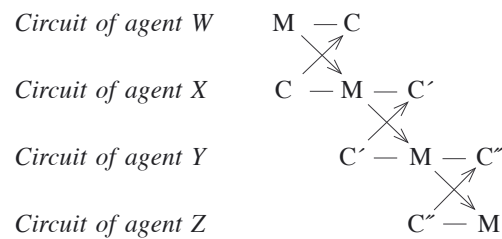
Marx is more specific in his 1859 *Contribution*:

The C at each of the two extremes of the circuit C–M–C has a different formal relation to M. The first C is a particular commodity which is compared with money as the universal commodity, whereas in the second phase money as the universal commodity is compared with an individual commodity. The formula C–M–C can therefore be reduced to the abstract logical syllogism P–U–I; whereas particularity forms the first extreme, universality characterises the common middle term and individuality signifies the final extreme.³⁰

This use of the dialectic of the Concept by Marx may not be immediately perspicuous unless it is thought of in terms of the point of the two exchanges. In the first, C–M, the C as an individual has no interest for the exchanger who is endeavouring to gain money (which itself exchanges against all commodities); what interests him from this point of view is merely that the C be some particularization of the universal. In the second exchange, M–C, by contrast, the point is to secure not just any C but the one whose individual characteristics will satisfy a certain need, and hence leaves circulation as a singular. Hegel says: 'The actual is One, but it is equally the dissociation of the moments of the Concept, and the syllogism is the circuit [*Kreislauf*] of intermediation of its moments through which it establishes itself as One.'³¹ Marx, of course, in *Capital* says 'this movement of commodities is ... a circuit [*Kreislauf*].'³²

Here the function of money as medium of circulation is the objective complement to the notion of money as universal equivalent in that this gives a ground for the

ability of money to serve as 'the universal commodity' – that is, one with immediate exchangeability. Key to the role of money here is that in being used it is not used up. Naturally, therefore, gold (or silver) serve in that people have at hand a particular example of permanent 'wealth', so in the end it can serve as the incarnation of wealth in the abstract. C–M–C is an example of 'finite' teleology because the C–M serves as a means for the M–C, but with the aim here still being a use value as in simple exchange. Having served its purpose as medium, money drops away. Or does it? In fact since every purchase is a sale the mediator money stays always in circulation, albeit further and further removed from the original purchase. The following diagram (adapted from K. Uno³³) shows three successive exchanges; while new commodities arrive and depart, money keeps on trucking.



Here money that circulates endlessly has a kind of immortality. But as medium of circulation this still appears as an emergent property of the exchange system; it does not direct it. However, if this 'bad infinity' recoils back on itself in the circuit M–C–M, money makes itself origin and aim of its circuit. In this way the implicit unity of the (subjective) notion is found in the objective intermediation of its moments. Value has become 'Idea' in Hegel's terms. Selling in order to buy reverses the teleological positing of C–M–C. The mediator takes over from the extremes. Money now liberates itself from use value in setting the aim of exchange as its own. This is 'infinite teleology' in Hegel's terms, because a system structured in this way is centred on the valorization of value.

However, we jumped too quickly. For money to be the aim requires that it be posited 'for itself' rather than as mediator. The link in the argument is given in Marx's section on money as money. This points to money's functions as means of payment and store of value, for which its real presence is required. (Measure may be merely notional, the medium may be replaced with tokens of itself.) In this form money is separated from commodities and counterposes itself to their circulation. Marx even says that in this shape it is fixed as the sole existence of value in the face of commodi-

ties as use values.³⁴ But, of course, no moment of the concept can subsist on its own. The miser thinks he accumulates wealth but his hoard is just a metal dump apart from circulation.

In M–C–M value is referred to itself, particularizing itself from money to a single commodity and then recovering its universal form through realizing the particular value of that commodity. In this sense, posited as the totality of these determinations, capital is Individual.³⁵ Now commodities and money are its own determinations. Marx says ‘capital is money, capital is commodities’.³⁶ The content of the circuit is ‘only the presentation [*Darstellung*] the Concept gives itself’ (Hegel).³⁷ Of course, commodities and money continue to act as commodities and money. Money retains such functions as medium of circulation, means of payment and store of value. But within the circuit it is further determined as capital, that is to say money in search of money. The self-reference of money in the circuit constitutes a new form of value, capital, which realizes itself through the metamorphoses of money and commodities.

However, in understanding what exactly is to be realized here, it is instructive to look at Hegel’s discussion of ‘Being-for-Itself’. Hegel introduces first the incontestable notion that ‘something only is what it is within its limit and by virtue of its limit’.³⁸ The ‘dialectical’ consequence is that there is ‘something else’ beyond the limit, and that ‘everything finite is subject to alteration’. It is here that the infinite is evolved as a category: ‘Something becomes an other, but the other is itself a something, so it likewise becomes an other, and so on ad infinitum.’³⁹ This is, of course, the ‘spurious infinite’, which needs to be superseded. This occurs when something and other are grasped as phases of the same thing, ‘and this relation to itself ... in the other is genuine infinity’, says Hegel; therewith the category of Being-for-Itself is constituted.⁴⁰ If capital is to actualize itself as Being-for-Itself in the M–C–M circuit, then, in furthering itself through these phases it must become different from itself in this its own otherness as well as identifying itself in it. In the case of money, we have seen, the only possible difference between two specifications of this universal is in amount. Alteration is the superseding of limit, which here must mean a limited amount. In the M–C–M circuit the moment of identity is secured with the reflux of the original outlay; the moment of difference emerges if a monetary increment is thrown off; and if this new value is identified with the principal and employed together with it as capital once more the unity of the

two is achieved.⁴¹ Thus, simply to be itself capital must become ever larger.

Money is really ‘value for itself’ only when its increase is the aim of the capital circuit. A simple sum of money is equivalent to a stock of commodities, as indeed is the miser’s store of gold. The superiority of the capitalist over the miser is that he accumulates by throwing his money again and again into circulation. This iteration is absolutely necessary if the movement of M–C–M is to realize capital, the truly infinite as against the finitude of the world of commodities. Capital is money in motion.⁴²

Conclusion

I have argued that the categories of Hegel’s logic may be deployed in understanding the nature of capital because material practice has generated a model of Hegel’s logic of the Concept. Here I have concentrated attention on just a part of this homology. I have shown how the formal moments of the Concept map onto the form of price. Now, in what I did, two mistakes were avoided: (1) the naturalistic reduction of form to matter, (2) the supposition that value is a mental fiction generated in social consciousness. Rather value is, as the second view sees, not given prior to its concept, but, at the same time, as the first view would like, ‘out there’, objectively present to consciousness, prior to its reflection in thought. In short, value is a concept, hence not originally our concept. For such a concept to be really present, the moments of value have to be distributed over its material bearers, namely commodities and money. This idea is perhaps the most novel, and difficult, of what I here propose. There is no ‘given’ of which one forms a concept, namely the concept of value; rather, value is a concept given to us from practice, having been generated ‘behind our backs’. Value is a concept objectively presented to us in the circuit of capital. It is not through some externally applied method that the nature of capital is identified and defined; capital defines its own identity through the circuit of the determinations of its concept that it itself presents.

Notes

1. Christopher J. Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx’s ‘Capital’*, Brill, Leiden and Boston, 2002.
2. ‘The ontology of the value form is that of an *objective ideality* which is nonetheless immanent to a *social materialism*.’ Peter Osborne, ‘The Reproach of Abstraction’, *Radical Philosophy* 127, September/October 2004, p. 27.
3. This is known as ‘value form’ theory. I think Marx finds this, but he sometimes falls back into formulations suggestive of a Ricardian naturalism about value.

4. See Christopher J. Arthur, 'Money and the Form of Value', in R. Bellofiore and N. Taylor, eds, *The Constitution of Capital*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2004, ch. 2; and Christopher J. Arthur, 'Value and Money', in F. Moseley, ed., *Marx's Theory of Money: Modern Appraisals*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2005, ch. 7.
5. Karl Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, trans. B. Fowkes, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1976, p. 139.
6. In *Capital* Marx says the commodity is 'ein sinnlich übersinnliches Ding'. *Das Kapital* Volume I, *Marx-Engels Werke*, vol. 23, Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1983, pp. 85, 86; the Fowkes translation, 'a thing which transcends sensuousness' (p. 163), is wrong. For the inverted relation of the two worlds, see G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1969, pp. 507–9.
7. Karl Marx, 'The Commodity, Chapter One, Volume One of the first edition of *Capital*', in *Value: Studies by Karl Marx*, trans. A. Dragstedt, New Park, London, 1976, p. 27.
8. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, trans. T.F. Geraets et al., Hackett, Indianapolis, 1991, pp. 56–7; translation amended, and stress mine.
9. For 'universal commodity', see *Capital* Volume 1, pp. 234, 235, but the second occurrence replaces 'absolute', which is given in all German and French editions.
10. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, para. 164.
11. However, Hegel anticipated Marx in one of his unpublished early works as follows: 'their [commodities] universal concept must become a thing like them, but one which as a universal represents all; money is this materially existing concept, the form of unity or the possibility of all things needed.' G.W.F. Hegel, 'Fragmente aus Vorlesungsmanuskripte zur Philosophie der Natur und des Geistes' (1803–4), *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 6, *Jenaer Systemwürfe* I, Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg 1975, p. 324; G.W.F. Hegel, *System of Ethical Life and First Philosophy of Spirit*, trans. H.S. Harris and T.M. Knox, State University of New York Press, Albany NY, 1979, p. 249. For a discussion, see Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx's 'Capital'*, ch. 9.
12. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, para. 13.
13. Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, pp. 197–8.
14. Marx talks of a commodity money such as gold, of course. To keep things simple I follow him in this. However, the necessity for money to function as a real existent does not depend on a commodity bearer; a notional stand-in for gold such as a banknote may instantiate this objectivity. Furthermore the same relation obtains at the more complex level of existence of universal and particular in the relation of bank finance to industrial capitals. Not only is the system of self-moving abstraction capable of generating interest-bearing capital as the pure form of self-valorizing value, this is needed. The concept of capital must exist in this general form alongside the real capitals severally invested in industry, because only competition enforces the general law of accumulation on them. The money market presents to putative investors the current 'worth' of capital as a super-commodity. The general rate of profit takes concrete shape in the interest rate, dictating the minimum return for a capital to be viable.
15. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, para. 163.
16. Cf. *ibid.*, para. 223.
17. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 621.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 622; *Wissenschaft der Logik* II, Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg 1975, p. 264, my translation.
19. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, para. 168.
20. *Ibid.*, para. 165–6.
21. *Ibid.*, para. 166.
22. *Ibid.*, para. 179.
23. *Ibid.*, para. 180.
24. *Ibid.*, para. 181, my translation.
25. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, pp. 630–31, translation amended.
26. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, para. 188.
27. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 711; *Wissenschaft der Logik* II, p. 360, my translation.
28. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, para. 194. In considering the bare exchange of commodities one could even follow Hegel in talking of the 'violence' done to the independence of things (para. 196).
29. *Ibid.*, para. 205.
30. Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works*, vol. 29, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1987, pp. 330–31; cf. *Capital* Volume 1, p. 203.
31. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, para. 181, my translation.
32. Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, p. 210.
33. K. Uno, *The Principles of Political Economy*, trans. T. Sekine, Harvester, Hassocks, 1980, p. 10.
34. Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, p. 227.
35. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, para. 163.
36. Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, p. 255.
37. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, para. 213.
38. *Ibid.*, para. 92 Addition.
39. *Ibid.*, para. 93.
40. *Ibid.*, para. 95.
41. Marx plays on the identity of the Son with the Father to illustrate this; *Capital* Volume 1, p. 256.
42. For more on 'The Infinity of Capital', see Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx's 'Capital'*, ch. 7.

subscribe to **radical philosophy**

new online service for subscribers be available online. Subscribers can exclusively download current and back issues in searchable pdf format, with original pagination. Issues 117–135 will be available immediately. Issues 76–116 will be added throughout the year, so that by January 2007 more than ten years of back issues will be available.

From January 2006, *Radical Philosophy* will download current and back issues in searchable pdf format, with original pagination. Issues 117–135 will be available immediately. Issues 76–116 will be added throughout the year, so that by January 2007 more than ten years of back issues will be available.

subscribe online at www.radicalphilosophy.com

God squaddy

Hent de Vries, *Minimal Theologies: Critiques of Secular Reason in Adorno and Levinas*, trans. Geoffrey Hale, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 2005. 760 pp. £46.50 hb., £18.00 pb., 0 8018 8016 5 hb., 0 8018 8017 3 pb.

Religion is back. This seems to be true not only in politics, where it has returned with a vengeance, but in intellectual and cultural discourse as such. If this is a fact, and if the Enlightenment project of secularization can somehow be shown to have reached its limit, then how should one respond? Is the liberal strategy of containment (within the private sphere, faith, the non-cognitive) the best way of dealing with it, or should it be accepted (can it ever be accepted?) that religion presents us with a source of authority that is *sui generis* and possibly sovereign in relation to other forms of discourse? What, in particular, is the relation between philosophy and theology? Is modern or twentieth-century philosophy, as any cursory look would seem to indicate, overwhelmingly secular, or is there perhaps an unacknowledged entanglement with religion that may be constitutive of what the most sophisticated thinking was and continues to be?

It is the latter alternative that Hent de Vries has explored in his now substantial body of research on the works of thinkers such as Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Marion, Jacques Derrida and Theodor W. Adorno – all of whom he takes to represent a kind of ‘working through’ of theological motifs in the register of conceptual, philosophical reflection. De Vries has previously published two acclaimed books on this topic – *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion* (1999) and *Religion and Violence* (2001). *Minimal Theologies*, while appearing in English for the first time in 2005, was originally published in German in 1989 and may well, according to de Vries, be viewed as ‘an extended prolegomenon, after the fact’ to the other two books.

Extended it is, for at 760 pages this is a huge study of its own. Its subtitle – *Critiques of Secular Reason in Adorno and Levinas* – should be taken in its Kantian meaning: what de Vries is after is how Adorno and Levinas (with Habermas and Derrida, each in their own way, functioning as backdrops to the discussion), in the context of the all-too-familiar man-made disasters of the twentieth century, negotiate and articulate a certain theological impulse, a metaphysical desire, without making ontological or onto-theological com-

mitments. The critique is particularly Kantian in that, rather than rejecting this impulse outright, they seek to acknowledge, explore and analyse it with a view to uncovering a dimension that on a legitimate, although not ‘traditional’ or indeed even fully conceptual, basis can be accepted by philosophy.

In some respects, the fact that this book was written in the 1980s can be felt rather strongly, and de Vries would perhaps have written it differently today. It is, for example, caught up in the then virulent debates around discourse ethics, and de Vries spends more time than I imagine he would have today worrying about Habermas’s attributions, in the notoriously impatient *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1985), of ‘performative self-contradictions’ to thinkers as distinguished and different from each other as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Adorno, Derrida and Foucault. Habermas’s more direct engagement with religion was in his debate with Joseph Ratzinger (now Benedictus XI), which took place more than a decade after the writing of this book and is therefore not discussed (See Habermas’s ‘Stellungnahme’ to the issue of ‘Vorpolitische moralische Grundlagen eines freiheitlichen Staates’ in *Zur Debatte: Themen der Katholischen Akademie in Bayern* 34, 2004; and *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity*, ed. Eduardo Mendietta, 2002). However, the more general deficits that de Vries locates in Habermas’s work, and which he discusses in a long warm-up to the analysis of Adorno, are still relevant and important. According to de Vries, Habermas fails to explain adequately how rationality, as embodied in our claims to unconditional validity, can be represented in principles, rules or norms. Indeed, Habermas himself admits that secular moralities stand in need of semantic resources drawn from extra-reflective or extra-philosophical registers – yet these are resources that cannot be accounted for within his own system.

There is a need, de Vries senses, for a responsible articulation of what one might think of as reason’s other. In a (post-Auschwitz) world of closure and metaphysical immanence, apparently leaving such

anti-metaphysical positions as pragmatism and hermeneutics to do the job of accounting for the pre-suppositions of rationality, de Vries wants to talk about a 'higher' and more demanding source of moral and epistemic authority than what current Enlightenment consensus can provide. 'I would suggest', he writes, 'that we could conceive of philosophical theology as the touchstone and guardian of universality, truth, veracity, intersubjective validity, even authentic expressivity in all matters concerning (the study of) religion and, perhaps, not religion alone.' Such a philosophical theology would have to avoid both positive theology (or ontotheology) and the mere empirical research into the history and practices of religious faith. It would also – and this is more difficult – have to traverse the seemingly exclusive divide between conceptual or reflective articulation of the absolute, on the one hand, and appeals to some form of exclusive encounter with an immediate presence, on the other. De Vries rejects idealism and dialectics, both of which reduce the absolute to its conceptual representation. He also, however, wants to avoid mere gesturing or mysticism. There must be what he calls an 'irrefutable concretion', but not in any argumentatively determinable way.

Is such a position – a philosophical theology *in pianissimo* – available? Is there a third way in these matters? When discussing both Adorno and Levinas, de Vries repeatedly invokes the notion of 'the trace'. Yet what is a trace of the absolute other (of reason)? How does it announce itself, and why should we accept its bid for authority? What makes it genuine or binding?

As already intimated, de Vries's way of answering these questions is to offer extensive readings of both Adorno and Levinas (as well as Derrida to some degree). Indeed, de Vries's orientation is predominantly scholarly and reconstructive. Largely avoiding polemics, de Vries's book, with its penchant for quotation, reference and interpretation, is a theoretical collage which, rather than playing out positions against one another, seeks to produce what Adorno called 'constellations' – complex syntactic relations and similarities that manage to reverberate with one another and generate new meaning. De Vries does this extremely well. He succeeds in disclosing fascinating and deep parallels between Adorno and Levinas, and he brings their works fruitfully to bear on more

widespread discussions of the nature of rationality (There is a growing awareness of the parallels that run between these two projects. See, for instance, Josh Cohen, *Interrupting Auschwitz: Art, Religion, Philosophy*, 2003). However, he also, perhaps unavoidably, downplays some essential differences between the two thinkers.

According to de Vries, Adorno's dialectical critique of dialectics and Levinas's phenomenological critique of phenomenology 'resemble each other formally, to



the point of becoming *almost* interchangeable and collapsing into each other'. By criticizing philosophies of identity (Adorno) or totality (Levinas), they both seek to locate a transcendent dimension that places the subject in demand or, even stronger, as in Levinas, obligates it. For Adorno, the critique of identity-thinking takes place through negative dialectics, a radical self-critique of (Hegelian) dialectics, aiming not to synthesize or unify but to demonstrate the non-identity of subject and object, concept and object, universal and particular. For Levinas, the critique of totality involves a turn from thematizable being to the anarchy of transcendence experienced in the subjection to the Other before whom the subject becomes a hostage. Both of these moves, which de Vries explores in great detail, are governed by a strong respect for the biblical prohibition on graven images, and both seem to involve the use of atheism as a tool by which to purify the absolute and defend it from illegitimate appropriation. Both Adorno and Levinas emphatically reject theodicy: rather than the progressive realization of a universal capable of justifying the existence of pain and negativity, which for both represents a lapse into myth, true history is the redemptive other of progressive history. Interestingly, de Vries even

sees developmental parallels between the two thinkers. Just as Adorno, following Benjamin, started and ended with a very austere programme of philosophical interpretation, which was interrupted (with *Dialectic of Enlightenment*) by a middle phase marked by a more affirmative thinking of the absolute, so Levinas (as Derrida points out in the important essay 'Violence and Metaphysics') was more rigorous in his thinking of the trace before and after *Totality and Infinity*, the main work from his middle phase.

Yet what about the differences? De Vries does not fail to register that Adorno works with dialectics and Levinas with phenomenology, or that the former is not a religious thinker while the latter clearly is. They radically disagree about art, ethics and the nature of conceptual thinking. In particular, de Vries accepts that whereas Levinas persistently seeks to combat the concept of *mediation*, Adorno considers it as 'to a certain extent indispensable for thought, experience, language, and action'. The problem is that de Vries does not fully spell out the consequences of these disagreements. Too often he is satisfied simply to have noted them so as to be able to continue charting their agreements.

I think there is reason to worry about the use to which de Vries puts Adorno in particular. It is certainly true that Adorno occasionally announces a desire to 'save' the utopian dimension of positive theology by transposing its categories into the language of negative dialectics. His interest in questions of metaphysics and transcendence is unquestionable, especially after the publication of his far-reaching lecture course on metaphysics (*Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*). Yet, however in tune with the *Zeitgeist* it may be, de Vries's downplaying of the significance for Adorno of Marxist categories like commodity fetishism and social critique, as well as of both Weber's account of rationalization and Freud's theory of drives and the unconscious, risks disconnecting the great luminary of first generation Critical Theory from the social and political challenges his thinking was faced with. Indeed, my wager would be that the critical impulse animating Adorno's negative dialectics becomes unintelligible unless the social forms it is meant to criticize are taken into account. Unlike that of Levinas, Adorno's thinking is intended to be profoundly historical; and just as every philosophical category is meant to be historical through and through (such that truth itself becomes historical and transitory), so is what they respond to historical. Where Levinas offers a transcendental structure that in its apriority is supposed to be untainted by history and contingency, Adorno

negotiates his negative dialectics so as to restate the risks of critical rationality and politics at a higher, yet fundamentally risky, level. Despite his assurances of its essentially social character, Levinas locates what he means by responsibility beyond the polis in the sphere of the sacred (as does Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation*, 1996). By reading Adorno theologically, de Vries all too easily affirms the by now common view of Adorno as the other-worldly, potentially conservative metaphysician/aesthete who, having been disillusioned by politics, sought refuge in the beyond (I try to challenge this claim in *Adorno and the Political*, 2005). Now this is intimately related to the issue of mediation. If, as Adorno claims, all categories of thought are mediated, then transcendence is not possible except 'from within'. The task of philosophy is not to find a transcendental structure that accounts for the subject's infinite subjection to the Other, but to uncover and criticize identity-thinking wherever and whenever it takes place.

One could develop this objection in a lot of detail. At the end of the day, however, it may not really touch on de Vries's basic point, which is that theology continues to be of relevance to contemporary thinking and this is how it should be. *Minimal Theologies* is an important book that ought to find a wide readership.

Espen Hammer

It's still raining

Julian Bourg, ed., *After the Deluge: New Perspectives on the Intellectual and Cultural History of Postwar France*, with an afterword by François Dosse, Lexington Books, Lanham MD and Oxford, 2004. 472 pp., £69.00 hb., £19.99 pb., 0 7391 0791 7 hb., 0 7391 0792 5 pb.

The premiss of this volume is that, since the era of the French intellectual is now over, its history can be written. Editor Julian Bourg writes in his preface that 'The passing of an era invites re-examination', and that 'The early twenty-first century seems an opportune moment for gauging the shape of a historical period that has passed and for taking stock of its significance.' But what is the nature of the era which is supposed here to have passed? Bourg himself writes that the figure of the French intellectual is a national stereotype of the same kind as the Queen of England, or French cheeses and wines. Is it the stereotype, then,

whose time has lapsed? The theoretical premiss on which the book is based may be flawed if what has passed is indeed a stereotypical view of a reality, and if, as Bourj also seems to acknowledge, the notion of its having waned is also a stereotype. In this light, the claim that the book ‘marks the arrival of a new historiographical and generational sensibility’ is hyperbolic. At the same time, however, the subsidiary claim that the essays in the book ‘are motivated by the impulse to fill the many gaps in our understanding of postwar French intellectuals’ is substantiated by some of the essays. A significant contribution is made in the essays by Christophe Premat and Stuart Elden on the generation of Greek intellectuals (Cornelius Castoriadis, Kostas Axelos and Georges Papannaoui) and on Axelos and the journal *Arguments*, respectively. The same period, roughly the end of the 1950s, after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, is the focus of Michael Scott Christofferson’s essay on the influence of this event on the Comité National des Écrivains. David Berry and Ron Haas also provide detail on two undervalued figures – Daniel Guérin and Guy Hocquenghem, respectively. These essays offer valuable detail on several specific moments or figures within a fairly large historical context – roughly from the end of the war to the present – but, taken with the other contributions to the volume, they do not fully substantiate the claim to provide ‘new perspectives’, except in the sense of a dispersed plurality of unrelated viewpoints. Indeed, since the theoretical premiss of the volume implies buying into the stereotypical assessment of French intellectual life as a ‘trend’, it disables its titular claim from the start.

The opposition implicit in this assessment, however, between the discourse of the stereotype and something which, without being named, is presupposed as ‘real’ history is problematized once one admits the possibility that the stereotypical discourse itself forms part of the history. François Dosse writes in his careful afterword to the volume (written independently, it seems, from the essays it contains) that: ‘It nevertheless seems to me that an intellectual history that takes seriously the reception of works cannot abandon this dimension [media echoes and the press], which is described or denounced as playing an increasingly central role.’ If intellectual history, now, must include the pseudo-historiographic discourses based on the stereotypical figure of the French intellectual, then it does not entirely suffice to differentiate the ‘true’ history of intellectual activity one might seek in works and their contents from the ‘false’ image of this history contained in discourses about them. Dosse

advocates an approach to intellectual history which works both through an attention to the internal content of works – that is, to ideas – and to the ‘external manifestations of intellectual life’, or to ‘networks of sociability’. He refuses the strict opposition between an ‘internalist’ approach to the works themselves and an ‘externalist’ approach which stops at the limit of the work. An intellectual history which attends to the elaboration of ideas within single texts, and within the oeuvres of individual intellectuals, but which is also concerned with groupings, networks, the contexts formed by journals, publishers and institutions, is to be welcomed, and a number of the essays in this volume follow this line. It is worth asking, however, if the pseudo-historiographic discourse is itself now part of the history to which intellectual history must attend? In what contexts does this discourse operate? What institutional and intellectual context could produce the statement that poststructuralist and postmodernist theories were ‘the French version of the Beatles invasion’? Or, more seriously, in what contexts is there a ‘continuing lack of attention to Deleuze and indifference to Serres, Bourdieu, and Badiou?’ There are fault-lines in this volume between the French, North American and European contexts which are belied by the apparent collective consensus of its international contributors.

Theoretically, the volume raises the question of the relation between intellectual history and the history of intellectuals; or, more specifically, what part does the history of intellectuals have to play in intellectual history? About half of the essays are focused on the itineraries of specific figures – Axelos, Guérin, Hocquenghem, Levinas, Raymond Aron, Debray and Marcel Gauchet – the heterogeneity of which witnesses the variety, and perhaps the lack of cohesion, of the individual contributions, while the other essays are focused either on specific events (1956 in Hungary) or polemics (the ‘Treblinka controversy’), or on broader questions. Of the four essays in the last category, Schrift’s essay is concerned to redress the apparent perception (the ‘myth’) of postwar French philosophy as dominated by the clash between existentialism and phenomenology, on the one hand, and the myth of Gallic Heideggerianism, on the other. The suggested revision affirms, instead, the determinant role of the institution of the École Normale Supérieure on the formation of French philosophy, on the one hand, and the current of interest in Spinoza, on the other. William Gallois’s essay on French theory and the economy argues that, while a resistance to capitalism has been a common characteristic of much postwar

French thought, there has been little engagement with the economic reality of capitalism in France, save in the work of Lyotard and Bourdieu, the latter mentioned only in passing. Philippe Poirrier addresses the fortunes of cultural policy in France since 1981, focusing mainly on the importance of Jack Lang and of Fumaroli's 1991 polemic *L'État culturel*. The most consequential of these disparate essays is Warren Breckmann's consideration of the 'Post-Marx of the Letter', which offers an account of the poststructuralist reading of Marx, drawing inspiration from Gramsci, by Laclau and Mouffe before briefly contrasting it with the early 1990s deconstructive attention to 'the political' of Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy. Breckmann seeks to draw a distinction between the dynamic post-Marxism of Laclau and Mouffe and what he sees as the sense of resignation implicit in the notions of the 'inoperative community' (Nancy), and the resistance to the metaphysics of the politics of the subject (Lacoue-Labarthe). He then seeks to account for the difference between these two accounts in the different national contexts – British and French – from which they arise. The implication seems to be that the best French post-Marxism is being done or has been done outside France. Possibly – but this would be to ignore a vital current of work in France or in French over the last few years by Daniel Bensaid and others. This quibble notwithstanding, Breckmann's essay is a corrective to the uncritical assumption of stereotypical versions of French intellectual history in its attention to the difference of national and institutional contexts within which intellectual work and intellectual figures arise.

However, it is interesting to note that much of the contextualization provided by Schrift as a corrective to the 'myths' of the 'cult of the personality' and of Gallic Heideggerianism – the history of the institutions of philosophy teaching in France – would be familiar to those who have read biographical histories like Gregory Elliott's *The Detour of Theory*, or David Macey's *The Lives of Michel Foucault*. Dosse's proposition of a way between 'internalist' accounts of ideas, in books, and 'externalist', sociologically driven accounts of the disposition of intellectual contexts, seems only able to offer a weak account both of the history of intellectuals and of intellectual history; weak, that is, in comparison to the richness of biographical accounts, and the theoretical rigour of approaches such as that of Bourdieu in *Homo Academicus*, or the more theoretical and abstract notion of the movement of ideas proposed by Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. What I am suggesting here is that, while histories of institutions must be an integral

part of any account of the movement of ideas in a defined epoch, intellectual history is rooted in the endeavours, and the works, of individual thinkers. It is in the interaction between the itineraries of individual intellectuals and the institutions with which they are involved, and sometimes struggle, that intellectual history is made and can perhaps best be analysed. And this interaction also features the intellectual's conflict with their time and their mortality, since an intellectual is perhaps always necessarily out of step with his time – untimely, in the Nietzschean sense. In this respect it might be more instructive and productive to attend to the substantial amount of relatively unresearched work produced by Foucault in his lectures at the Collège de France, from the early 1970s until the early 1980s, or the only recently published lectures by Roland Barthes at the same institution, or the unpublished seminars of Lacan, in order to contribute to an understanding of the intellectual history of the last thirty or so years, rather than concern oneself with pronouncements of the end of an era and its historical monumentalization. Moreover – in that the later work of these three figures, to speak only of them, seems imbued with a sense of impending mortality and oriented towards the legacy of their thought, particularly towards the question 'how might one live' – intellectual history would perhaps be better served by a concern with the existential imbrication of lives and ideas, rather than by a frozen historicization.

Let us address, then, the proposition that the era of the French intellectual, or of French theory, has passed, and its history can now be written. I shall do so with reference to the recent volume of *Angelaki* (vol. 8, no.3, August 2003) devoted to 'French Philosophy Today', edited by Peter Hallward. Hallward addresses the question in what seems to me a far more measured and careful manner than Bourdieu, and in a way which is based in a philosophical or at least theoretical method. Reviewing the recurrent tropes of discourse about French philosophy, Hallward concludes that this gives a picture of 'a despondent branch of learning defeated by its unsustainable ambition and subsequently rearranged by needs external to its own, needs borrowed or imposed by government, pedagogy, science, history'. Dialectically, he wagers that there is just enough truth in this image of French philosophy to rule out its simple inversion, and that French philosophy is consistently going about its business as it has always done according to its own rules and method. Against the four tropes which he identifies in the doxa-driven discourse – complexity, subversion, eclecticism and exhaustion – and which bear witness to a far more

accurate and acute analysis of the discourse of the ‘end of an era’ than that in *After the Deluge*, he proposes, as the presuppositions of his collection, a number of principles crystallized around the term *persistence*: innovative work is being produced, dynamically and inventively; there is a ‘stubborn *commitment*’ (my stress) to the tasks of philosophy; there is a persistent attention to locate an unfettered, or *simple*, principle of singularity; this persistence is at once contemporary, in that it is happening now, and non-contemporary, in that it continues in the same orientation as ancient philosophies or theologies. The interviews and articles in the *Angelaki* volume (with or by Christian Jambet, Jean-Luc Nancy, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Clément Rosset, Guy Lardreau, Michel Henry, Alain Badiou, Monique David-Ménard, Bernard Stiegler, François Laruelle, Jacques Rancière, Daniel Bensaïd and Michel Serres) bear witness to an active intellectual and philosophical life which is not despondent, neither in mourning nor melancholic.

Patrick french

Walking with bobcats

Namascar Shaktini, ed., *On Monique Wittig*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 2005. 288 pp., £36.95 hb., £14.95 pb., 0 2520 7231 6 hb., 0 2520 2984 4 pb.

In her analysis of the various generic excursions performed by lesbian writers in the later twentieth century, Patricia Duncker notes: ‘Personal narratives, *Bildungsromane*, life stories, are both important and frequent in Lesbian writing. They represent the search for definition, and the search for a way to inhabit the word “Lesbian.”’ The habitation of a word seems nonsensically to cross the boundaries of material existence and linguistic signification; by implication, it suggests not least that the identity ‘lesbian’ must be understood in spatial as well as affective and materialist terms. Spatiality is implied in another account of what it means to be lesbian by the novelist Anna Wilson, who argues:

I remain other than Woman; there remains a distinction between what the world expects of a woman’s view – and what I see ... If it seems important to retain my sense of difference, to guard *the oblique angle* from which I see the world, what does it mean that I write as a lesbian?

Wilson’s apparent question is shored up by the assertion of lesbian difference. She records the lesbian as a position, a space, which functions at an ‘oblique angle’ to dominant female experience and, moreover, one which must be celebrated at the same time as being protected from assimilation. For both Duncker and Wilson the question remains of how to define this ‘space’ of the lesbian.

Perhaps no theorist has done more to further our understanding of the cultural, material and representational space occupied by the lesbian, in audacious and continually generative terms, than the French theorist Monique Wittig. Wittig, who described her own political and philosophical approach as ‘materialist lesbianism’, endeavoured to produce an embodied and affective theorization of the lesbian via the lived practice(s) of inhabiting the space of the lesbian within dominant heterosexual culture. For Wittig, the lesbian denoted a cultural space always already outside the boundaries of hegemonic culture. In her essay ‘The Straight Mind’ (1980), she makes one of her most seminal pronouncements: ‘it would be incorrect to say that lesbians associate, make love, live with women, for “woman” has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems. Lesbians are not women.’ Developing this argument further in ‘One is Not Born a Woman’ (1981), Wittig extends the strong sense in which lesbianism, as *practice*, exists as just that ‘oblique angle’, to which Wilson refers: ‘lesbianism provides for the moment the only social form I know in which we can live freely. Lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is *not* a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically. For what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man.’

Wittig’s formidable theoretical challenge has been poorly met by further engagement from anglophone critics and theorists. The collection under review here does the very important job of presenting and assessing Wittig’s contribution to studies of gender and sexuality and critical philosophy. As its editor, Namascar Shaktini, argues, one of the most central functions of this collection is its accessibility to anglophone readers. To date, the only English-language book to examine Wittig’s work in any depth is Erika Ostrovsky’s *A Constant Journey: The Fiction of Monique Wittig* (1991). It is, of course, difficult to separate out Wittig’s fiction from her non-fiction. Wittig herself regarded the generic boundaries between fiction and theory as specious, and strove throughout her career to produce all kinds of new linguistic and conceptual

attacks on the patriarchal language system within which we function. In the light of this, the collection commendably examines Wittig's 'radical critical perspective on gender' in all areas of her work, like Wittig herself, refusing to privilege theoretical writing over fiction or drama.

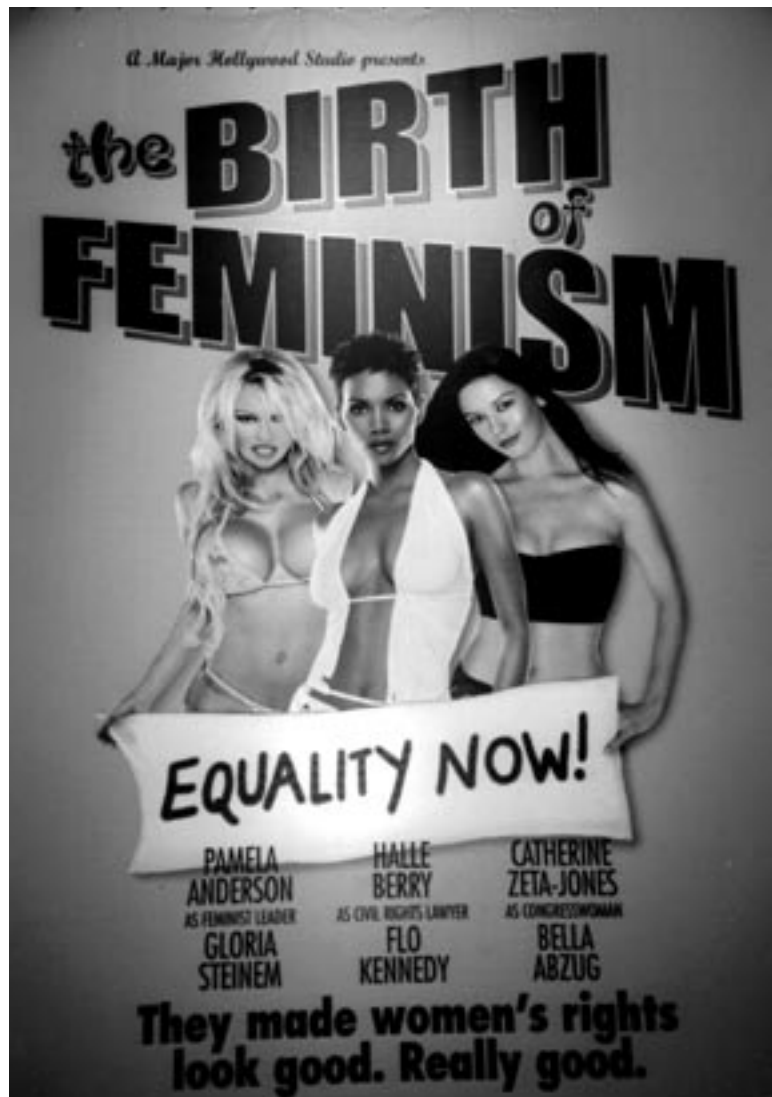
Wittig's own voice appears in the collection in different guises; three of her own essays open the book. First, she appears as political activist in her manifesto 'For a Women's Liberation Movement'. This manifesto, published in the leftist monthly *L'Idiot International* in May 1970, has never before been published in English. Introduced by Shaktini, who was also one of its signatories, the manifesto articulates the key Marxist feminist framework through which Wittig chose to think about gender and sexuality: 'We, from time immemorial, live like a people colonized within the people, so well domesticated that we have forgotten that this situation of dependence doesn't go without saying.' The two essays that follow the manifesto, 'Some Remarks on *Les guérillères*' and 'Some Remarks on *The Lesbian Body*', present Wittig the novelist commenting retrospectively on her textual strategies in both texts. In her essay on *Les guérillères* (1969), which was published in 1994, Wittig identifies herself as 'critic' returning to a completed text. Compellingly she conjectures upon her play in this text with the pronoun *elles* (the linguistic subjectivity never allowed for in the gendered spaces of standard French). Her essay on *The Lesbian Body* (1973), another retrospective critical account, was commissioned for the collection in 2001. This novel was written, Wittig argues, into a representational lacuna in dominant culture:

With *The Lesbian Body* I was confronted with the necessity of writing a book totally lesbian in its theme, its vocabulary, its texture, from the first page to the last, from title page to back cover. I was thus located in a double blank. The blank that all writers have to face when they begin a book. The other blank was of a different nature.

The 'other blank' is, of course, the absence of a vocabulary and register in which to speak of lesbian subjectivity and experience. There were, Wittig tells

us, 'no lesbian books except Sappho'. (She had not yet at this point, she remarks in parenthesis, encountered the work of Djuna Barnes.) Wittig is typically performative and polemical. These comments are made not to negate or denigrate the other lesbian authors who *have* written since the time of the infamous Greek poet, but rather to lay blame and attack the dominant heterosexual culture – the world of the straight mind – which negates and denigrates the lesbian.

The evocative photographic images of Wittig collected among her writings in this section remind us



that Wittig's activism always went hand in hand with her theorizing of the political and the cultural. One in particular, taken in August 1970, shows Wittig staunchly holding her banner by the Arc de Triomphe, at the first publicized action of the MLF (Mouvement de Libération des Femmes) which she organized. Wittig's banner reads 'Un homme sur deux est une femme' (one man in two is a woman). Shaktini, herself pictured in another photograph being arrested by the police at this demonstration, records the confusion this banner

created: 'The point, however, went over the heads of the police who arrested us. The one who booked me ... looked at my passport and said, in French, 'You American women think that half the men in France are effeminate.' The linguistic acuity of the banner, and the misreading of it by certain spectators, epitomizes the complexities of Wittig's critical endeavour and the sometimes confused interpretations of her work. This collection engages with all facets of Wittig's passionate endeavour, in its fictional and non-fictional turns. Its aim is to retrieve Wittig from the multiple misreadings of her work as essentialist, humanist or separatist, and to reinvigorate the as yet unanswered problem to which Wittig always attempts to attend, which is, as Linda M.G. Zerilli puts it, no less than 'the problem of freedom as a political phenomenon'. To some degree, the decision to organize the critical readings offered by Wittig scholars into three different conceptual bundles – Critical Approaches, Theoretical Applications and A New Generation of Readers – seems arbitrary and speaks to the difficulties of isolating single strands in Wittig's work. Each of the critical essays, in fact, stands in its own right as a rigorous and honest attempt to engage with Wittig and her work, in all its complexity.

In her essay 'When Lesbians Were Not Women', Teresa de Lauretis considers the effects that meeting and reading Wittig had upon her own decision to pursue the 'project of lesbian theory as distinct from feminist theory'. Wittig's influence is importantly theoretical as well as personally inspirational. Her delineation of the lesbian subject as 'the subject of a cognitive practice based upon the lived experience of one's body, one's desire, one's conceptual and psychical dis-identification from the straight mind' opens up a conceptual space into which de Lauretis can insert her own theorization of the figure she defines within her own schema as 'the eccentric subject'. De Lauretis digs Wittig back out of the 'dump of surpassed and discarded philosophies' into which Judith Butler so unfortunately 'tosses' her in *Gender Trouble* (the book which, de Lauretis notes, 'brought Wittig to the attention of nonlesbian and nonfeminist readers'), countering the criticisms of essentialism which are so often levelled against Wittig. Her essay convincingly demonstrates the 'epistemological valence' of Wittig's lesbian; in acknowledging her own intellectual debt, she points to the strong echoes of the nuanced and suggestive figure of Wittig's lesbian within the bodies of contemporary lesbian and queer theory. In 'Universalizing Materialist Lesbianism' Diane Griffin Crowder considers the ways in which Wittig's lesbian might subversively

function as a universal. Wittig's 're-visionary' texts push the reader, however temporarily, into a space of Otherness and difference, which has huge political and educational potential. In this sense, it is not that the straight reader can see sameness in these texts and thus regard lesbian experience as somehow mappable back onto the dominant heterosexual frame, but rather, and much more radically, that the straight reader might be both enticed and forced into the warp of a different mindset and world-view, which will profoundly alter the 'straight mind':

It is not, as Ostrovsky asserts, the fact that straight readers can see her work as potentially heterosexual that makes it universal. Rather, it is that all readers, of all sexualities, come to inhabit a new space in which the perspective of the lesbian writer becomes their perspective, at least for the duration of the textual journey itself.

Wittig's aim to push this radical potential in as many different generic directions as possible is evidenced in the many discussions of her fictional work in this collection. One important addition here is Jeannelle Laillou Savona's analysis of Wittig's only published play, *Le voyage sans fin* (*The Constant Journey*, 1979). Introducing the play to an anglophone audience, Savona details its historical and personal context. Wittig's lesbian rewriting of Cervantes' *The Adventures of Don Quixote* for the stage was undertaken at the same time as her partner Sande Zeig, a trained mime, was improvising on the theme of Quixote, whilst developing her own techniques as a performer. Photographs of Zeig in the 1985 Paris production of *Le voyage sans fin* punctuate Savona's essay. Typically, the play refuses generic dramatic structure, comprising a 'montage' of fifteen short scenes. In both its revision of a classical text and the transgressions of traditional stage action, Savona argues that Wittig attempts 'a process of lesbianization'. Yet the very word, Savona notes, is never used on stage; the lesbian moves from noun to verb, becoming a radical, transgressive *action* upon social and theatrical traditions. Savona's analysis of the text and its performance concludes that *The Constant Journey*

represents a remarkable attempt to eradicate the heavily genderized traditions of the Western stage. It dares to impart to the classical narrative of Quixote a fresh feminist significance and an uncompromising lesbian vision that is meant to shake spectators by forcing them to question what they tend to consider their most 'natural' human characteristic: gender.

The collection closes with a fictional dialogue between the author, Marie-Hélène Bourcier and Man-

astabal, the fantasized figure of the guide from Wittig's novel *Across the Acheron*. The dialogue details stories from the often bitter and contentious beginnings of the MLF, and the emergence of 'French feminism'; it interweaves solid political and theoretical explication with gossip, humour and fantasy. This 'queer fantastic text', Shaktini notes, 'departs from the academic rigor of the previous twelve chapters'; yet such an ending to the collection is suitably Wittigian. The figure of Wittig who emerges from this fantasy – as from this collection of essays – is larger than life, politically and intellectually indomitable. Manastabal recounts a story of Wittig in the Arizona desert:

People around here say that they have seen two bobcats guarding Wittig's door during the night. It seems that Wittig is not afraid of them. I heard that some nights, when she cannot sleep, she walks with them to the end of the desert.

Joanne Winning

Am I bover'd? Do I look bover'd?

Didier Eribon, *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self*, trans. Michael Lucey, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 2004. 440 pp., £69.00 hb., £17.50 pb., 0 8223 3286 8 hb., 0 8223 3371 6 pb.

Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 2004. 191 pp., £61.00 hb., £15.95 pb., 0 8223 3359 7 hb., 0 8223 3369 4 pb.

Didier Eribon has already published a biography of Foucault (1989), and now, in *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self*, he revisits Foucault's life and work, in Parisian and Californian intellectual milieux. Here he stresses the centrality of resistance in Foucault's work. He disputes the implication, in *The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, that twentieth-century images of gayness may be understood as a tactical reversal of dominant, straight discourse ('reverse discourse'), and repudiates Foucault's conception of the role of late-nineteenth-century psychiatric discourses in the constitution of modern homosexuality. Foucault's theses here were experimental, not a bid for a new orthodoxy, Eribon says. He reassesses the precursors and followers of Wilde, especially Symonds, Pater, Carpenter, Proust and Gide. Of course, these men have been much worked over, but Eribon still finds plenty to say about their discovery of distinctive subjectivities, out of a complex array of developing possibilities.

If Eribon's tendency is to deny a significant rupture at the end of the nineteenth century, he is equally concerned with continuities between modern gay life as Foucault experienced it in California, and the situation around 1900. We may wonder, Eribon adds,

if what Foucault is presenting as a new system of relations does not fundamentally resemble some extremely traditional gay ways of life: multiple sexual encounters that sometimes lead to friendships, circles of friends composed of former lovers and their lovers and former lovers, male sociability, links between men of different ages and different backgrounds, visits to gay male bars, cafes, and restaurants. This does not seem far distant from the way many gay men led their lives in the twentieth century.

In conventional gay historiography, that is a bold view. The Stonewall riot, relative legalization, lesbian and gay activism, the AIDS crisis – all this is rendered unimportant when set alongside ongoing patterns of sexual encounters and forms of socialization.

The effective project of Eribon's book, though he does not say it in quite so many words, is a reassertion of the lived concept, *gay identity*. The argument takes a positive and a negative direction. For the positive, Eribon stresses the continuity of recent gay subculture and the lives of gay men in the first half of the twentieth century, drawing on literary evidence and George Chauncey's historical research in his book *Gay New York*. It has been necessary throughout for gay men to seek the opportunities and anonymity of the city; we are still to be found in artistic and sensitive occupations. Such continuities have been proposed also by Neil Bartlett in *Who Was that Man? A Present for Mr Oscar Wilde*, and Rictor Norton in *The Myth of the Modern Homosexual*. Whether this emphasis is correct depends on how you add up the evidence. Eribon's claim that gay men still inhabit distinctive friendship networks, bars and cruising grounds seems right. However, there are changes as well. Two are most commonly remarked since the 1970s: the ability of gay men to appear 'masculine', and (perhaps as a consequence) a readiness to look for liaisons among other gay men, instead of prizing (apparently) straight types. This proves important theoretically and politically, because it prompts a separation of gender identity and sexual object choice, leading to the current engagement with issues in transgender.

The negative aspect of Eribon's case for ongoing gay identity involves the supposition that gay men must, inevitably, constitute themselves in response to stigma, shame, and *insult*. This is Eribon's leading argument; the one that appears most controversial. What gay men

have in common is an experience of stigma at the foundation of our selfhood. Eribon's argument is that even before we experience ourselves as gay, the sex/gender system is occupying our minds. Combining Althusser and Butler, he stresses how insult penetrates and infects the most vulnerable parts of the self. He denies that this position is essentialist; gayness is a social construction which can be refused, like any other construction, if that is what the individual wants to do. However, it sounds hard to shift, and rests, without much deliberation, on the ancient stigma of effeminacy.

A problem with Eribon's treatment is that he draws a good deal upon Proust and other dead white men. He gives no serious attention to the gay boy and man currently aged under thirty-five. It is possible that many of those younger people do have a different experience. If 'gay' is still an insult, it may also be a contested space; the gay boy today has some scope to answer back. He may have some plausible role models; his stigma may be manageable. He may have inherited a new subculture whose parameters are reflected, approximately, in *Gay Times*. The articles and advertisements in that glossy monthly suppose a fascination with sexual enhance-



ments (from drugs, toiletries, mechanical devices and, above all, pornography), performers and producers in the music business, and expensive holidays and apartments. Books are noticed through extracts from the blurbs, and feature those emanating from the *Gay Times* publishing house. Whether gay youngsters socialized into this subculture are much exposed to, or troubled by insult, is a question for sociological enquiry. It is possible that the dismissal of insult correlates with the arrival of complacency. Eribon's *Insult* should be read for its commitment to positive action, beyond the enticements of poststructuralism and the

market, and for its fair-minded linking of history and current political possibility.

The terms of discussion thus far must seem merely liberal to Lee Edelman. In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, in energetic and determined prose, he condemns the dominant 'familial ideology' (in the USA) and 'the regulatory fantasy of reproductive futurism'. By futurism he means that we can work toward a better future; attention to (the production of) children is supposed to guarantee this. The child has become 'the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention'. The queer, meanwhile, is associated with disillusionment, sterility and death. Edelman finds ample instances of this in current rhetoric. For elaborate elucidation he draws on Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (Scrooge versus Tiny Tim), George Eliot's *Silas Marner* and Hitchcock's *The Birds*. He tangles with Baudrillard ('The Final Solution') and Butler (*Antigone's Claim*), finding their ideas liberal. The world view behind this analysis is uncompromising. Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* is read to expose compassion as an illusory and ineffectual offshoot of futurism. When Thornhill, at the end of the film, appeals to Leonard to save him at Mount Rushmore under the monumental glare of the presidents of the United States, his attempt is futile. Leonard knows that love is a form of aggression and sympathy a kind of manipulation.

Some queer readers may suppose, nonetheless, that there is a place for us with children and the future. Lesbians, gay men and bisexuals may bear offspring and take part in the rearing of them; they may contribute distinctively. This may be an end in itself. The future, meanwhile, though it must include cross-gender coupling, may be focused on other goals too, such as the development of freedom, equality and justice; we might add artistic accomplishment and the scientific study of nature. Such aspirations may be equally experienced as good in themselves; many people are prepared to die for them. But to Edelman, such negotiations are futile; they buy into heteronormative ideology. We might turn the argument around, however: perhaps reproductive futurism is capturing and abusing other political aspirations and they should be reasserted.

The linking of queerness and death may sound like a typical instance of Eribonian insult. The difference is that Eribon believes we can work on our stigma – not, to be sure, to a point where it might evaporate, but sufficiently to enable a productive political and personal commitment. Edelman binds his sense of political futility to psychoanalysis. Lacan’s placing of the (alleged) death drive as a consequence of the Symbolic figures ‘the negativity opposed to every form of social viability’. ‘The realization of the subject’s authentic presence in the Child’, meanwhile, is only ‘imagined as enjoying unmediated access to Imaginary wholeness’. *Queerness*, by contrast, figures, outside and beyond its political symptoms, the place of the social order’s death drive.’

Yet there is for Edelman a perversely positive potential. ‘Rather than rejecting, with liberal discourse, this ascription of negativity to the queer, we might do better to consider accepting and even embracing it.’ Since there can be no future good in the order of the Symbolic, it is better to match its foundational negativity with ‘a constant *no*, ... a refusal of the coercive belief in the paramount value of futurity.’ So we may even achieve ‘an access to the *jouissance* that at once defines and negates us’. So the negative becomes a positive.

Edelman’s ideas overlap with those of Leo Bersani and Jonathan Dollimore, and also with Judith Halberstam’s belief that queers work on a different time frame from that of heterosexuals: not birth, marriage and childbearing. It is enough for a trend: I see a reassertion of a defiant anti-assimilationism, rendered ineluctable through an attempted embrace of the so-called death drive. These ideas were circulating well before the election victories of George W. Bush (Mandy Merck has linked them to HIV and AIDS; a good deal of the rhetoric adduced by Edelman arises out of the abortion controversy). However, their prominence today may correlate with the shameful and indeed fearful violations of human rights in Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib. On 7 November 2004 the *Observer* newspaper reported from Washington on Bush’s re-election under the headline: ‘Gay community fears new era of intolerance. Equality campaigners are in despair at the rise of the homophobic right.’ (It is assumed that Bush will pack the Supreme Court with conservatives, threatening sexual dissidents.) Eribon, from this perspective, appears as a spokesperson for ‘Old Europe’, still looking for respect, transparency, social reform and international decency; not bombing and shelling civilians indiscriminately, and achieving some success in the realm of LGBT rights.

Alan Sinfield

Equality is simple

Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 2004. 392 pp., £78.00 hb., £18.95 pb., 0 8223 3252 3 hb., 0 8223 3290 6 pb.

Despite their violently divisive effects, the consequences of the American and French Revolutions were incorporated early on into standard historical accounts of the emergence of the ‘West’ as a distinctively modern, liberal and democratic part of the world. The revolution that led to Haiti’s independence from France in 1804 was neither acknowledged nor remembered in the same way. If you search through recent histories of the French Revolution by people like François Furet or Simon Schama you will find little or no trace of the ‘colonial question’. Haiti doesn’t get a mention in Hannah Arendt’s *On Revolution*, and is acknowledged only in passing even in Eric Hobsbawm’s *Age of Revolution*. Yet it was in Haiti, rather than the USA or France, that the revolutionary slogans of liberty and equality were universally applied, via the unconditional abolition of slavery.

The central thesis of Sibylle Fischer’s compelling and impressively detailed book is that hegemonic conceptions of egalitarian modernity in Europe and North America (and in those creole Caribbean countries who conceived of their national independence in terms of an inclusion in this modernity) could only emerge through the disavowal of attempts, most notably in Haiti, to extend equality to issues of colour and race. There is no clear place in conventionally ‘enlightened’, nation-centred accounts of ‘modernity as an unfinished project’ for so-called peripheral struggles against international slavery and its modern substitutes. The same historical narratives in which most Caribbean and Latin American countries are said to make slow but welcome steps towards liberal modernity are used to explain why Haiti is apparently doomed to remain what Samuel Huntington describes as ‘truly a kinless country’, the ‘neighbour nobody wants’. Hegel’s abstract account of mastery and slavery offers Fischer a paradigmatic instance of this more general trend: his text retreats into ‘silence and obscurity at the very moment when revolutionary slaves might have appeared on the scene’.

Fischer makes much of her useful distinction between the pure repression involved in associations of historical experience with ‘unrepresentable’ trauma, on the one hand, and the more convoluted, more oblique

machinations of disavowal on the other. The bulk of her three-part book consists of closely argued analyses of somewhat random or 'accidental fragments' of the nineteenth-century literary and cultural history of Haiti and its immediate neighbours (Cuba and the Dominican Republic) in which such disavowal acquires some discernible though often elusive form. Havana's leading newspaper never so much as referred to the revolutionary sequence in Haiti, from its beginning in 1791 right through to 1805. Aponte's trial and execution in 1812, subtly subversive wall decorations painted by black artisans, the unclassifiable rhetorical excesses and oblique political implications of Plácido's poetry, the tortuously evasive antislavery narratives of Avellaneda, Villaverde and their contemporaries – these are some of the materials that Fischer sifts through in order to understand how subsequent Cuban representations of blacks and mulattoes served to recognize them only as virtually unrecognisable, to admit them only as inadmissible (most typically as objects of forbidden or incestuous desire).

The second and perhaps most compelling part of *Modernity Disavowed* deals in more systematic fashion with counter-revolutionary and anti-Haitian ideologies in the country most directly affected by 1804 and its aftermath: the Dominican Republic. Against the threat of Haiti's 'French' and 'black' egalitarianism, and in denial of their population's own largely African ancestry, pro-independence Dominican writers and intellectuals concocted a far-fetched but remarkably effective Hispanist-indigenist fantasy, through which they portrayed their nationalist struggle as sanctioned by a fusion of native American purity with early Spanish (Columbus and Las Casas) goodwill. In keeping with this general logic of disavowal, Haiti itself only enters the frame of Fischer's book in its third and final part, which is mainly dedicated to close readings of the ambiguously universalist language used in the new country's several early constitutions so as to enshrine, within modern republican frameworks, the principle of racial equality. According to Fischer, the eventual failure of these attempts is itself a symptom of the fact that such a principle cannot be expressed, in such a framework, without omission and distortion.

Perhaps the most curious omission however, in a book that is so directly concerned with Haitian revolutionary agency, is that of any involved discussion of the revolution and of the revolutionary actors themselves. Fischer's perfectly legitimate concern is with the representation or misrepresentation of this revolution in the subsequent century, but the fact that she includes no discussion of the revolutionary sequence, nor of the

actual circumstances that led to the end of slavery in 1793, creates the impression that Haitian writers and intellectuals were themselves somehow complicit in this same disavowal. Fischer notes that 'in the years immediately following independence, writers [sang] the heroic deeds against the French', but declines to name or analyse the work of these writers. Instead, the only Haitian literary text she considers in any detail is a minor play, *La Liberté générale, ou les Colons à Paris*; it was performed in Cap Haïtien in 1796, and deals with the intrigues of the colonial lobby in Paris as it sought to resist the Jacobin law of February 1794 confirming the general abolition of slavery. On the basis of somewhat scanty evidence, Fischer tentatively reads the play as a 'post-mortem recuperation of Brissot's project'.

This is a revealing moment in Fischer's book. Brissot, a leading Girondin and founder of the Société des Amis des Noirs, was one of Robespierre's main adversaries in the French Assembly. Fischer suggests that the relative marginalization of Brissot in both anti- and pro-Jacobin histories of the French Revolution is a symptom of the fact that 'the irreducible social heterogeneity and transnationalism of the cultures of antislavery were no more convenient in the European metropolis than they were in the plantation zone.' Against Michel-Rolph Trouillot (and C.L.R. James), she claims that Brissot was one of the few revolutionaries 'who had gone so far as to write in support of the armed rebellion in Saint Domingue'. Unusually, however, in so thoroughly documented a study, she cites no evidence of this support (other than a footnote which refers to his position *before* the rebellion), and she neglects to mention the complicity of Brissot and his faction in the Assembly's call for the immediate suppression of the slave uprising. Despite Robespierre's own notoriously slow conversion to the cause of abolition, James surely had good cause to dub Toussaint and his collaborators 'black Jacobins' rather than 'black Girondins.'

The more important point at issue here is Fischer's emphasis on an oblique and irreducible *complexity* as the primary concern of her analysis. The dominant methodological metaphor of her wide-ranging introduction is that of a 'landscape', a 'transnational' and primarily cultural 'landscape of heterogeneous facts, practices and ideas that to this day remain separated by disciplinary boundaries' and nation-centred historiographies. (The exact sense in which a war that was begun by Toussaint as an intra-national or pro-French conflict and then won by Dessalines as an inter-national or anti-French conflict might be called 'transnational'

is never adequately explained.) The consequent stress on 'interstitial' and 'radically heterogeneous' movements, on interdisciplinary convolution, on 'radical anti-slavery [as] a shadowy, discontinuous formation with a rhizomic, decentred structure', etc., not only echoes the well-worn formulae of conventional postcolonial scholarship. It also obscures the essential *simplicity* of the principle at issue, i.e. the immediate clarity that (no less than undeniable contextual intricacy) is properly fundamental to any affirmation of equality. All things considered there is remarkably little trace in Fischer's book of the subjective orientation of those who took up arms, in Haiti and elsewhere, in defence of precisely '*self-evident*' principles and rights – an orientation which sits rather uncomfortably, perhaps, with her own concern for archival complication and elaborate hermeneutic speculation.

On the other hand, this same concern cannot by itself illuminate the precise relationship between the forms of ideological disavowal that interest Fischer and the severe economic and class constraints that have shaped so much of the history and influence of independent Haiti. Of course, Fischer is perfectly aware of the long shadow cast by the plantation system that Dessalines and subsequent Haitian leaders inherited from France. But for all its often dazzling critical finesse, her book does little to engage in detail with the sort of issues raised by Marx's well-known critique of the French Jacobins: both political agency and socio-economic structure are left largely to one side here, in favour of the delicate, almost therapeutic work of cultural reconstruction.

Peter Hallward

'Differently placed'

Andrew Sayer, *The Moral Significance of Class*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005. 256 pp., £45.00 hb., £17.99 pb., 0 521 85089 4 hb., 0 521 61640 9 pb.

A few years ago a friend of mine risked attending a New Labour Women's Conference. The only speaker was Charles Clarke. In conversation afterwards he asked her what she was writing her PhD on: 'Class'. 'That's rather an old-fashioned topic', he replied. This, of course, is in accord with the spirit of the times. The end of Soviet communism is deemed to have produced the end of socialism and any form of collectivism. Neoliberalism reigns supreme. Now we are apparently

all individuals who in the paradise of postmodernism are free to shape and reshape our social persona according to personal whims.

Meanwhile – no surprise – out there in society inequality is increasing. Yet, while it has become fashionable to discuss discrimination on grounds of sex and gender, and race and ethnicity, class is the category which 'dare not speak its name'. My own view is that the rejection of the concept of class is itself a class ploy, for it thereby pushes some inconvenient issues off the agenda. Class, anyway, has become an embarrassing subject; it is now easier to talk about sex. At the back of our minds we know that class positions are undeserved; they are largely a matter of luck. Thus class 'is morally problematic because of its arbitrary relationship to worth, virtues and status, and this is why it is a highly sensitive subject'. In this context it is reassuring to learn from Andrew Sayer that, 'after many years of neglect, there have recently been signs of a revival of interest in class, especially regarding how it is subjectively experienced.' Sayer's book is welcome for its reminder that class has not gone away and that social placing not only determines our opportunities and ways of life but also provides a whole repertoire of norms structuring our relations with those who are differently placed. Here we are told not of the disappearance of class but of its ubiquity; of how our speech, clothing, food, consumption patterns, child rearing and leisure pursuits are among society's class markers.

This is a philosophical book on class in which there is hardly any mention of Marx, although many points of fundamental disagreement can easily be deduced. For example, Sayer clearly rejects the highly reductionist view that takes values, ethics and morality as part of a superstructure that is fully explained by material interests deriving from social location. Times have changed and the book's starting point is Pierre Bourdieu. Central here is Bourdieu's key concept of *habitus*, which refers 'to the set of dispositions that individuals acquire through socialization'. Sayer, however, goes beyond what he calls Bourdieu's predominantly 'amoral Hobbesian framework' to examine people's normative agenda. The replacement of Marx by Bourdieu is indicative of Sayer's main focus, which is micro rather than macro: class encounters at the individual level rather than that of the overall social structure. For him income and wealth are not the only issues. He also deals with many of the behavioural and psychological adjustments that are made and is sensitive to the consequent stratification in people's 'capabilities to engage in ways of life they have reason



to value'. There is much on the culture of class; how assumptions, attitudes and mores are all coloured with implicit social rankings. If democracy is about all being treated equally, equal respect and equal voice, then, irrespective of our formal political institutions, it is clear that our wider culture is still pervaded by counter-tendencies. This book, among other things, indicates what would be required to take equality and democracy seriously. Apart from Bourdieu, Sayer is clearly also strongly influenced by Adam Smith's 'focus on everyday relationships' and R.H. Tawney's concern for how inequality disfigures ordinary life.

What we have here is not just description, though that alone would be a service, for Sayer wishes to go further. This is a critique, for he explains how class disfigures human relations; it produces a situation where the dominant treat others with contempt and so the dominated become of reduced concern in terms of equal opportunities and equal respect. Margaret Thatcher is said to have 'positively oozed class contempt and condescension'. In answering questions from those she saw as inferior she 'would tilt her head to one side patronizingly with a withering look as if talking to a disobedient child'. For Sayer it is unacceptable that class contempt has not become taboo in the same way sexism, racism and ageism have. It is clear that the book is written from an egalitarian standpoint, though one that is realistically aware of the obstacles to overcome. What, then, can be done?

Sayer wishes to uncouple the 'posh' from the 'good' and the 'common' from the 'bad' so that qualities are valued for their intrinsic rather than their status credentials. Though he challenges current neoliberal discourse, he thinks that there is no prospect of a transition to a fundamentally transformed society. The travails of socialism have apparently demonstrated the impossibility of doing without markets, but Sayer still has a strategy to 'substantially reduce class inequalities'. This would involve, among other things, more progressive income and inheritance taxes, 'a liveable minimum wage' and greater sexual and racial equality. For those who denigrate what is in effect capitalism with a humane face, Sayer responds by claiming to call for what is realistically possible rather than what is fully satisfactory.

This book is based on a combination of moral philosophy and sociology which involves numerous digs at the latter. Sayer complains that 'normative thought has been largely expelled from social science, and ghettoised in political and moral philosophy'. Values have come to be associated with the subjectivity from which all science should be distanced. In consequence social science has attained the worst of both worlds. It has failed to become value-free whilst failing to understand lay normativity. Sayer believes that social science wrongly elevated itself above the masses, imagining itself able to see what ordinary people couldn't. In contrast he claims to take lay concepts seriously,

‘more seriously than much social science has done’. For ‘Lay interpretations and motives can be highly skilled and subtle, compared to the lumbering efforts of academics.’ Sociology has often avoided treating values on their own terms (rather than reductively), so Sayer calls on moral philosophy to redress the imbalance; though the latter also has methodological problems, with its ‘normal individual’ too often being implicitly male and middle class.

How, then, does Sayer see the relationship between facts and values, and the place of the latter in the social sciences? For him this divide – what he calls the ‘positive/normative distinction – hides an excluded middle, a zone’ with concepts that ‘have both descriptive and evaluative content’. This area contains ‘some of the most important phenomena of life’ such as ‘needs’, ‘desire’, ‘lack’, ‘flourishing’, ‘suffering’, ‘health’, ‘illness’, ‘oppression’ and ‘disrespect’. If we avoid using such evaluative terms he claims that we ‘weaken rather than strengthen the descriptive adequacy or truth status of our accounts’. In this way Sayer provides the methodological justification for a critical social science, one that does not shy from outlining how current society fails to meet the basic human needs of many of its members. However, I wonder to what extent this sort of critique of positivist sociology is still as appropriate as it might have been some decades ago? Surely sociology has always had those willing to engage in public debate and challenge prevailing norms. Not least was Herbert Spencer, who went out on a Sunday morning to march ostentatiously away from church while others walked towards it. C. Wright Mills, Anthony Giddens and now Frank Furedi are clearly also, in their own particular ways, in this tradition. What Sayer has done is not to make possible what was anyway already being practised but rather to outline the terms on which a sociological critique can justifiably operate.

Michael Levin

Differendschrift

Rudi Visker, *The Inhuman Condition: Looking for Difference after Levinas and Heidegger*, Kluwer, Dordrecht, 2004. 309 pp., €120.00 hb., €33.00 pb., 1 4020 2825 3 hb., 1 4020 2826 1 pb.

This book is a detailed and subtle investigation of the relation of ethics to politics in the works of Levinas, Heidegger, Lyotard and Arendt. It is driven by ques-

tions about the place and possibility of ethics in a postmodern epoch, but also by questions concerning whether there is such an epoch, or whether some kind of modernity still holds sway. Throughout, the question of ethics is given a political context through an inquiry into the role of ethics as independent of strictly political and economic ways of judging social issues. As such it can be read in part as a powerful phenomenological rejoinder to consequentialism.

The style of the book is rather dry and academic – in the sense of lacking economy and variation. This is not in itself a flaw. The refusal to draw final conclusions, summarize, simplify and apply to abstract cases is a reflection of the thesis that any such direct and measurement-based communication fails to reflect its own insufficiencies with respect to ethical questions of difference. However, when compared to its source texts, Visker’s work lacks the search for aesthetic forms of writing that express the limits of communication by making us feel them, rather than straightforwardly stating them. What the book gains in accuracy, it may lose in appeal to non-specialists.

For researchers on ethics and the works of Levinas and Heidegger, this book is an important response to critical accusations of ethical failure or incoherence. Visker sets out the thesis that ‘Ethics is not politics’ better than most interpreters, because he combines close and very thorough interpretation with a wide-ranging engagement with secondary material as well as older debates and reflection on new directions. He also draws out the consequences of this thesis with great care, not so much in terms of political action, but in recommendations with respect to the limits of normativity and consensus-based politics.

Visker’s reading of Lyotard’s work on the differend and the sublime is a good example of the balance and care he brings to interpretation. He is at pains to refute the accusation that Lyotard falls into contradictions when attempting to communicate that some things cannot be fully understood in language. This is because incompleteness in communication is essential to all forms of language. So Lyotard’s claim is not that some things cannot be said, but that each time we say something there is a necessary lack – including in his own statement about this insufficiency and in accusations raised against his position.

Lyotard’s ethical challenge is then translated into a claim about the necessity of a certain kind of violence in language and about the ethical obligation to bear witness and take account of this violence in expression. If politics is to accept that we must continue to reflect upon and fight against injustice, the ethical moment is

to sense and respond to the inevitable raising of new injustices in any political act:


In other words: the purpose of 'bearing witness to the differend' ... is not so much to cure us of the bad habit of forgetting this injustice, but rather to 'sensitize' us to the fact *that* we forget, that we are – so to speak – cursed with an ontological illusion which not only lets the void, out of which every phrase arrives, become obfuscated by this new arrival, but also makes us forget this forgetting by seducing us into seeing ourselves as the authors of these phrases, as the ones who 'use' language.

I have some reservations about Visker's framing of debate in terms of the idea that there are political and ethical challenges specific to our times. This comes out in his mistaken view that Lyotard is concerned with modern and postmodern epochs, rather than interrelated aspects of works that can be seen as both modern and postmodern. These would then be ideas and processes that operated in artworks, but that did not allow them to be assigned to particular historical moments. We could speak of a preponderance of postmodern works at a particular time, but this would be open to review and reinterpretation, dependent of the issues and questions tackled alongside those works.

Visker considers questions of ethics and difference and also about the difficulties of pluralism, primarily as revealed in twentieth-century politics and philosophy (though there are also excellent discussions outside this time-frame, notably a highly original discussion of Heidegger in relation to Kierkegaard). This leads him to define difference and plurality in terms of rare events and sensations, whilst also wishing that these were more broad and open. It also leads him to reflect on 'our age's fascination with an ethics of the Other' whilst ascribing a necessity to this fascination. This explains his ambiguous relation to Lyotard's work on the sublime. It is praised from an ethical and political point of view, yet also criticized for narrowness with respect to feelings and for its triggering of a passivity that seems to bar political action.

Setting aside these minor qualms, this book takes phenomenology further in its relation to contemporary problems in ethics and politics. It reflects on this relation with great acuity and provides us with carefully thought-out boundaries and recommendations as to the ethical legacies of Levinas and Heidegger. It shows the 'inhuman condition' in which we find ourselves to be much more complicated and ethically demanding than in the analyses offered by overly complacent neo-humanists and overly joyful postmodernists alike.

James Williams



http://multitudes@samizdat.net
Multitudes 21 Subjectivation du Net: postmédia, réseaux, mise en commun
Multitudes 20 architecturales: Pragmatiques architecturales
Subscriptions: Diffusion Populaire 21 ter, rue Voltaire, 75011 Paris
difpop@globenet.org, www.difpop.com

Multitudes²²
philosophie politique
des multitudes (2)
Créoles
Toni Negri : réponse
à Pierre Macherey
François Cusset :
french theory
et cybernétique
Peter Weibel /
Boris Groys /
Hans Belting

AUTOMNE 2005
REVUE TRIMESTRIELLE
1422, 73 EURO
0 292090 722052

Hunger in Niger and Zimbabwe

There's no denying the images are dreadful: a naked child hanging from his mother's empty breast, large eyes under attack from flies, screams of pain and hunger. We have seen a lot of them since the end of July when the Western media woke up to the hunger crisis in Niger. It made a change from the British media's tireless tirade against the Zimbabwe regime and their obsession with the neatly moustached man some call the African Hitler, President Robert Mugabe. Exaggerated attention on Mugabe was swapped for images of a famine in West Africa. So how did Niger manage to find its way onto the radar of the Western media this summer? And what does the coverage tell us about the West's interest in Africa?

According to the BBC, it was a mixture of expert instinct and investigative work. The corporation's in-house magazine, *Ariel*, tells how a lone television editor, searching for material to illustrate a television feature on Live 8, chanced upon footage of emaciated children at a feeding centre in Niger. Spotting a story, he asked a correspondent in Africa – albeit at the other end of the continent – to investigate. The United Nations food agency, the World Food Programme (WFP), confirmed that some people in Niger were indeed going hungry, adding that an initial 'call for help' had been made eight months before, in November 2004. The WFP spokesman, himself a former BBC reporter, said: 'If the media had gone to Niger then they would have seen people struggling but surviving. It's only when it's too late for many children that the images force donor nations to take notice.' What he didn't say was that it is also only when it is too late for many children that their skeletal bodies are judged filmworthy by Western television crews.

A self-congratulatory and heroic tone is not uncommon among British and Western journalists, particularly when they are covering hunger and conflict in Africa. They like us to know that they have helped save people, an achievement that no doubt gives a greater definition to their work as investigators, reporters and missionaries. Nevertheless, the work they do is often superficial and clichéd. Niger has once again proved that life in Africa is nasty, brutish and short.

Time and again, it is the European – journalist or aid worker – who is required to step in and quite literally save the day. Rarely do these same journalists discuss the silence that characterizes their work just as much as the noise. Niger featured on the BBC *Ten O'Clock News* twelve times in a 12-month period up to mid-August this year. That might sound promising: once a month on the domestic news is good going for an English-speaking African country, let alone a former French colony in the middle of the Sahara. However, eleven of those stories were about the recent hunger crisis and were run in the space of about seven weeks from the 18 July. The twelfth focused on another African cliché, slavery, and was broadcast in early February, three months after the WFP had first warned of a hunger crisis brewing in Niger.

During the past four or five years, the British media's limited appetite for Africa has transformed into a bulimic desire for rolling reports on Zimbabwe. The former colonial power's sense of trauma resulting from the loss of Rhodesia has at last been allowed to express itself freely. The monstrous dictator Mr Mugabe has eclipsed coups, civil wars, US-sponsored terror initiatives and even severely malnourished children across Africa in the news. In November 2004, at the time of the WFP warning on Niger, Zimbabwe featured twice on the *Ten O'Clock News*. On both occasions, the English cricket tour to the land of Satan was the subject matter. From August 2004 to August 2005 Zimbabwe featured thirteen times on the *Ten O'Clock News* and ten times on the BBC's *Newsnight*, a programme that featured Niger only once in the same period. A cursory glance at the British press reveals a similar pattern. A search on the *Daily Telegraph's* output brings up sixty-one hits on Zimbabwe but only three on Niger, in the same period, all of which were after 21 July – just after the BBC began broadcasting its pictures. Similarly, the *Guardian* brings up eighty-two hits on Zimbabwe and fourteen on Niger, all also after 21 July. Of course, it's not simply a numbers game; it's also about content. British media outlets have been desperately predicting famine in Zimbabwe since as far back as 2002. The BBC's Fergal Keane

wrote in January 2003 that a catastrophe was coming, under the headline 'Famine Plagues Zimbabwe'. There is no doubting that the former breadbasket of Southern Africa is in a bad way, but the famine of which our media have been warning with such enthusiasm is yet to come. The need to prove that Mr Mugabe cannot survive without the white man prevails. Nevertheless, even the more conservative newspapers know that their anger about white farmers losing land cannot dominate headlines for ever and leaves them open to accusations of racism. Hence the abnormal concern for poor black Africans.

Double standards have also been evident in the Niger coverage. When the British media finally awoke to the story, they depicted the hunger crisis as one of biblical proportions – Africa in disaster once again – unable to convey the complexities of the situation. This was exemplified in the British media's response to the refusal of Niger's president, Mamadou Tandja, to agree with various Western 'experts' – mainly foreign journalists flying into his country for a first and probably last brief trip – about the existence of a famine in his country. 'There is no famine in Niger', he said. 'The people who are saying there is a famine either have a political interest or an economic interest in saying there is a famine.' He accused the Western media and certain aid agencies of making 'propaganda'. In response, he was vilified by the Western press, despite the fact that his statement was accurate. As the WFP put it: 'We have not spoken about famine but about pockets of severe malnutrition.' Yet the British media continue to make wild claims. The *Daily Telegraph* has insisted on headlines like 'A nation starving to death' (28 July). The *Guardian* has repeatedly talked of 'Niger's famine' and even reported that 'thousands of severely malnourished children are dying every day' (23 July). The BBC also confirmed 'the famine', despite exploring the definition of the word on its website and confirming that Mr Tandja is 'technically right': there is no actual famine in Niger (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4139174.stm>).

In fact, there is no internationally accepted definition of famine. The WFP, however, has come up with a guide which is an amalgamation of several leading famine theorists. It is worth quoting in full:

Famine is a situation of extreme food scarcity in terms of availability or access, resulting in widespread deaths. Such death can occur due to starvation or starvation-related diseases. Normally anything over 2 deaths per 10,000 of the population per day constitutes an emergency situation. The precise rate at which excess mortality becomes a famine has not been determined. Famine is precipi-

tated by substantial gaps between what a country is able to produce and what its population needs, which are not filled either by affordable commercial imports or by aid. Such gaps can be caused by nature or man.

At the moment, no one seems able to confirm exactly how many people are dying in Niger each day. However, at the end of August, one well-placed aid worker said that the *Guardian* claim of thousands of children dying on a daily basis 'had to be an exaggeration':

I visited the Médecins Sans Frontières clinic in Maradi in early July and they had just had one of their worst days when seven kids died. The average is about two. It is of course impossible to know how many kids are dying out in the villages in the bush, but the general impression from those who have been out and about is that MSF and others have done a good job at treating the worst cases.

To put this into perspective, there are a couple of other statistics from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs that are worth noting. First, in an average year, almost one in six children die each year before their first birthday in Niger. Second, 262 out of every 1,000 children do not make it past the age of five. This is everyday life in Niger and yet few news managers think it worthwhile investing in a Niger correspondent on a permanent basis, let alone a West Africa reporter or a regular visitor to the country.

It may seem churlish to bicker about the semantics and statistics when people are dying of hunger, and Mr Tandja has his own self-serving political reasons to fear a famine. Hunger can be the crucial catalyst to a successful coup and was in Niger in 1974 as Mr Tandja knows: he played a crucial role and was rewarded with the post of interior minister. However, the self-satisfied tone that slips so easily from the imperial tongues of Western journalists requires, at the very least, some reflection. The journalists accuse the Nigerien president of denying the obvious and of failing to care for his people without any sign of shame for their own very limited coverage of the crisis – an extremely belated and impulsive response to some shocking pictures of starving African children. Instead of busying themselves with the British cricket team's moral stance on Zimbabwe in order to whip up patriotic fervour, they could have used some of their resources last November to respond to the WFP warning about Niger.

It is easy to present Africa as a continent of pathetic victims and mad, monstrous leaders. It is not just

journalists who promote this simplification, but also unkempt pop stars, well-meaning charities, diplomats, consultants and academics. Anyone who challenges the stereotype or pleads for a consideration of history is accused of political correctness, at best. So, it seems, for the time being we are stuck with threadbare accounts of dying children and Zimbabwe's lunatic leader. Other critical and telling developments will continue to count for less: for instance, the acceptance by the international community of the new Mauri-

tanian leader who came to power in a coup in August, despite reports that he is wanted for torture charges in France; the persecution of northerners in Ivory Coast; the sales of Nigeria's so-called Nollywood films in Niger alongside the hunger; allegations that the United States is sponsoring attacks around the Sahara to suggest that al-Qaeda terrorists are operating in the area. All of this will be ignored.

Lara Pawson

Marx comes first again, and loses

So, Marx has come first again. Marx has been voted 'The Greatest Ever Philosopher' for a BBC Radio 4 show *In Our Time*, following an online poll taken over five weeks. The show, one of the most respected intellectual shows on radio, offered the public an open vote on the ten greatest philosophers. Marx polled 28 per cent, easily outstripping second-placed David Hume with 13 per cent, followed by Wittgenstein (7 per cent) and Nietzsche (6.5 per cent). This has excited a lot of people on the Left, with commentators being trawled out to bear witness to Marx's relevance, his insights into globalization, and why philosophy should take Marx seriously. An air of jubilation presides: what better proof of his importance than Marx winning a BBC poll for the greatest philosopher?

It is worth recalling that Marx had previously won a major BBC poll, when he came first in the 'greatest thinker of the millennium' poll at the end of 1999, beating Einstein, Darwin, Newton as well as the philosophers beaten in 2005.

So, the audience of the intellectual channel of the state broadcasting system of the Iron Heel's junior partner has voted for the writer most associated with the vision of human existence beyond class society – twice, within the space of a few years. What makes this such a strange result is that anyone who knows Marx's work is aware of his view that philosophy suffers from a serious practical-political limit, rooted in the philosopher's aim to interpret the world in

various ways, when of course the point is to change it. The most famous non-philosopher, a political anti-philosopher, is being peddled as the greatest philosopher of all. The more you think about this the odder it becomes.

Even allowing for the voters not being a random sample of the UK's population, can it really be that anything remotely like this number of its citizens are communists? Since the answer to this is – sadly – 'no', some other explanation must be sought. So, what was Marx winning about? Rather than jubilation, we might better see this in terms of the Cunning of Unreason. At every possible turn, Marx's political project was ignored, marginalized or misrepresented.

This was evident from the discussion on *In Our Time* after Marx's 'victory'. Gareth Stedman Jones, Francis Wheen and A.C. Grayling appeared to discuss the great philosopher's work, in entirely unpolitical terms. Thus, to explain why Marx spent years thinking through

the idea of alienation, it was commented that Marx was born a Jew, but that his father had to convert to Lutheran Christianity in order to get a job, so Marx was a minority within a minority and consequently alienated, estranged, from childhood onwards. Alienation was apparently important to Marx because he suffered from identity problems: this was pseudo-identity politics masquerading as philosophy, which was masking any actual politics.



The Cunning of this exercise in Unreason twisted everything it took from Marx into its opposite. Dialectics was presented in the standard cartoonish way, as thesis–antithesis–synthesis. It would be difficult to parody a situation where a notion which appears in a writer only by way of ridiculing it (in *The Poverty of Philosophy* on Proudhon) is then attributed to him in a discussion on why he was voted the greatest philosopher. At one point Margaret Thatcher was pronounced the greatest Marxist of the twentieth century – on the grounds that she stressed the economic relations between individuals as the determining force of society. For the most part, however, Marx was twisted into just a more prescient Keynes, someone who predicted globalization, and so on and on. The critical distance on class society which was the central focus of Marx’s project was screened out. Marx’s central concern – that wage-labour is a species of the genus of forced labour, in the same category as slavery and serfdom, and that this is a distortion of the human – was never approached. Instead, we were swamped in a deluge of trivia:

Bragg to Wheen His education was influenced by Baron von Westphalen ... can you tell us about this?

Wheen Well yes he was a liberal and an Enlightenment figure, and Marx’s sister said he was never happier than when having Homer read to him. The Baron’s daughter then became Mrs Marx.

It was Marx as a cultural icon, rather than Marx as a communist, that people were voting for. And for this to work the cultural icon has to be as far removed from the communist thinker as possible.

The Marx at stake was a ‘Marx’ who has become falsely associated with some of the major traditions and assumptions on the Left, which Marx himself actually argued against. To have Marx as one’s ‘fancied philosopher’ is to make a statement of the same kind as ‘I am a caring person who is against globalization, who believes in equality, and who believes that, while we cannot do away with capitalism, some things should be protected from the awful forces of the market.’ Smith and Weber – symptomatic absences in any list of important social theorists – do not have this iconicity.

The vote for Marx was thus another way of ‘branding’ the self, a *leftish* self which can only associate with Marx once an alternative Marx has taken over – a Marx falsely associated with things that many on the left value but which are in fact not part of Marxism at all. Several commentators suggested that Marx had

produced some excellent soundbites: ‘religion is the opium of the people’, ‘from each according to his abilities, to each according to their needs’ and, yes, ‘the philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point however is to change it’. But we were never told why Marx thought these things or, more importantly, how they figured in his critique of capital. The idea that religion is the opium of the people was never connected to his understanding of the ‘soulless conditions’ of the market in human labour. Similarly, the image of communism that lay behind the principle ‘from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs’ was lost. A survey in 1994 revealed that half of the US citizens consulted thought that ‘from each according to his abilities, to each according to their needs’ was part of the US Constitution.

Francis Wheen’s main defence of Marx was that his insights are now accepted by leading theorists of the American business class as showing the nature of capitalism. What is remarkable about this defence is that it systematically misses out the idea that the wage-labour/capital relation is essentially exploitative. This is an echo of the way in which the labour movement has assimilated Marxist insights more generally. Many of the leading figures in British labourism have cited *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* as one of their leading influences. This book is remarkable because of the central place in it of ‘The Great Money Trick’ – a brilliant dramatization of the nature of wage-labour. Yet its demonstration of the exploitation at the core of capitalism is actually utterly opposed to the politics of labourism. The book achieved its status through the screening out of this core, in favour of its contingent descriptions of working-class life (the very thing which Stedman Jones has spent his career writing about). The ‘Marx’ who won this poll was a figure who was likewise cleansed of his revolutionary, anti-capitalist ideas.

In this sense, Marx did not win this poll at all. It was won by ‘Marx’. It was a shadow Marx, a spectral Marx, who was voted the Greatest Philosopher of All Time. The Marx who won this poll was an alternate being, a spectral being which exists in the ideological world, a figure in the phantasmagoria constructed by those who benefit most from having others buy this particular icon. ‘Marx’ won, and so Marx – and Marxism – lost. Far from celebrating this as a victory, then, and enjoying the furious protestations of the conservative press, we should actually see it as a defeat. There must always be the *shamshow* of opposition, of a criticism that never takes to arms.

David Murray and Mark Neocleous