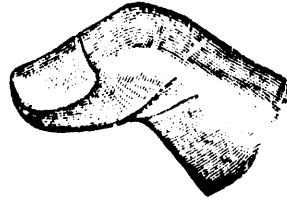


# EDITORIAL



Charles II once invited the members of the Royal Society to explain to him why a dead fish weighs more than the same fish alive; a number of subtle explanations were offered to him. He then pointed it out that it does not.

Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*

Who ate the fish?

A heckler's response to Nancy Astor's suggestion, in an address to the unemployed, that they could obtain sufficient nourishment by boiling a fish's head.

What, as *Radical Philosophy* approaches the twentieth anniversary of its foundation, does 'radical philosophy' connote today? Alternatively put, what does it mean in 1991 to be a *radical* philosopher or a radical *in* philosophy? At the turn of the sixties the answers were deceptively straightforward. To reprise the fashionable Maoist terminology of the period, in the Anglophone context the enemy was readily identifiable as orthodox analytical philosophy and its avatars: that extension of the complacencies of the Senior Common Room to the seminar-room magisterially dismissed as 'parish-pump positivism' by Perry Anderson, in an issue of *New Left Review* (no. 50, 1968) whose banner enjoined its readership to 'Combat Bourgeois Ideas'. Our friends, on the other hand, source of the weapons with which the ideological class struggle was to be waged, resided in the renascent traditions of Classical and Western Marxism, then enjoying a new lease of life courtesy of the triple crisis that marked the conjuncture of 1968: a crisis of imperialism in the Third World (the Vietnamese Tet), of Stalinism in the Second (the Prague Spring), of capitalism in the First (the Parisian May). In short, Anglophone radical philosophy was invariably socialist in affiliation and *marxisant* in inspiration, buoyed by the return of the global revolutionary repressed in punctual refutation of Marcuse's bleak prognosis on *One-Dimensional Man* (1964).

Twenty years on, philosophical radicalism is more likely to deck itself in other colours. The Western Marxist tradition, to look no further, is under attack for incorrigible universalism, foundationalism, essentialism, monism, etc. – so many indices of its putative consonance, at root, with Western Metaphysics; while, by way of a revenge of the idiom and method excoriated by the class of '68, the most prominent current still professing some allegiance to Marxism denominates itself 'Analytical'. Whether proponents of a postmodernism for which language is permanently on vacation, a pragmatism for which continuation of 'the conversation of the West' is the prime desideratum, or a communitarianism that dances attendance upon the unobliging St. Benedict *de nos jours*, the majority of accredited philosophical radicals are hostile to Marxism and sceptical, at the very least, of the rationality, feasibility and desirability of the socialist project. The ties that bound avant-garde philosophy and socialist politics have been severed.

That this cannot be attributed solely to the vagaries of intellectual fashion is (or should be) obvious. For if the 'surprise' of 1968 apparently re-synchronised dialectical theory and the historical dialectic, its bitter fruits threaten to reconsign Marxist philosophy to the intellectual oblivion from which it had been temporarily (and fortuitously?) rescued. Those fruits are not far to seek: the termination of de-Stalinization in the East with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia; the discrediting of elected alternatives to Stalinism via the Oriental Zhdanovism of the Cultural Revolution, the dementia of Democratic Kampuchea, or the regression of the Cuban regime; above all, the unanticipated resilience of capitalism, capable, eventually not only of renewing itself in its heartlands, but of vanquishing the antagonist whose performance in post-war history rendered socialism something other than a utopia.

The evident failure of socialism, West and East, North and South, in the twentieth century; the consequent pervasive perception of its utopianism or dystopianism on the eve of the twenty-first, these must surely pose problems for a practice of philosophy which would not confine itself to academic iconoclasm, which has hitherto defined its radicalism in broadly socialist terms, and sought in some sense to contribute – often by deflation of the legislative pretensions of First Philosophy – to emancipatory politics. Evasion – be it in the form of silence or reassurance that world history is back on the tracks after a secular detour – is no more compelling by way of response than an insouciance which dusts itself off and embraces the latest philosophical vogue. Neither purblind fundamentalism, nor mere radicalism, but ...?

Any half-serious answer to that question must await the results of sustained debate of the problems now confronting radical philosophy; crucial to its prospects is the identification and formulation of the exigent problems. Meanwhile, in their different ways, each of the articles published in the present issue of *Radical Philosophy* addresses, or alludes to, one or more of these.

Amidst the lethal escalation of national, ethnic, religious, etc. tensions and hatreds throughout Europe, contemporary utopias are far more liable to be particularist, stamped with the mark of exclusion, than inclusivist, as imagined by Marxism in its prolongation of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism. In the text of a lecture on 'Internationality', Jonathan Rée ponders recent influential contributions to the theory of nationalism by Ernest Gellner, Tom Nairn, Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm (the last three of whom, significantly, were Marxists). Rée challenges the consensus over nationhood – namely, that nations are 'imagined political communities' expressive of 'popular subjective will'. That they are modern artifacts, he does not dispute. For Rée, however, particular notions 'arise only within a field of general internationality', whose logic precedes nation-formation. A history of that logic would reveal the nation-form to be 'a kind of false consciousness', generating all too material effects (militarism, etc.). Bracing as this perspective is, it raises, at a minimum, three quandaries: Whence the logic of internationality? What order of logic does it pertain to? And is 'progressive' nationalism inconceivable?

Lynda Nead too is concerned with utopia – in this case, utopias of the female body, among which she delineates two basic types. The first, considered to be the cultural dominant in Western aesthetics, represents it as replete and bounded in itself; its exemplum is the nude, stripped of nature (sheer corporeality) and valorized as culture (pure form). The second – prevalent in recent feminist writing and art – inverts this type, proffering ‘the body in process, liberated from boundaries and modern aesthetics’ as embodying *la promesse de bonheur* in a concrete utopia. But, Nead asks in her closing remarks, what balance is to be struck between utopian speculation and explanatory critique in feminist cultural politics? Moreover, is inversion of the inherited value-system adequate, insofar as it preserves its structure even as it reverses the evaluative signs?

In the rush to translate and assimilate non-native traditions of Marxism in the late ‘sixties and ‘seventies, the flourishing Japanese school of political economy associated with Kozo Uno and his followers was largely neglected. Robert Albritton, whose ‘Levels of Analysis in Marxian Political Economy’ we publish here, is the author of a full-length study on the subject. As Albritton’s informative article indicates, if Uno et al have sought to reconstruct and develop the ‘logic of *Capital*’ – to ‘move “levels of analysis” from the wings to the centre stage’ – the motivation has not been primarily marxological. Rather, as with the innovations of the much better-known French Regulation School, the ambition is to render Marxist political economy better able to fulfil an indispensable task: understanding contemporary capitalism. Whether the Unoist differentiation between three levels of analysis and their corresponding logics – the dialectical logic of capital, the structural logic of ‘stage theory’, and the processual logic of historical analysis – fits the explanatory bill is, of course, another question.

Jürgen Habermas is unquestionably the main surviving representative of the Western Marxist tradition, distinguished both by a prolific theoretical output and a readiness to descend from the conceptual heights to address the political issues of the day. One inconvenience of this is that he is a difficult thinker to keep up with. In a review article focusing on Habermas’s engagement with his principal opponents in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Nick Smith lucidly expounds and scrutinizes the intersubjective or communicative paradigm of rationality countered by Habermas to subject-centred reason and the philosophy of consciousness. Given the unfashionable Habermasian subscription to a duly qualified ‘project of modernity’ – and hence a recast universalism – Smith’s discussion is a more than usually timely mediation.

In RP 59 Kai Nielsen, reviewing Rodney Peffer’s *Marxism, Morality and Social Justice*, criticized the project of a Marxian

moral theory which has received such stimulus from the analytical turn in contemporary Marxism. According to Nielsen, a set of ‘moral truisms’ supplies sufficient account of the normative commitments secreted by Marxist social science, whereas any attempt to furnish philosophical ‘foundations’ for it, in the shape of a theory of social justice, will be counter-productive because controversial. In a trenchant counter-critique, Peffer disclaims any ‘moralism’, yet insists that, in view of the depredations of formerly existing socialism, Marxism requires such a theory. Nielsen’s ‘truisms’, it is argued, themselves ineluctably turn contentious once it comes to explicating their content. Peffer’s own theory of justice is, by his own admissions, a ‘modified version of Rawls’s’. This prompts the question of whether any distinction between socialism and capitalism survives in it. More generally, it raises a query as to whether such convergence with the dominant liberal tradition is a necessary, or contingent, feature of endeavours to conjugate Marxist theory and analytical political philosophy in the provision of the ‘missing’ moral theory.

Finally, we are pleased to be publishing Michael Kelly’s obituary of the French Marxist philosopher, Henri Lefebvre, whose death last year terminated an intellectual and political career spanning sixty years or more. At a time when this unknown Western Marxist – eclipsed in his time by the incandescence of a Sartre, a Goldmann, or an Althusser – seems set to achieve posthumous recognition as a philosopher of modernity, it is well to remember that such concerns were integral to his distinctive brand of Marxism and his long-standing political affiliation to the French Communist Party, from which he was expelled for infractions of discipline in 1958. Lefebvre’s work, from his induction of the Young Marx into France (*Dialectical Materialism*, 1935) to his defence of Marx, against the Parisian current, on the centenary of his death (*Must We Abandon Marx?*, 1983), always aspired to advance the tradition to which he continued, critically, to adhere. Lefebvre neither repudiated an open Marxism, nor did he make the transition – familiar from the biography of so many of his contemporaries and juniors – from *ex-communism* to *anti-communism*. He who had more reason than many to recant the ‘God that failed’ declined to imitate the likes of Garaudy, erstwhile Stalinist heresy-hunter, in repenting godless communism and devoting his earthly powers *ad majorem Dei gloriam*. Thus it was only to be expected that some of those lately seeking to save the French Communist tradition from political suicide should have turned for aid, confident that he would respond to their call, to a radical philosopher, now in his eighties, who had never been other than engaged: Henri Lefebvre.

Gregory Elliot

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