

REVIEWS

TWO KINDS OF MARXISM

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The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx by Shlomo Avineri; Cambridge 1968. (Paperback edition 1970, 75p)

In the history of Marxism's intellectual productions two trends are discernible. Marx himself left an extraordinary complex legacy, in the study of which it was only too easy to fall back on one-sided simplifications. On the one hand we have had those who, taking Marx's stress on science to be the main point, interpreted him from a positivistic standpoint; and, on the other, those who took seriously his acknowledged debt to Hegel.

Undoubtedly the dominant trend has been the former, expounded ad nauseam by all the bone-headed orthodox of the second and third Internationals. The best Marxists, however, have always known better than this. Indeed it was Lenin himself who realised how far off the track Marxism had gone when he recorded in his notebooks: "It is impossible completely to understand Marx's *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the whole of Hegel's *Logic*. Consequently half a century later none of the Marxists understood Marx!!" (1)

At that time, as also when Lukacs produced the neo-Hegelian Marxism of *History and Class-Consciousness*, Marx's early works and manuscripts, which confirm this judgment, were not generally available. The merit of Dr. Avineri's work (which shows signs of becoming the standard commentary on the subject) is that it takes fully into account for the first time in English such early manuscripts as the 1843 Critique of Hegel.

Avineri's book has been attacked in *New Left Review* by a reviewer working from the positivistic, scientific, standpoint. (2) Doubtless the over-enthusiasm of some neo-Hegelian interpretations of Marxism need correction - but not by going back to the theoretical poverty characteristic of positivism, albeit in Althusserian dress. Perhaps we may digress on this theme before discussing Avineri's work.

The NLR review starts by describing the difference between the two views as follows. On the one hand Marxism "was understood as a science of society (historical materialism), whose object was the socio-economic formation". On the other, the neo-Hegelians make the basis of Marxism "the concepts of praxis, alienation, proletariat as universal class and historical subject, class-consciousness, etc."

We have no particular quarrel with this account but draw different conclusions. The NLR reviewer charges, without evidence, that the neo-Hegelian interpretation can "relapse into spontaneism." (3) This is simply the converse of the charge launched, with much justice, by Lukacs and Marcuse against the positivist version, of fatalism and quietism. This latter charge can be substantiated *a priori* by pointing out that positivism removes man-as-subject from the arena and shifts responsibility for establishing socialism from the party and class to disembodied 'historical forces'. Gramsci perceptively explains this "fatalist aroma" by the subordinate character of the social strata whose consciousness it is, and allows it may be valuable psychologically as long as there is present at the same time a real activity, but denounces it when made into a reflexive philosophy by intellectuals.

It is thus quite baffling to find the statement that "the work of the Marxist cadre in mobilising the masses and wielding political power to effect social transformation, is compatible

only with 'scientific' Marxism." (4) The exact opposite is true. However often these two things co-exist in practice they are theoretically inconsistent. If Marxism is just a subdivision of natural science there is no place, not only for the cadre but for any self-conscious activity at all, since the revolution will surely dawn at the appointed hour, independent of the cadre, just like an eclipse.

The truth is that only if one makes praxis a fundamental concept and subordinates the scientific analysis of social formations to this, does the activity of the cadre in bringing the proletariat to the consciousness of its tasks, make sense. The completely undialectical character of the scientific interpretation is shown by the way it can give the cadre's activity no connection with 'objective analysis' other than the purely external, instrumental, one. The origin of the cadre is quite unexplained on this view. The dialectical view sees the cadre as internal to the process (Cf. Thesis 3 On Feuerbach)

What the 'scientific' view does essentially is to turn Marxism into just another 'interpretation of the world' - which may then be used, if it cares, for some extrinsic reason, by a cadre to 'change' the world, in spite of the fact that this is incompatible with the assumptions behind a positivist interpretation. This farrago is the easiest thing in the world for any bourgeois critic to knock down. (5)

In any case the 'scientific' interpretation is incompatible with the theses of historical materialism itself, with its stress on the class-based nature of all ideology. In spite of its stress on materialism, at the level of the status of theory, it is fundamentally idealist. Just as bourgeois sociology does not deal with its own role, so the 'scientific' interpretation makes claims to absolute objectivity, not understanding itself as grounded in a specific historical period, class struggle etc.

This 'scientific' view with its contemplative attitude to the world reduces Marxism to the status of any other interpretation - it 'just happens' to be correct whereas others are wrong. But surely the peculiar nature of Marxism is that it is a theory which explains itself, and guarantees its truth relative to bourgeois theory, by expressing in theoretical terms the practice - past and future - of a definite class engaged on a concrete historical struggle. It grounds its claim to be truer than bourgeois theory on the fact that the interests it expresses are not those of a small ruling group but of the immense majority of mankind - hence ideological distortion is minimised. The test of its truth is not the mechanically observed correspondence of the theory and its object but the success of the practical transformation which the theoretical moment both explains and facilitates.

(Turning now to the review proper); Dr. Avineri justifies the production of his book by the need to divorce the debate about Marx "from explicit or implied political objectives." (6) It is all the more interesting then that the defects of his work do not flow from lack of scholarship but precisely from the effect of an implicit political objective - in this case that of saving Marx from Lenin. Parts of this work very definitely have the objective of debunking Leninism by contesting its claim to be Marxist. This involves a "double distortion" - either of Lenin or Marx according to convenience. Mainly it takes the form of reducing Lenin to a 'Jacobin' conspirator and turning Marx into a gradualist by misusing the notion of "aufhebung". Since no evidence whatsoever is given for the distortions of Lenin which creep in mainly in asides we shall not concern ourselves with them but concentrate on saving Marx from Avineri. The political objective of this will be to block the escape route by which many concede Marx's genius while avoiding his revolutionary conclusions.

(1) V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol.38, p.180 (F.L.P.H., Moscow, 1961).

(2) David Fernbach, "Avineri's View of Marx", *New Left Review* 56.

(3) *ibid.* p.63.

(4) *ibid.* p.64.

(5) See H.B. Acton, *The Illusion of the Epoch*, conclusion. Also see Sartre, "Materialism and Revolution" in Novak (ed.), *Existentialism and Marxism*.

(6) S. Avineri, *The Social & Political Thought of Karl Marx*, p.vii.

It needs to be said at the outset that what we have here is by no means a hack job but a sincere scholarly production with many passages that are well worth study. It is perhaps all the more significant that when Dr. Avineri's scholarship does break down it is on a matter of no less political consequence than that of the place of proletarian dictatorship in Marx's thought. We may clear this up first.

In discussing the closing paragraphs of the second chapter of the Communist Manifesto Avineri says that not only does Marx not use the term dictatorship of the proletariat in this context but that "he does not use the term more than two or three times in his life, and then always in what is basically a private communication." (7) The said communications are Critique of the Gotha Programme and the letter to Weydemeyer of 5th March 1852. What Dr. Avineri does not say is that in the latter epistle Marx describes the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as one of his three unique discoveries. It would indeed be extraordinary if he had kept this discovery a personal secret!

To begin with although it is true that the Manifesto does not include the phrase there is a pretty good paraphrase of its content in such expressions as "raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class", "its political supremacy", "the producers organised as the ruling class", "despotic inroads on the rights of property". As Lenin says (in State and Revolution) these formulae are still abstract, but that the content is class dictatorship is clear enough.

Certainly Bakunin in his Statism and Anarchism (1873) read it this way in his polemic against the theory of "revolutionary dictatorship". He quotes the Manifesto and says that the Marxists admit this means dictatorship but console themselves that it will be temporary. (8)

However if Avineri wants chapter and verse for a public statement it is to be found in The Class Struggles in France published in 1850 and to be found in the standard 1962 edition of the Selected Works. Here we find the slogan; "Overthrow of the bourgeoisie! Dictatorship of the working class!" (9) Even more clearly: "This socialism is the declaration of the permanence of the revolution, the class dictatorship of the proletariat as the necessary transition point to the abolition of class distinctions generally...." (10)

Moving now to the book as a whole, the early chapters are the best with good material on Feuerbach's transformational method, the proletariat as universal class, alienation, and consciousness. The distortions of the later chapters and the flaw in the book as a whole are due to difficulties arising from the complexities of the dialectical concept of Aufhebung which pertains to the nature of dialectical transitions. In understanding this untranslatable term one has to do justice both to the notion of abolition - break - leap and also to that of preservation and continuity. Avineri is one of those who give too much weight to the latter side and almost achieves the incredible feat, for a dialectician, of turning into a gradualist (q.v. the discussion of the Manifesto below.)

Avineri takes his cue from Marx's early writings in which the demand for the aufhebung of the State is put forward, and such terms as 'true democracy' and 'universal suffrage' are mentioned in this connection. In his early chapters Avineri argues correctly that by talking of 'true democracy' Marx by no means aligns himself with the usual variety of radical democrat; because this new society was to be based on 'man's communist essence' with the abolition of private property and the state. (11) However the later chapters leave the reader genuinely puzzled as to what Avineri does mean by the aufhebung of the State. The treatment still seems far too Hegelian in that sometimes he does seem to believe that the State could have a real rather than illusory, universality in content. (12) Furthermore although Avineri correctly denies the existence of a sharp opposition between a 'young' Marx and a 'mature one', it should nevertheless be clear to any student that Marx's career represented a development in which the terms of his problematic changed. Thus although Marx did concentrate his attention at first on the difficulties of realising the Hegelian postulate about the universality of the State it by no means follows that the later work produced an answer to that same question. The turn towards political economy marked the

realisation by Marx that a different question was needed. The problem of the State then becomes a secondary one within the transformed problematic. The unreality attending the later chapters of Avineri's work flows from his failure to relocate the problem in this way. Instead he picks out bits and pieces from the mature Marx in an attempt to show how to answer the early formulations of Marx's problematic. The central tenet is that "universal suffrage" constitutes the aufhebung of the State. Here (pages 202-220) the most extraordinary nonsense is produced. He gets into a terrible tangle trying to reconcile this alleged universality with Marx's clear position from 1844 that the transition to socialism is the work of the proletariat imposing its will against that of the old ruling class. He also has trouble differentiating it from the parliamentarism Marx attacks. For example he is reduced to arguing (on p.210) that parliamentarism for Marx was the limited suffrage of property qualifications. He forgets here On the Jewish Question with its trenchant critique of American states in which "the non-owner comes to legislate for the owner of property."

The petit-bourgeois utopianism inherent in his position comes out nowhere more clearly than in the pathetic remonstrance: "The abolition of universal suffrage in a revolutionary situation, according to Marx, means reversion to a partial, illusory universalism with one segment of society declaring itself the voice of all society. For Marx such a pars pro toto, bourgeois or, for that matter, Leninist, would never be able to carry out the universal postulates inherent in the state, and abolish the state." (13)

The authority claimed for this is not given. However if we do want to discover the position of universal suffrage in a revolutionary situation "according to Marx" let us consult The Class Struggles in France: "Universal suffrage had fulfilled its mission. The majority of the people has passed through the school of development, which is all that universal suffrage can serve for in a revolutionary period. It had to be set aside by a revolution or by the reaction."

On the question of the transition to socialism Avineri seizes on the programme outlined in the Manifesto (in spite of the fact that the authors in the 1872 Preface said that some parts of the Manifesto were defective and especially "no special stress" is to be laid on these measures.) He points out that it does not include nationalisation of industry as such. From this fact he draws the extraordinary conclusion that the aim is to "slowly erase private industry out ... not through one-sided political means, but by gradually creating the economic conditions which will make the further existence of private industry unviable." (14) This is a nonsense because even if slow, these measures are quite definitely political (abolition of inheritance, tax reforms etc.) and are quite certainly one-sided in relation to the social situation since this political attack on a class socially still in power will raise contradictions to an extreme - further developments cannot possibly be "peaceful and orderly" as Avineri claims. (15) On the contrary a violent reaction would ensue which would make necessary the "further inroads" Marx mentions (though it must be admitted that the paragraph in the Manifesto introducing the programme is vague and ambiguous on the question of the perspective opened up by such changes.)

Another conclusion Avineri draws from this list of measures involves a quite crucial misinterpretation of Marx's theory of the state. He says: "By applying this policy the proletarian state will be the first state in history to use political power for universal and not partial ends. This programme thus realises the Hegelian postulate about the universality of the state. Dialectically, the state that would really carry out its universal potential must end with communism and consequently with its own abolition, since 'public power will lose its political character'. The ultimate realisation of the Hegelian idea of the state as universal power implies according to Marx, that, once the state is truly universal, it ceases to exist as a differentiated organism." (16)

First of all this interpretation misses out that the measures are admitted by Marx to be "despotic" i.e. within the existing dialectical contradiction they are partial measures of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. Even though the eventual result is the abolition of class distinctions it remains true that the state power is never properly universal and thus does not realise any Hegelian postulate to that effect.

The peculiar dialectical transcendence involved in the proletariat's rule is that while wielding state power in their own interests they lay down conditions which lead to the creation of a classless society, i.e. the transition is not one in which the proletariat "becomes the absolute side of society,

(7) ibid. p.204.

(8) G.P. Maximoff (ed.), The Political Philosophy of Bakunin, Part 3 Ch.4.

(9) Karl Marx, Selected Works, p.162 (F.L.P.H., Moscow 1962)

(10) ibid. p.223. Dr. Avineri has told me that he does not regard this as a "pragmatic" occurrence of the term. See also Marx "Political Indifferentism" quoted in Lenin, The State and Revolution, p.96.

(11) Avineri, op.cit., p.34.

(12) ibid., pp.206-9.

(13) ibid., p.212.

(14) ibid., p.206.

(15) ibid., p.206. See also Marx to Sorge, June 20th, 1881, (Selected Correspondence, p.342)

26 (16) ibid., pp.206-7.

for it is victorious only by abolishing itself and its opposite. Then both the proletariat and the opposite which conditions it, private property, disappear." (17).

Marx himself has already replied to Avineri's interpretation in advance in the very paragraph of the Manifesto following the list of measures so it could hardly be missed.

"When, in the course of social evolution, class distinctions have disappeared, and when all the work of production has been concentrated into the hands of the associated producers, public authority will lose its political character. Strictly speaking, political power is the organised use of force by one class in order to keep another class in subjection. When the proletariat, in the course of its fight against the bourgeoisie, necessarily consolidates itself into a class, by means of a revolution makes itself the ruling class, and as such forcibly sweeps away the old system of production - it therewith sweeps away the system upon which class conflicts depend, makes an end of classes, and thus abolishes its own rule as a class."

It is made absolutely clear in this passage that the transitional regime is one in which one class uses force to subjugate another. This must put paid to any interpretation which conceives of it as realising the Hegelian postulate about the universality of the State. A State which was truly universal in form and content would not need force to hold down one section of its citizens. That this must be so no doubt accounts for the lame attempts Avineri makes to argue that force by the revolution is undesirable and indeed unnecessary, (e.g. p.218) This passage also makes clear that public authority does not lose its political character until communism has been achieved - until then we have rule by one class over another while it "forcibly sweeps away the old system of production." This is quite incompatible with Avineri's claim that the state carrying out its universal potential must end with communism.

Avineri's crucial mistake is to stay within the Hegelian problematic defined in terms of the "state as universal power". Briefly, Hegel held that the family represented a one-sided universality in which the individual did not distinguish himself as such; civil society (i.e. the generalisation of private property) represented a one-sided particularity; the synthesis in the modern state was supposed to reconcile individual aspirations within a universal order regulated by rational laws and morality. Avineri misinterprets Marx's early critique of Hegel in so far as he seems to think that all Marx added was the understanding that "once the state is truly universal it ceases to exist as a differentiated organism." He takes this to be a practical programme - hence all the material he produces on suffrage, force and other problems of transition interpreted from this standpoint.

In fact Marx's critique was much more negative and resulted in a switch to a new problematic in which the crucial questions were not posed in terms of the state at all. Marx's true position was that the state could not be made truly universal just because it necessarily existed as an organism differentiated from, and standing over against, civil society.

In order to prove this it is in order to ask what conditions would have to be realised in order to overcome the illusory nature of the universality possessed by the state and conclude that their realisation would involve its disappearance altogether but it is a big mistake to read this immanent critique as a practical programme and conclude that communism is to be realised through the aufhebung of the state.

The switch by Marx to a new perspective occurs as early as the 1843 Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Here Marx retains the Hegelian category of 'universality' but introduces the question of class in order to give the term a new context. Instead of trying to produce a political form which would incarnate an abstract 'universality' Marx points to the concrete material (as opposed to political-spiritual) existence of the classes with their particular possessions and interests, and identifies the proletariat as the class to whom no particular wrong but "wrong in general" is done. Being at the sharp end of all the contradictions in society it is the element of total negativity in the situation. It has no particular wrong to redress but can only liberate itself by a universal restructuring of society which will remove all class limitations and inequalities. It is not the "aufhebung" of the state through its becoming concretely universal that Marx demands, rather he turns to the question of how to accomplish the "aufhebung" of the proletariat, and concludes that out of the practical necessities of its peculiar position as a class "in, but not of, civil society" it will accomplish its own transcendence by abolishing itself as a class through a total restructuring of the conditions determining it as such. (However it is equally clear that the first phase of this dialectical development is one in which it is in irreconcilable struggle with the existing ruling class.)

The problem of the state comes out in the wash. If the classes go then the institutions of class rule go too - whether

(17) Marx & Engels, The Holy Family, Ch.4.

it be the old bureaucratic police machine or the organisation of the armed majority for "forcibly" sweeping away the old system. To reduce the argument to a formula - Avineri thinks the state disappears when it becomes universal: Marx argues it disappears when society has become universal i.e. classless, but while it exists it is always "the organised use of force by one class in order to keep another class in subjection".

The argument is not merely a semantic one because it leads to differing attitudes to transitional problems such as suffrage, force etc.,

It is however, very confusing besides all the talk about "making the state a truly universal organ", to find that Avineri keeps up a running campaign against "politics" - starting from Marx's critique of the French Revolution, in his early work, as "merely political". His point here seems to be that it is no use declaring universal brotherhood from above (i.e. politically) - one must wait until conditions are ripe through the internal development of the economy etc. This would be O.K. except that Avineri often seems to fall into the trap of hoping for a 'merely social' revolution without any horrid political action, especially the use of force. ("One can summarise Marx's position by saying that for Marx physical power will either fail or prove to be superfluous. By itself physical power achieves nothing." (18))

One cannot do better here than quote Marx at the end of The Poverty of Philosophy:

"Do not say that social movement excludes political movement. There is never a political movement which is not at the same time social. It is only in an order of things in which there are no more classes and class antagonisms that social evolutions will cease to be political revolutions. Till then, on the eve of every general reshuffling of society, the last word of social science will always be: 'Le combat ou la mort; la lutte sanguinaire ou le néant. C'est ainsi que la question est invinciblement posée'
Georges Sand." (19)

Another place where Avineri charges Leninists with belief in the omnipotence of politics is on the vexed question of the uniqueness of proletarian revolution in relation to socio-economic conditions. He draws on Lange's version of it. (20) The situation of the proletariat seems to be unique because it has no existing socio-economic base to predicate a struggle for power on (unlike the bourgeoisie who possessed wealth and culture). Thus they have to construct socialist economic relations after taking power, whereas the bourgeoisie was able to develop capitalist relations of production a good way within the old system. The bourgeois revolution really consisted in one oppressing class displacing another in the political-legal sphere and consecrating as dominant a system of productive relations which was already displacing the old.

Avineri does not believe the socialist revolution in fact differs from previous ones in this respect and calls in Marx's remarks about the emergence of joint-stock companies and co-ops to prove that political power "does not create the new structures realised".

Once again Avineri's gradualist streak has got the better of him - a careful reading of the texts shows that a difference still remains because although the joint-stock companies show that the situation is ripe for socialist ownership proper they are themselves still firmly within the category of the private property system and cannot grow over into the new one given a favourable political climate - they have to be revolutionised - while Marx saw the co-ops as exemplars rather than a base for growing over into the new system.

Marx expresses this dialectically by saying that the stock company "is the abolition (Aufhebung) of the capitalist mode of production within the capitalist mode of production itself, and hence a self-dissolving contradiction ..." (21)

It is clear that here we have a contradiction within the system of production and this does nothing to alleviate the situation of the proletariat in the face of people who no longer perform any essential function whatsoever but are "parasites in the shape of promoters, speculators and simply nominal directors; a whole system of swindling and cheating by means of corporation promotion, stock insurance, and stock speculation." (22) The solution to this absurd contradiction still requires the major transition to socialism via expropriation, the condition of which is proletarian state power.

(18) Avineri, op.cit., p.218.

(19) The Poverty of Philosophy, p.197.

(20) Avineri, op.cit., p.181.

(21) Karl Marx, Capital Vol. III, p.427-9 and ibid. p.178.

(22) ibid.

Marx compare stock companies to co-ops as follows: "The capitalist stock companies, as much as the co-operative factories should be considered as transitional forms from the capitalist mode of production to the associated one, with the only distinction that the antagonism is resolved negatively in the one and positively in the other." (23) So the co-ops appear as more of a breakthrough because here the contradiction is resolved "positively" and the parasites are got rid of. Indeed in Marx's day there were many who saw in the spread of co-operative production the mode of transition to socialism. Marx however was always more cautious and saw them mainly as proof that capitalists were not necessary rather than basing on them a main perspective of socialist strategy. Even in the up-beat Inaugural Address he accurately diagnosed their fate: "...Co-operative labour if kept within the narrow circle of the efforts of private workmen, will never be able to arrest the growth in geometrical progression of monopoly, to free the masses, nor even perceptibly to lighten the burden of their miseries ... To save the industrious masses, co-operative labours ought to be developed to national dimensions, and consequently, to be fostered by national means."

Of course no such fostering took place and lack of capital extinguished all efforts, except the retail side. In retrospect it can be seen that co-operative factories could only exist in the early days of capitalism before the huge growth of monopoly capital. Monopoly capital has only recently spread into retail organisation and it is obvious that no new co-op retail organisation could start now - while the existing organisation is not exactly the most noticeable force for socialism. Even as exemplars co-operatives suffer from the fact that under a capitalist regime, without the support of planned social production, they can do little to "lighten the burden."

It is clear then that although co-operatives anticipate a new social regime Marx saw the actual process of transition as based upon the revolution within the capitalist sector. Avineri is perfectly correct to draw attention to these passages which stress the element of continuity involved in the taking over of a material base, the negations of capitalism within capitalism, etc., but it is still true that significant differences remain between the proletariats' situation and that of previous classes and these do put a high premium upon its political understanding and will - that this be 'Leninism' notwithstanding.

Dr. Avineri finally discloses his hand in the Epilogue in which he blames Marx for "endowing the present generation with eschatological significance" and overlooking the possibility of "the combination of his philosophical and historical theory with the Jacobin tradition of merely subjectivist revolutionary action; Leninism embodied such a combination". (24) However these points are made too briefly and vapourously to be worth serious analysis so I have preferred to pick up some of the more detailed points above. In sum we have a book which at first sight looks promising - at its strongest the best exegesis of many Marxian themes in English - but finally turns out to have irritatingly perverse aspects.

(23) Marx, *Capital*, p.431.

(24) Avineri, *op.cit.*, p.258.

NATURALISM IS NOT ENOUGH

Bruce Young

A review of *THE OBJECT OF MORALITY* by G.J. Warnock
(Methuen Paperback 1971, £0.90).

Under the influence of a positivism which (in all its forms) locates the positive outside philosophy, moral philosophers have often believed that in the mere analysis of moral discourse lay their only legitimate occupation. For otherwise, it was said, moral philosophy would itself moralize and hence cease to be philosophy.

The reasons which have of late led many Anglo-Saxon philosophers to reject various proposed meta-ethical analyses, bring into question the very concept of what moral philosophy's about which underlies them. Thus to an analysis of "X is good" as "I like X, like it too" it's been objected that it makes things look as if just anything could sensibly be called "good" and for any "reason" (or for none) - whereas it's clear that there are limits to the possibilities for sensible moral or evaluative judgement here. The given analysis seemed plausible only when one took the utterance in isolation. In doing so, one forgot that we "use" language, language does not "use" us. But if accordingly an adequate account would concern what kinds of thing might sensibly be said in what kinds of situation, then the line between philosophy and positive moralizing gets blurred.

If this line of reasoning is valid it would seem to be valid against the whole idea of moral philosophy as meta-ethical analysis of moral discourse. One can of course retain a form of words, but if moral philosophy continues to be the "analysis of moral concepts" this is now also the "analysis" of human situations. It seems to follow that there results a revival of ethics in something like the traditional sense.

If the idea of analysis does arise in the outlined way from one positivistically-influenced concept of philosophy, perhaps also whoever remains influenced by positivist and empiricist trends will be thereby hampered in his efforts to revive ethics. In other words, mere rejection of one particular form of positivistically-influenced philosophy, such as "Oxford philosophy" arguably is, may not be enough. I think that GJ Warnock's latest book illustrates this point.

Warnock would I think at least partly agree with the above-sketched critique of meta-ethics. For instance he argues clearly and persuasively that moral philosophy should return from the dead-end of formal analysis of moral discourse to a treatment of its content: "what the talk is about - specifically, the sorts of grounds that are stated or implied for the things that are said, the sorts of considerations that are taken to be relevant, and why" (pp. 137-8). This would seem to involve something like a "justification" of morality. There are of course some contemporary philosophers who'd immediately say that any such attempt is both philosophically and morally mistaken. For them, to be moral and to reflect on why one is moral would seem to be mutually exclusive possibilities. But perhaps, in spite of their objections, a man who wants to rise out of the merely conventional moral life in order through philosophical reflection to grasp the sense of morality itself which in conventional life he'd been forgetting, may be all the more moral for that. Anyway, it's not the raising of the question by Warnock that I want to challenge, but only the answer he gives to it. To arrive at this answer, Warnock examines not just human situations, but "the human situations" as such. Through a treatment of human nature, the intelligibility of morality is to be revealed. But it's the empiricist conditioning of his concept of human nature, which seems to me to vitiate his whole project.

At any rate Warnock isn't very polite about human beings. They have "natural propensities" to "malificence, non-benificence, unfairness, and deception" emanating from their "limited sympathies" (p.85). As for morality, it gets its justification from the part played by moral principles and moral virtues in delivering us from the disasters which would result from the free expression of these "natural propensities".

But what's supposed to be the cognitive value of such assertions? He speaks, not of human *potentials* for selfishness, etc., (which to me at least seems more plausible) but definitely of "natural propensities". "Natural" to whom? This "state of nature" way of putting things suggests some quasi-historical hypothesis, but in reality, we don't have to look up any trees for Warnock's "natural man", but rather in the streets and colleges of Oxford. In this book there's described but perhaps not so much understood the character of the modern bourgeois, toward which men tend in our society. The truth of this account, lies in the description. But understanding is lacking, for once described, these very characteristics are elevated to the level of the "human condition", which means that it's then safe to have a bad conscience about them.

Thus Warnock's grounding of morality on human nature is curiously lop-sided. For in it morality is set off *against* "human nature" and there's no question of relating it to the latter's immanent development. Warnock therefore, in the last chapter of his book brings to light yet another "natural" characteristic, viz. "non-indifference" and bases morality on that. He's ready to accept the consequence that morality is in the end not based on rationality. Thus the need for morality, its point, is based on our factual viciousness; our ability to be moral, on our factual "non-indifference".

But if morality is truly to be grasped as arising intelligibly out of the human situation, one requires I think a different and more adequate concept of human nature. When the latter is grasped, not in a frozen factuality, but in a teleological development wherein the natural is humanized and the human naturalized, it becomes possible to grasp also morality as a phase in the realization of a properly human nature. Such a concept was already prefigured by Hegel, whom Warnock seems to regard as a "relativist" (v.pp.4-6). Actually it's precisely Hegel who most determinedly tries to conquer the relative, not indeed by ignoring it but rather by so to speak devouring it. It's his concept of man as "Spirit", i.e. a restless activity which overcomes its own partiality in order to constitute and concretely universalize itself, which permits him through the dialectic of the life-and-death struggle and the master-slave relationship, to portray an overcoming from within of unreason by reason, and thus also an intelligible genesis of morality as *freedom made nature*. Such a teleological development doubtless doesn't proceed without conflict, but conflict isn't an endless battle against some daemonic original "nature" which would be doomed to failure were it not possible in philosophical reflection to invent an adventitious hypothesis to explain the possibility of success.

PHILIPPA FOOT'S DEFINITION OF MORALITY

Jonathan Ree

Philippa Foot has been continuing her fight for naturalism in ethics in a series of classes in Oxford this winter term. Her subject was 'the "ought" of morality', and her aim was to refute Kantianism. Kantian moral theory, she said, attributes to moral obligations a 'special binding force' in virtue of which they automatically or unconditionally give men reasons for action. Her thesis was that the idea that moral obligation has this 'special binding force' is illusory in the same way that the idea of private, incommunicable mental objects is illusory. Kant thought morality rested on a 'categorical imperative'. But the only sensible definition of categorical imperatives, according to Mrs. Foot, equates them with obligations which a person has regardless of his interests or desires (e.g. not to cause suffering); hypothetical imperatives, on the other hand, say what a person ought to do on the purely contingent assumption that he has certain ends (e.g. to catch the 8.15 if you don't want to be late). But this definition of categorical imperatives makes them useless to the Kantian: it is so wide that it applies to obligations arising from things like etiquette or club rules, as well as to moral obligations.

Philippa Foot concluded that 'the "ought" of morality' doesn't have a 'special binding force' any more than 'the "ought" of etiquette' does. One thing she meant by this was that just as a society or an individual can do without etiquette, so they could do without morality. If we join the army of morality, we do so 'not as conscripts but as volunteers'. Our resistance to admitting this originates, she said, in the enormous social pressure which sanctions moral norms. Referring to Wittgenstein, Mrs. Foot suggested that modern moral philosophy goes wrong when it tries to 'build up morality on the basis of individuals': social norms are part of the meaning of 'the moral "ought"'. Her point might be put, I think, by saying that even if you can ascribe some beliefs to isolated individuals in a pre-social state of nature, you cannot ascribe moral ones. Her overall conclusion was that it is only social conditioning which makes us think that moral obligations have a special binding force.

Mrs. Foot's attack on Kant's doctrine of the categorical imperative seems to me just; but I think her positive account of morality is still too Kantian. She should not have retained the Kantian assumption that there is such a thing as a 'moral point of view' or an '"ought" of morality'. Having dislodged moral obligation from its high pedestal in the philosophical museum, she picked it up again and put it in a frame on the wall.

Mrs. Foot's assumption that there is such a thing as a 'moral point of view' is more utilitarian than Kantian. However she follows the utilitarians in defining morality by its content: it is, for her, an institution whose object is to promote social welfare by encouraging pro-social behaviour. So she might agree with Bentham (from whom, I think, she takes the phrase 'binding force') who distinguished four types of sanctions which rules of conduct may have: physical, political, religious, and 'moral or popular' (*Fragment on Government* III 2), or with John Stuart Mill, who divided the 'Art of Life' into prudence, morality, and aesthetics (*System of Logic* VI xii 6). It is because she was using some such utilitarian definition of morality that Mrs. Foot was able to claim that morality is something which a society or an individual might do without.

But I think it would be better, and more in accordance with the naturalism she wants to defend, to define morality less narrowly, so that it includes all 'rules of conduct' or the entire 'Art of Life'. Morality, on the definition I advocate, would be the whole set of 'internalised' abstract principles which govern how a person treats others. On this definition, a person's treatment of others would express his morality just as his way of using words expresses his grammar. And with morality defined like this, it would of course make no sense to say that an individual or a society had no morality.

What is the advantage of the wider definition of morality which I am advocating?

Mrs. Foot regards herself as a naturalist; and naturalists, I suppose, are people who oppose scepticism about morality and at the same time maintain that it does not rest on anything supernatural or transcendental. Thus naturalism seems to be one form of objectivism. But in her recent classes, Mrs. Foot declared that when it came to "super-oughts" i.e. "oughts" other than 'the "ought" of morality', or 'of etiquette' or of any other particular institution, she was 'a subjectivist, in the good old fashioned sense'.

The cause of this confusing situation is that when Mrs. Foot rejected the Kantian theory that moral obligations are based on a categorical imperative, she concluded that moral

facts only give reasons for action to people who have certain interests or desires. And, given her narrow, utilitarian definition of morality, this led her to think that people choose whether or not to bother with moral considerations, on the basis of interests or desires which do not themselves express a morality. And it is I suspect her emphasis on the importance of such interests or desires which makes her call herself a 'subjectivist'.

Her subjectivism is well illustrated by one of her examples. She said there could be a society which always put considerations of morality above considerations of etiquette. I suppose an example of this would be thinking it best not to warn someone of imminent but avoidable death if you could not think of the correct form of address. But this example is not as simple as it seems; for surely if a society attached such importance to using the correct form of address, that would mean that for them this was not really a matter of etiquette. We would not have understood the society in question unless we could say what strikes its members as so important about forms of address; but to do this would be to describe their morality.

On Mrs. Foot's definition of morality, however, it is an open question whether this society has a morality at all. And I think the reason for rejecting this definition is now clear. The interests and desires of a society which Mrs. Foot would regard as valuing etiquette and not morality could not be expressed without using what everybody would call moral vocabulary - for example by saying that it is wrong ever to risk using an incorrect form of address. Mrs. Foot's narrow definition of morality created the illusion that people can choose, for example whether to warn somebody of imminent danger, without thereby expressing some moral beliefs.

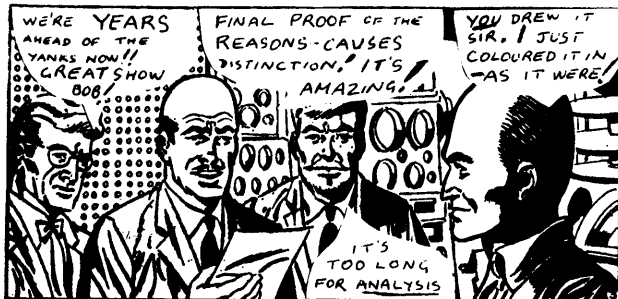
My argument against Mrs. Foot's definition of morality is based on something which she herself is arguing for - the importance of seeing morality from a social point of view. In fact it is based on a technique of hers, which is to consider the problem of translating the moral vocabulary of different societies. Therefore I am grateful to her for what she has said. But it seems to me that the full implementation of her programme will involve scrapping her definition of morality.

"What the philosophers say about Reality is often as disappointing as a sign you see in a shop window, which reads: Pressing Done Here. If you brought your clothes to be pressed, you would be fooled; for the sign is only for sale."

(Kierkegaard)

"You ask me which of the philosopher's traits are really idiosyncracies? For example, their lack of historical sense, their hatred of the very idea of becoming, their Egypticism. They think that they show their respect for a subject when they de-historicize it, *sub species aeterni* -- when they turn it into a mummy. All that philosophers have handled for thousands of years have been concept-mummies; nothing real has escaped their grasp alive."

(Nietzsche)



"This kind of degenerate learning did chiefly reign amongst the schoolmen: who having sharp and strong wits, and abundance of leisure, and small variety of reading, but their wits being shut up in the cells of a few authors (chiefly Aristotle their dictator) as their persons were shut up in the cells of monasteries and colleges, and knowing little history, either of nature or time, did out of no great quantity of matter and infinite agitation of wit spin out unto us those laborious webs of learning which are extant in their books. For the wit and mind of man, if it work upon matter, which is the contemplation of the creatures of God, worketh according to the stuff and is limited thereby; but if it work upon itself, as the spider worketh his web, then it is endless, and brings forth indeed cobwebs of learning, admirable for the fineness of thread and work, but of no substance or profit."

(Bacon)

REPORTS

KENT

Report of Discussion Weekend at University of Kent,

25-27 June 1971.

Plans for the formation of the Radical Philosophy Group originated at a small and informal discussion weekend which was held in June last year. We are here reprinting a report on that meeting which was circulated afterwards. It should be emphasised that this summary presents the discussions in a very abbreviated form; thus the views which were expressed and the conclusions which were formed are here abstracted from much of their supporting arguments. Nevertheless we think that the report may be of interest as indicating the kinds of issue that were discussed.

Institutional Determinants

Friday evening's discussion centred on a paper by Tony Skillen in which he examined the non-theoretical determinants of modern English (and especially Oxford) philosophy. His thesis was that its poverty was not a function of a false theory (Empiricism, for example). Rather, there was no powerful or rigorous theoretical tradition at all in England. Hence philosophical activity was dominated by its institutional and social setting. He referred to an article by R.M. Hare ("A School for Philosophers" *Ratio* V 3), and argued that Hare unwittingly reveals the way in which the work of the "professional philosopher" and his whole idea of philosophy is shaped by his activity as a preparer of future bureaucrats for the Examination Schools. Although these factors obviously operate in other subjects, they affect philosophy to a special degree, since it has become almost entirely an academic, teaching discipline for specialists. Thus he sought to explain not only the conformist content of English philosophy but also its piecemeal parcelled-up character, its formalistic stress on "moves" and "techniques" of linguistic analysis, and its isolation from reality and living thought - forcing it to feed on itself.

Tony quoted an article by Mark Pattison in *Mind*, 1876, showing how, from the very beginning of the modern academic period, philosophy at Oxford was constricted by the demand that teachers spend most of their time teaching for examinations.

In the discussion Tony's suggestion that any opposition movement in philosophy would have to combat these distorting influences was generally accepted. But there was disagreement about the importance of institutional forces, especially examinations. It emerged that it was important to distinguish the historical importance of examinations in shaping academic philosophy's development in England from their present importance in maintaining the *status quo* in philosophy.

Contemporary British Philosophy as Theory

Saturday's discussion was mainly an attempt to situate contemporary British philosophy theoretically. The discussion was initiated by a paper on epistemology which Sean Sayers read, and by some further comments from Richard Norman. The main points to emerge were:-

1. Sean argued that contemporary epistemology is still basically empiricist. He examined the relationship between it and classical empiricism, using the latter term to mean not just the idea that knowledge is based on experience, but also a particular interpretation of 'experience' within a particular tradition. He traced the progressive impoverishment of the concept of experience, from Bacon to the colour-patches of sense-datum theorists. Linguistic epistemology is a new phase of empiricism. Though less explicitly so, it remains empiricist,

first, insofar as its 'problems' are empiricist problems (knowledge of the external world, causality, other minds, personal identity, etc.), and secondly, insofar as it retains the same ideological orientation as classical empiricism. Epistemology is by its very nature prescriptive; it is for some claims to knowledge and against others. This aspect of contemporary epistemology has become mystified, but it remains covertly prescriptive; in practice it is for the natural sciences, against psychoanalysis and Marxism on the grounds that they are 'unverifiable' or 'unfalsifiable'. But whereas the classical empiricists were in close touch with the sciences and were in reaction against academicism and scholasticism, contemporary philosophy has become the "New Scholasticism". It has cut itself off from concrete bodies of knowledge and thereby condemned itself to sterility, declaring itself concerned solely with 'language' or 'concepts'; this is the rationale of academicism.

2. Richard argued that it was misleading to attack contemporary philosophy for being 'linguistic'. The distinction between 'questions about language' and 'questions about the world' is itself a false dichotomy, and therefore one cannot effectively characterise contemporary philosophy by saying that it is concerned with language. Moreover, philosophical arguments may legitimately appeal to 'what we say'; and in particular cases the philosophical nature of a question may often be brought out by saying that it is 'conceptual' or 'second-order'. What is really characteristic of contemporary philosophy, and leads to charges of 'quibbling about words', is its piecemeal nature. This is itself intrinsically connected with the empiricist view of knowledge and experience. Richard thus agreed with Sean that the important thing to concentrate on is the empiricist basis of contemporary philosophy, and he suggested that possible lines of approach might be:

a) to challenge the dichotomy of 'Epistemology' and 'Ethics' as the two separate bases of university philosophy courses; the division between the two perpetuates and is perpetuated by the fact/value dichotomy and the empiricist view of experience;

b) to attack the prevailing conception of the *history* of philosophy; the Kant revival should be seen as a way into Hegel and Marx - but these, as also the philosophers in the phenomenological tradition, should not just be studied as alternative interests but should be used to combat the assumptions of empiricist philosophy;

c) to develop positively the anti-empiricist elements in Wittgenstein's later philosophy.

3. There was some disagreement as to how far Wittgenstein could be used in this way. What was seen to be important was his recognition of the intrinsic connections between understanding and a) agency, b) social relations; on both points, there are affinities with Hegel and Marx. But there was disagreement as to whether Wittgenstein had really said anything very positive or useful about the nature of these connections.

4. Another point of disagreement which emerged in discussion was the nature of the relation between philosophy and particular sciences or bodies of knowledge. There was a general acceptance of Sean's point that the scholasticism of contemporary philosophy consists in its cutting itself off from concrete areas of knowledge, and an agreement on the need to reject the dualistic view that "science investigates reality, philosophy investigates language/concepts". But some of us were inclined to accept the first-order/second-order distinction, and to say that philosophy does not attempt to answer the same questions as are confronted within the specific disciplines; others argued that it was not a matter of first order as against second order, but one of degree of generality and depth of