

The hidden Goldmann

Mitchell Cohen, *The Wager of Lucien Goldmann: Tragedy, Dialectics, and a Hidden God*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994, xi + 351 pp., £26.50 hb. 0 691 03420 6.

In her autobiographical *roman à clef*, *Les Samourais*, Julia Kristeva describes one 'Fabien Edelman': 'Graying, pot-bellied, smiling, his shirt open and, of course, no tie, calling everyone *tu* and constantly battling against existentialism, alienation and the *nouveau roman*, and arguing the case for dialectical reason (as revised and updated in the light of Pascal's experience).' 'Edelman' is, of course, a thinly disguised portrait of the Marxist critic Lucien Goldmann, who agreed to supervise Kristeva's doctoral thesis when she came to Paris from Bulgaria in the 1960s. In Kristeva's novel, 'Edelman' is surrounded to a crowd of students, most of them foreign. Yet, by the time of his death in 1970, Goldmann's reputation had largely been eclipsed as a result of Althusserian, Foucauldian and Lacanian onslaughts on humanism, and by the leftward drift of many of his former students (not least Kristeva).

Goldmann's reputation and popularity faded as he fell out of step with the increased use of linguistic methods; his genetic structuralism owes nothing to Saussure, and a great deal to Lukács. Indeed, Goldmann was actively hostile to the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss and Barthes, viewing it as a coherent expression of a stabilized and organized capitalism and its 'narcotic' – consumerist culture. In the years of theoretical anti-humanism, few had much sympathy for Goldmann's characteristic brand of humanism or for the belief, voiced at so many conferences and in so many books and articles, that the authentic destiny of man (*sic*) is to strive towards the absolute.

Mitchell Cohen takes as his starting-point the contention that Goldmann's work has never received its due, and has written what is undoubtedly the most complete study to date of the author of *The Hidden God*, combining intellectual biography with a broader history based on highly original research. Goldmann was normally very reticent about his background and past, and not the least of Mitchell's virtues is to have excavated the hidden Goldmann. There is a certain irony here: being concerned almost exclusively with group structures and

world-views, Goldmann disliked the biographical method; but biography proves able to teach us a great deal about him and his work.

Sergiu-Lucian Goldmann was born in Bucharest in 1913, and spent his childhood and early youth in Botosani, a district capital in Moldavia. In a rare autobiographical comment, he once said that he had grown up in a world similar to that painted by Chagall. That was something of an overstatement. His parents were relatively prosperous and secular Jews living in a cosmopolitan town with a lively cultural life, and Goldmann was presumably not the only one of its sons to grow up speaking Romanian, German and Yiddish with equal ease. Goldmann was born into a society in transition, and into a divided society. Anti-Semitism was rife in both his home town and the country at large; as a university student in Bucharest, Goldmann had to bribe his teachers in order to complete his courses.

In 1927 Goldmann became an active member of Ha-Shomer ha-Tsair (the Young Guard), a Zionist socialist youth movement whose ideology was a combination of Zionism, Marxism and romantic anti-capitalism. Some of its members joined the early *kibbutzim* in Palestine; others, like Goldmann, found a political home in the clandestine Communist Party. Despite Mitchell's extensive research, the details remain hazy, but Goldmann seems to have been active in the anti-fascist movement in the years when the ominous shadow of Romania's Iron Guard was growing longer, and to have been briefly imprisoned for political reasons. Although a member of the Romanian Communist Party (which underwent the grim process of 'Cominternization' after its 1931 Congress), he was hostile to Stalinism and, perhaps inevitably, was accused of being a Trotskyist; being seen on the university campus with a copy of Trotsky's autobiography under his arm cannot have helped. Whether he left the CP or was expelled is uncertain, but by 1934 Goldmann was in Paris and never returned to Romania, where his work has never received much attention.

Like so many exiles, Goldmann had a difficult life in Paris, washing dishes and doing other menial jobs as he studied for his law degrees and then the literary degree he received from the Sorbonne in 1938. Fleeing south to Toulouse as the German army occupied northern France, he supported himself by ghostwriting theses for wealthy students. October 1942 saw him in flight to Switzerland, where he was interned for some months. It was then that a chance encounter with Manès Sperber – former Comintern official, novelist and another graduate of Ha-Shomer ha-Tsair – led to an introduction to the work of Lukács. Only in 1959 did Goldmann, now a naturalized French citizen, find a permanent post at the *École des Hautes Études*, after having defended his doctoral thesis (*The Hidden God*) during a memorable and controversial public *soutenance* at the Sorbonne that lasted for six hours.

Cohen convincingly argues that two youthful influences on Goldmann were decisive. From his years in Ha-Shomer ha-Tsair Goldmann inherited a vision of the realization of an ‘individual-in-community’ that could transcend both atomistic individualism and anonymous collectivism, and the belief that Marxism’s true concern is with the creation of an authentic human community. The vision would be recast in different ways as a quasi-Kantian socialist kingdom of ends, and as a philosophy of community that owes a lot to the ‘social individual’ of the *Grundrisse*; but Goldmann’s fundamental beliefs remained largely unchanging. A



second influence relates to the broader structure of rural Romania, where Jews were traditionally forbidden to own land. They were, however, permitted to manage farms on behalf of big landlords. Such managers or *arendasi* were an obvious target for various forms of hostility, ranging from crude anti-Semitism to peasant unrest. The system was abolished after the First World War. In other words, the *arendasi* were a social stratum that was doomed and before long decimated by historical developments. Goldmann’s family did not belong to this stratum, but it is surely no accident that one of his concerns as a sociologist of literature was with precisely such marginalized groups – the Jansenist *noblesse de robe* in seventeenth-century France, the doomed revolutionary community of Malraux’s novels of the 1930s – and with the tragic world-view associated with them.

If early experiences appear to explain aspects of Goldmann’s work, they are not its sole determinants. Cohen provides a rich and complex account of the theoretical climate that eventually produced the Goldmann of *The Hidden God*, carefully tracing the tangled strands of Austro-Marxism, neo-Kantianism and, above all, the Hegelian-Marxist tradition associated with Georg Lukács.

Although there are two stages in the development of Goldmann’s sociology of literature, the central core recognizably derives from the Lukács of *Theory of the Novel* and of the great studies on realism. The novel, that is, is viewed as the story of the quest for authentic values (such as those of a community of ends) in an inauthentic or degraded world, and its problematic here – a literary incarnation of Hegel’s unhappy consciousness – is in search of values that cannot be realized. Goldmann in fact extends this beyond the novel, arguing in his 1948 study of Kant (English translation: *Immanuel Kant*, 1971) that the philosopher’s articulation of the positive but unrealizable values generated by ‘liberal capitalism’ (equality, respect for the individual, tolerance) eventually results in a tragic world-view.

Whilst the Hegel–Lukács tradition shapes the core of Goldmann’s theory of literature, a major input is also made by Piaget’s ‘genetic epistemology’, which traces the child’s evolution from brute facticity to the identification of particulars through the use of universals, and, finally, to conceptual thought. Each stage in this process is viewed as a mental operation involving structural wholes, ‘always evolved and always in genesis’. Each stage and each structural whole is a process, and neither a fact nor a composition of static invariants. For Goldmann, Piaget’s epistemology permits the transcendence of the subject–object

dichotomy and the elaboration of a dialectic that can be mapped on to Marx. It further permits the identification of 'significant structures' akin to Weber's ideal-types or Lukács's imputed consciousness, in that they are theoretical extrapolations rather than empirical realities. A world-view is not an individual vision, but rather the possible or potential consciousness of a social group (usually a class) and the common mental structures it generates. For Lukács, it is the Party that fills the *hiatus irrationalis* between potential and actual consciousness; for Goldmann, it is the transindividual subject that lies at the origin of cultural creativity. Goldmann refers to the methodology he derived from a combination of Lukács and Piaget as 'genetic structuralism'.

Goldmann's earliest philosophical interest was a concern with Kant, but it is Pascal who allows him to elaborate the most sophisticated version of his sociology of literature. *The Hidden God* (1959) is probably his best book, and it is that rarest of things: a highly readable exploration of Jansenist theology and of its impact on Pascal and Racine. For Goldmann, Jansenism – a heretical and puritanical version of Catholicism – is the world-view of a specific social group, namely the *noblesse de robe*. The *noblesse de robe* were the officials, most of them members of the Third Estate, who staffed the provincial assemblies or *parlements* of seventeenth-century France. Once allies of the monarchy in its struggle against the feudal nobility, they were increasingly marginalized and bypassed by history as absolutism was consolidated under Louis XIV. Unlike the hereditary nobility, they depended on their offices for their living and, as their very survival looked doubtful, turned in increasing numbers to a bleak theology that favoured seclusion and the rejection of worldly vanities. Pascal is its most famous representative, and probably the only one still read by non-specialists. Whereas Descartes places his faith in the rationalist scientism that will make men masters and possessors of nature, Pascal recognizes the value of the new sciences, but denies their universal validity. Unable to prove the existence of God, he is forced to gamble on the reality of a hidden God, to look for absolutes in a world without absolutes. The simultaneous acceptance and rejection of the world – also to be found in Racine's life and his plays – points, in Goldmann's view, to a dialectical reconciliation of opposites.

The later *Towards a Sociology of the Novel* (1965) abandons at least part of this structure, as the notion of a world-view disappears and is replaced by that of structural homology. This is not simply a change of theoretical direction, but, rather, as Goldmann would have it, a recognition that reification precludes the

possible emergence of transindividual groups. We have, in their place, a homology of forms. The general categories of a society dominated by the commodity form are reproduced in cultural forms, as in Robbe-Grillet's novels, where things and objects supersede human beings and their actions. Whereas Lukács would have denounced Robbe-Grillet, just as he denounced expressionism and most other forms of modernism, Goldmann accepts his novels as an attempt to grasp the real structures of capitalist society: Robbe-Grillet, no doubt much to his surprise, is in fact a realist.

Goldmann never wrote a book devoted solely to politics. Although he described himself as a Marxist and was convinced of the political import of his cultural work, he was a loner who argued that the necessary renewal of Marxism and socialism would be the work of unaffiliated *franc tireurs* rather than of Party members. No doubt he was in part mindful of the fate of those with whom he had studied in Bucharest: some became powerful apparatchiks in the Romanian CP; others went to nameless and hideous deaths in successive purges.

Reluctant to have anything to do with the French Communist Party, Goldmann grew increasingly close to the small Parti Socialiste Unifié (founded in 1960) and was greatly influenced by the 'New Working Class' thesis associated with Serge Mallet and André Gorz. Contrary to Marxist orthodoxy, the middle classes have not been proletarianized. *Pace* Lukács, capitalism has been able to avoid the final crisis and to attain stability and regulation, not because it has achieved a totalizing viewpoint, but because it has created a collective worker in the shape of the new wage-earning strata – highly educated, technically sophisticated and relatively prosperous. Increasingly, tensions focus not on the workplace but on the educational system, where young people demanding the technological skills required by 'organized capitalism' clash with increasingly 'magisterial and authoritarian teachers'. Yet even these strata are subject to alienation. As Gorz asks: 'Hunger calls for food to eat. But what does emptiness, boredom, dissatisfaction with life and the world call for?' The answer appeared to be 'revolutionary reforms' and some form of market socialism.

Goldmann's sympathies lay with the argument that a crucial element in the renewal of Marxism and socialism would be *autogestion*. The term is not easy to translate, but connotes both workers' control and more general forms of social self-management, ranging from the old Workers' Councils to the host of collectives spawned by the events of May '68. Pascal wagered on the existence of his hidden God; Goldmann wagers on the possibility that the new social strata might yet achieve a totalizing

vision and become a new transindividual subject.

Cohen is unlikely to bring about the rehabilitation of Goldmann. Although *The Hidden God* remains something of a classic, by no means all seventeenth-century specialists accept either its premisses or its conclusions, whilst Marxists have usually been dubious about the claim that Pascal is their totemic forebear. The later sociology of literature is overrestrictive and does not seem to permit the reading of individual texts, as opposed to their subsumption under categories so broad as to make them interchangeable. Cohen quite rightly criticizes the 'extreme schematism' of Goldmann's homologues; the less charitable might prefer to speak of economism or reductionism. Indeed, when Goldmann finds in Genet's plays a mental structure homologous to that of organized capitalism, and omits to mention that

Genet was gay, schematism sounds a mild charge.

In many respects, Goldmann emerges from this highly competent study as quite simply dated. His historical periodization of 'liberal capitalism', 'capitalism in crisis' and then 'organized capitalism' seems crude, and Goldmann's wager does not appear to have been a successful one. Cohen may not have written the rehabilitation he set out to produce; however, he has written a magnificent study in intellectual history. If it has one major weakness, it is that the concentration on the philosophical issues tends to obscure the literary questions that preoccupied Goldmann. We learn, for instance, very little about the importance of Racine to world theatre, and at least some comparison with Barthes's *On Racine* would have been welcome.

David Macey

Lost illusions

Gregory Elliott, ed., *Althusser: A Critical Reader*, Oxford and Cambridge MA, Blackwell, 1994. 214 pp., £40.00 hb, £12.99 pb., 0 631 18806 1 hb., 0 631 18807 X pb.

The critical oblivion into which Louis Althusser fell, even before he murdered his wife in November 1980, and thus covered the last ten years of his life in disgrace, seems to be over. Gregory Elliott's collection of essays on Althusser is the third such to appear in quick succession. *The Althusserian Legacy*, edited by E. Ann Kaplan and Mike Sprinker, and *Politique et philosophie dans l'oeuvre de Louis Althusser*, edited by Silvain Lazarus, were both published in 1993.

Elliott's collection differs, however, from its predecessors in two important respects. The two earlier books were the products of conferences linked, more or less loosely, to stages in Althusser's life – respectively, his seventieth birthday in October 1988 and his death two years later. To a large extent, the contributors had been strongly influenced by Althusser in their earlier intellectual careers, and took a stance that was sympathetic, though by no means uncritical towards their subject.

Althusser: A Critical Reader, by contrast, includes responses to the Althusserian enterprise written during its heyday in the 1960s and 1970s from standpoints that are sceptical, if not hostile. Thus, essays by Eric Hobsbawm and Pierre Vilar represent relatively well-disposed critical scrutinies by distinguished Marxist historians of Althusser's attack on historicism in *Reading Capital*. In counterpoint to these are the contributions by philosophers on whom the influence of the hermeneutic tradition would predispose them against Althusser's anti-humanism. Paul Ricoeur's discussion of Althusser's

theory of ideology is characteristically emollient, though searching. Axel Honneth, on the other hand, offers a root-and-branch critique of the Althusserian reconstruction of historical materialism.

To these contemporary responses to Althusser are added a series of more recent attempts to place him in perspective by British theorists. Peter Dews situates Althusser within a broader French intellectual context, laying especial stress on the debate between Sartre and Lévi-Strauss, and on the epistemological tradition of Bachelard, Cavailles and Canguilhem. David Macey explores the tensions involved in what Michel Pêcheux called the "Triple Alliance" in theory' of Althusser, Lacan and Saussure – the anti-humanist 'Rejection Front' which took shape in the mid-1960s, and linked together Althusser's return to Marx and Lacan's return to Freud within the common framework supposedly provided by structural linguistics. And Francis Mulhern explores Althusser's impact on British literary studies.

This combination of different perspectives on Althusser, some more or less immediate reactions to his writing, others enjoying the vantage point of retrospect, varying greatly also in the degree of sympathy they evince towards his project, gives the collection a wide-angle vision of its subject which the two earlier studies, for all their strengths, lacked. It differs from them also in a second, and in some ways crucial respect.

For I have not mentioned the main reason for Althusser's recent re-emergence from the oblivion into which he had descended – the publication in 1992 of two

autobiographical fragments, *L'Avenir dure longtemps* and *Les faits* (reviewed by David Macey in *RP* 67) and of the first volume of Yann Moulier Boutang's major biography. *L'Avenir*, an extraordinary human document written after Althusser had murdered his wife H  l  ne Rytman, became a bestseller and attracted widespread media attention, much of it malicious and salacious (my personal favourite is the front cover of the *Daily Express* magazine, in which an extract from *L'Avenir* appeared, showing a picture of a youthful Althusser lying on a beach under the headline: 'Sex, Socialism and Murder').

Elliott's own contribution to *Althusser: A Critical Reader* represents, to my knowledge, the first serious response to *L'Avenir*. Its significance is twofold. First, it uses Boutang's extremely detailed, and often fascinating, research to assess Althusser's own account of his youth in *L'Avenir*, demonstrating the extent to which his tortured reconstruction of the origins of the manic-depressive condition which lay behind H  l  ne Rytman's murder cannot be relied on. For all its undoubted interest and literary power, *L'Avenir*, Elliott concludes, is 'a re-writing of a life through its wreckage'.

Second, Elliott draws attention to what is, for those interested in Althusser's thought as opposed to his life, the real revelation offered by both *L'Avenir* and Boutang's biography. Suddenly there emerges into view a hitherto unknown Althusser, the author of previously unpublished texts written long before and long after the books that made his reputation, *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* (both published in 1965). In the story he has so far told (which goes up to 1956), Boutang uncovers a young Catholic intellectual, attracted towards the Communist Party, which he joined in 1948, but active in the worker-priest movement until its suppression by the French hierarchy in the early 1950s.

This young Althusser, it transpires, drank heavily of the Hegelian draughts so readily available in the Paris of the late 1940s. In a long letter to his former teacher Jean Lacroix he espoused what Elliott calls 'an apocalyptic Hegelian Marxism, (mis)construed as the philosophical vindication of a Stalinism at the height of its post-war powers of attraction (and repulsion)'. Though even then critical of the idea of the end of history, the young Althusser, like Koj  ve, saw (as Boutang puts it) in the Soviet tanks which enforced Stalinism in Eastern Europe an embodiment of the World Spirit, comparable to the French emperor whom Hegel watched ride through the streets of Jena.

The recovery of this youthful messianic Hegelian Stalinist sheds new light on Althusser's writings of the 1960s. The great critiques of Hegelian Marxism in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* takes on the aspect of *auto-critiques*, diagnoses of Althusser's own earlier errors.

Moreover, the equation often made by his critics on the revolutionary Left of philosophical anti-Hegelianism with a political apologia for Stalinism seems less plausible, given the ease with which the young Althusser was able to invoke the historical dialectic to justify East European show trials.

Also emerging from obscurity, however, are much later texts, written in the 1970s and even the 1980s, when both changing philosophical fashions and his own personal ignominy had consigned Althusser to oblivion. Hinted at in *L'Avenir* (particularly in the material added to the expanded French edition which appeared in 1994), and developed at length in texts included in the first volume of Althusser's *  crits philosophiques et politiques*, very recently published by his literary executors, is the theme of the 'royal road' to Marx laid by Machiavelli, Spinoza and Rousseau. In this, 'the real materialist tradition', chance and contingency play a major role. Althusser sought to bring this out with a metaphor:

an idealist is a man who knows both from what station the train leaves and what its destination is: he knows this in advance and when he gets on a train, he knows where he is going, because the train is taking him [there]. The materialist, on the contrary, is a man who catches a moving train without knowing where it has been or where it is going.

Plainly, this 'aleatory materialism' represents an extreme rejection of a teleological conception of the historical process in which the end of history is present in its origins, and a reassertion of the idea advanced by Althusser in the 1970s that history is 'a process without a subject or goals'. Elliott detects here the influence of Cournot's conception of historical contingency as the intersection of different causal series – an idea taken up in the early part of this century by J. B. Bury and strongly attacked by neo-Hegelian philosophers of history such as Oakeshott and Collingwood.

Anything purporting to be a definite assessment of Althusser's thought must wait upon a critical examination of these texts of youth and old age. My own view is that there are three respects in which he has had a lasting impact on the Marxist tradition: he established the incompatibility between Hegelian modes of reasoning and historical materialism; he inaugurated the rigorous examination and reconstruction of Marxist theoretical concepts; and he situated this project within a sophisticated realist philosophy of science. Though all these elements of Althusser's enterprise confronted well-known difficulties, some of which are explored in *Althusser: A Critical Reader*, he established an agenda

which Marxist philosophers ignore at their peril.

To recall that Althusser saw himself as helping to develop the Marxist tradition is to remind ourselves of his politics as well as his philosophy. As late as *L'Avenir* (1985), Althusser defended his membership of the PCF, insisting that it was 'the only means available *then* of acting *politically*, that is to say really on the course of history'. Elliott reaffirms Perry Anderson's judgement that in the Cold War era 'the Communist movement represented the only available embodiment of socialist politics'. Here sympathy seems to blur into indulgence. Those less enamoured of no-longer-existing socialism are entitled to wonder if Marxism would be quite so discredited in France today if its most prominent intellectual representative had not been identified – notwithstanding all Althusser's criticisms of, and reservations about the PCF – with 'historical Communism'.

How, then, should someone writing, as I do, from within the Marxist tradition assess Althusser's contribution to that tradition? There are plenty of impeccable revolutionary socialist criticisms that may be made of his politics. And these can be buttressed by the philosophical objections developed by various of the

contributors to this collection. Thus Honneth, for example, takes Althusser to task for 'categorically exclud[ing]' the 'interactive historical practices of action' on which 'the structurally construed functional tendencies of social systems, highlighted in *Reading Capital*, depend for their realization. Criticisms of this nature are perfectly valid, but they miss something that is especially hard to convey in retrospect: the exhilaration that was induced by the Althusserian enterprise in its heyday. The cover illustration – a Constructivist watercolour by Kandinsky called *Happy Structure* – is well chosen. It evokes the intellectual excitement generated by the 'Triple Alliance' and its vision of a marriage of Marx and Freud effected by the good services of avant-garde philosophy – all against the background of fervent cultural innovation and with the apparent prospect of revolutionary social transformation. Merely to describe this climate is to record the political and philosophical illusions it involved, illusions starkly exposed at this glum and demoralized *fin de siècle*. Yet – for me at any rate – it is impossible to regret them, or to abandon the search for what was rational and desirable in them.

Alex Callinicos

Identify yourself

Jorge Larraín, *Ideology and Cultural Identity: Modernity and the Third World Presence*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1994. viii + 190 pp., £39.50 hb., £11.95 pb., 0 7456 1315 2 hb., 0 7456 1316 0 pb.

George Robertson, Melinda Mash, Lisa Tickner, Jon Bird, Barry Curtis and Tim Putnam, eds, *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*, London and New York, Routledge, 1994. xiii + 255 pp., £37.50 hb., £11.99 pb., 0 415 07015 5 hb., 0 415 07016 3 pb.

Ernesto Laclau, ed., *The Making of Political Identities*, London and New York, Verso, 1994. vii + 296 pp., £39.95 hb., £13.95 pb., 0 86091 409 7hb., 0 86091 663 4 pb.

What forms of cultural identity are possible and available in the contemporary world? Who has the power to decide who assumes which identity? Is there a direct relationship between the advent of 'modernity' and a certain range of previously unconstructed forms of identity? Does it make any sense to write about groups of people as belonging to specific nations which possess particular national forms? Or, are we all hybrids now? These are some of the important – but hardly neglected – questions which these three books attempt to answer.

Jorge Larraín's monograph is the easiest to deal with. *Ideology and Cultural Identity* can be read as the conclusion of a trilogy which started with *The Concept of Ideology* and continued with *Marxism and Ideology*, both lucid and informative syntheses of research on the subject. Larraín showed that he had an impressive grasp

of his chosen subject, could elucidate difficult ideas, and was always particularly incisive on strengths and weaknesses of post-Althusserian Marxism. I have to confess that I am a little disappointed by his latest offering, which promises to extend Larraín's insights beyond a European context and discuss the problem of ideology in terms of a global politics. The problem is that Larraín only really attempts this feat in the first and last chapters; in between, he analyses what he has always analysed very well – namely, the history of the concept of ideology from Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, Pareto et al., through Marx and Engels to Althusser, post-structuralism, postmodernism and Habermas. Most of this discussion will be useful for those who haven't yet read Larraín's work, but hardly a revelation to those who have.

Larrain's goal is to provide a defence of Enlightenment reason as the best tool for combating racism and he has no tolerance for theories which privilege difference but run the risk of dissolving into relativism: 'If there is no such thing as universals, if one cannot generalize, then human beings are different, have different potentialities and fates that must be accepted. There are no such things as universal human rights' – an argument which damns both David Hume and Jean Baudrillard. This is fine as far as it goes, but obviously risks simply stating the opposite case. When Larrain criticizes Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe for failing to see that privileging a logic of 'non-correspondence and heterogeneity' is both a departure from Marx and 'a renunciation of any rational understanding of society and history', one can only wish that he had at least tried to refute Robert Young's arguments in *White Mythologies* (a book which should have appeared in the footnotes somewhere). Ultimately, Larrain does not get much beyond his early recognition that ideology occurs whenever there are asymmetrical power relations and that one therefore needs to consider 'a variety of relations between ethnic groups, between nation-states, between sexes, and so forth', and not just class relations.

Travellers' Tales, the proceedings of a conference held at the Tate Gallery, progresses from approximately the same starting point, but gets a lot further, even if it does suffer from the usual problems of such collections (repetition, underdeveloped ideas, fragmentation and lack of coherence) and has an occasional tendency to sound a bit smug and pretentious (it could also have done with a more substantial introduction). There are some splendid essays – notably, Griselda Pollock's analysis of two sets of pictures, Gauguin's racist refiguration of Manet's anti-Orientalist *Olympia* in his representation of his thirteen-year-old Tahitian wife, Manao Tupapau, juxtaposed with family snapshots of her South African childhood. Pollock concludes that 'we need to resist and disrupt the territorialization of desire – all forms of nationalism and identity politics', a stance which seems to risk fetishizing displaced women – like herself – at the expense of the rooted. Pollock's assertiveness contrasts strikingly with the late Madan Sarup's humility (Obituary, *RP* 68): 'I don't have the confidence to become ... cosmopolitan' (emphasis mine), a divergence which neatly points out the pitfalls of choosing one's own identity.

Also of particular interest are Anne McClintock's reading of the imperial and sexual politics of Victorian soap advertisements, which promised the metamorphosis of black children into racial hybrids, 'brought to the brink of civilization by the twin commodity fetishes of soap and mirror' and the simultaneous erasure of 'the

unseemly spectacle of women's labour'; Rob Nixon's analysis of the complex national and racial displacement of Bessie Head, a writer caught between the desire for rooted community and exile; and the hard-hitting and amusing discussions of tourism and Lévi-Strauss by Adrian Rifkin and Sunpreet Arshi et al., which recommend that travellers' tales are best read at home. Such travellers assume a radically different identity from that articulated by Trihn T. Minh-ha, who laments that 'all attempts at exalting the achievements of exile are but desperate efforts to quell the crippling sorrow of homelessness and estrangement'. I thought back to the difference between Griselda Pollock and Madan Sarup and felt glad that the volume was dedicated to his memory.

Ernesto Laclau's collection is easily the most heavyweight of the three, in terms of both its size and content. The volume is divided up into two sections: a series of essays dealing with the theoretical problem of modern identity and a series of theoretically informed case studies. Laclau's brief introduction announces that one of the aims of the volume is to problematize precisely what Larrain wanted to take for granted: the principle of self-determination, for example, involves the assertion of 'a universal principle grounded in universal values', but can only be manifested in a series of particular forms: 'a universality that is the very result of particularism'. The main theme of the volume is the 'emergence of a plurality of new subjects that have escaped the classical political frameworks ... and have put new challenges to political practice and political theory'. Again, the resemblance to Larrain's project is evident, as is the movement beyond his finishing point.

The essays in the first section are highly sophisticated, many being attempts to reread Hegel's conception of identity-formation through an understanding of Lacan. Slavoj Žižek's 'Identity and its Vicissitudes' – a piece which juxtaposes the most densely argued theoretical passages with comments on more demotic references to Charlie Chaplin, Jewish humour and popular Hollywood film – deals with the problem of possibility which, as soon as it becomes realized, disappears. Žižek illustrates his argument via the discussion of a problematic episode from recent political history: 'What is at stake in the Yugoslav civil war are not archaic ethnic conflicts; these centennial hatreds are inflamed only on account of their function in the recent political struggle.' In other words, explanations which rely on ancient history are tautological acts and hence incapable of accounting for the development of forms of modern identity because they confuse the 'conditions' with the thing itself, the 'ground'. Rodolphe Gasché provides a rival deconstructionist reading of Hegel, criticizing Adorno's

notion of the non-identical in order to show how intimately bound up with the seemingly antithetical project of the Prussian philosopher Derrida's writing really is; Claudia Hlib explores the paradoxical limits of pluralism.

The second section of Laclau's collection is undoubtedly more accessible. Aletta Norval charts the logic of apartheid, arguing persuasively that the problem of apartheid was that it did not merely discriminate but 'succeeded ... in creating so-called ethnic identities and allegiances' and thus served to represent one extreme of the 'totalizing logics of modernity'. Glen Bowman explores the forms of identity available to Palestinians via a reading of three major writers – Edward Said, Fawaz Turki and Raja Shehadeh – suggesting that the experience of exile has demanded that Palestinians usually construct Palestinianness as inevitably bound up with suffering. Anna-Marie Smith examines the

resistance politics of Rastafari, going so far as to suggest that smoking ganja constitutes a challenge to Aristotelian logic. And, in perhaps the best essay in this section, Bobby Sayyid analyses the construction of 'Islamic Fundamentalism', showing how Khomeini's deliberate avoidance of references to the West can only be understood in terms of an attempt to decentre Western political discourse so that contemporary political identities need to be conceived in terms of a meta-narrative which, rather than abandoning the concept of a centre, recognizes that centres can only exist in a weak form.

The Making of Political Identities can be criticized for being rather too opaque in places, too long and self-indulgent. Nevertheless, it is a valuable and stimulating exploration of the problem of constructing identity as a theoretical concept, a series of instances and, most importantly, the relationship between the two.

Andrew Hadfield

Settling our disagreements

Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller, Jr., and Jeffrey Paul, eds, *Cultural Pluralism and Moral Knowledge*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994. xiii + 285 pp., £12.95 pb., 0 521 46614 8.

Andrew Mason, *Explaining Political Disagreement*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993. xii + 170 pp., £27.95 hb, 0 521 43322 3.

Pluralism is, at the moment, very much at the top of the agenda of concerns to which English-speaking political philosophers are addressing themselves. There are at least three reasons why this is so. The first is a recognition that the modern condition is characterized by the existence of a diversity of cultures, traditions and moral outlooks. The second is a belief that the philosophical liberalism which currently dominates the Anglo-American intellectual scene is essentially connected to pluralism. This belief has now been given influential expression by John Rawls in his *Political Liberalism*. The third reason is an apprehension that pluralism may be damaging in two ways. The existence of diversity can seem to undermine any conviction that there is one single true morality, and portend belief in either nothing or everything. Diversity may also spell disagreement and conflict.

Both of these books shed valuable light on these matters and thus contribute to what is now a rich debate about pluralism. *Cultural Pluralism and Moral Knowledge* is an uneven collection. This is in part because not every contributor directly addresses what would appear to be its defining concern, namely the normative significance of cultural diversity. The early

essays do, and are united in refusing to draw relativist conclusions from a recognition of the existence of difference. Chandran Kukathas argues that there is less conflict between the different cultures than is assumed, and that a certain convergence of moral outlooks is possible through communication. Alan Gewirth refuses to acknowledge that pluralism subverts the case for rational moral knowledge, and defends his own account of universal human rights founded upon the very nature of individual agency.

Nicholas Sturgeon and Ernest Sosa supply more direct arguments against relativism. Sturgeon's case is especially persuasive. One might be drawn to relativism by an acknowledgement that some important moral disagreements are intractable. It would seem natural to conclude that both sides to such a dispute must be right. But if both are right, then there is no real disagreement, since that requires an attribution of error by each to the opposing side. Genuine relativism entails contradictoriness, and the only escape from that is a deeply unattractive nihilism wherein nothing is right. Joseph Raz denies that moral change – a change in the truth value of a general moral claim – is possible. In consequence, social relativism – the notion that a valid morality is a

function of a set of particular social practices – is false. John Kekes summarizes the main claims of his book on moral pluralism, which maintains the non-relativist thesis that there are many reasonable conceptions of a good life. Charles Larmore distinguishes between moral pluralism and reasonable disagreement about the good. The latter, not the former, supplies the foundation of modern liberalism.

The content and style of the remaining essays are somewhat tangential to these concerns. Curiously, one of the most distinguished contemporary defenders of moral relativism, Gilbert Harman, restricts himself to a schematic sketch of various accounts of why people hold the values that they do. He enjoins moral philosophers to spend more time in the intellectual company of social psychologists if an explanation of value is to be found.

Andrew Mason is familiar with at least one influential psychological account of moral development, and uses it to illustrate his own view about the nature of moral or political disagreement. He does not think that such disagreement is due to mistakes of reasoning which are remediable through thorough argument and analysis. Nor does he endorse the alternative view of disagreement as attributable to the essential contestability of the terms in use. Rather, he believes that both rational and non-rational considerations should figure in a complete explanation of differences of belief. More particularly, Mason favours materialist explanations which privilege power relations. By way of example, he attempts to integrate Carol Gilligan's distinction between a female ethics of care and a male ethics of justice, with Nancy Chodorow's theory of the acquisition of gender identities. One suspects that more is needed than can be offered in the context of this book to defend Gilligan and Chodorow from the many and varied critiques of their work. His remarks about the implications for a theory of justice of an integration of the two ethics are also somewhat gestural, even if they suggest very interesting possibilities. Nevertheless, the book offers an instructive survey of the variety of explanations for the persistence and prevalence of disagreement. And Mason, without flinching or abandoning himself to relativism or scepticism, recognizes the improbability of achieving a consensus by the unfettered exercise of reason alone. In this he endorses the doubt which Larmore expresses about a conviction at the heart of our intellectualist Western tradition – namely, that 'reason leads naturally to agreement, that reason is what brings us together'.

Perhaps it would have been valuable to see aired one further heterodoxy in these books. This is the view that disagreement is not only probably unavoidable, but also not obviously undesirable. Only Mason briefly alludes to the view that diversity is, arguably, good both in itself

and for what it encourages. And what it leads to need not simply be a richer uniformity. Moreover, as Nicholas Rescher has suggested in a recent defence of pluralism, it may be a mistake to assume that consensus is an ideal to aim at. Not only need disagreement not subvert our own separate convictions of what is the case, but it need not conduce to conflict. Perhaps, rather than agreement, we should try to accept that compromise, acquiescence, convergence may be sufficient for our social and political requirements. In that case, the fact that modernity is characterized by a diversity of traditions and cultures need not be cause for concern. It may even be something to celebrate.

David Archard

Child's play

Jostein Gaarder, *Sophie's World: A Novel about the History of Philosophy*, translated by Paulette Moller, London, Phoenix House, 1995. ix + 403 pp., £16.99 hb., 1 897580 42 8.

Gareth B. Matthews, *The Philosophy of Childhood*, Cambridge MA and London, Harvard University Press, 1994. 132 pp., £15.25 hb., 0 674 66480 9.

Both of these books derive from teaching philosophy to schoolchildren. *Sophie's World* is basically a history of Western philosophy, made accessible by being cast the form of a novel which moves from being a mystery to a philosophical puzzle – from the questions of who the mysterious Hilde is, and how her life is connected to Sophie's, to the question of whether Sophie is real or merely an idea in Hilde's father's mind. The book consists of a series of mini-lectures from Sophie's mysterious philosophy teacher (just who is he, and where does he come from?). They are clear and succinct, and many students – particularly those on history-of-ideas courses – will find them enormously useful. I suspect that is why the book has become a best-seller on the Continent, where high-school students are required to learn what the major philosophers said. If anyone wants a short history of how European philosophy developed, this is the book to read.

But the book has its limitations: Sophie is an even more irritating foil to the monologues than Plato's disciples ('Explain please' – 'So you said'). Any fourteen-year-old I know willing to follow these accounts would also argue with them, and display more frustration at their difficulty. The limitation of any book of this nature is that there simply isn't the space for a real discussion or exploration of the ideas. Sophie is eager, intelligent and blank, which she must be if she is to be

the cipher through which the history is told. The device of turning her into an idea in the Major's mind is a clever one for developing a Berkeleyian argument throughout the book. But it doesn't quite work, because readers gripped by this problem would probably skip the 'mini-lectures'. Still, anything that has adolescents reading philosophy is to be welcomed, and despite a typical academic distaste for 'survey' literature, I found it a compulsive read. The reason is Gaarder's sheer enthusiasm for his subject, which communicates itself both in the way he tells the story and in such comments as 'The difference between school teachers and philosophers is that school teachers think that they know a lot of stuff that they try to force down our throats. Philosophers try to figure things out together with pupils.' He is clearly a man deeply committed to teaching philosophy to children.

Gareth Matthews shares this commitment. But I suspect that he would argue against Gaarder's way of doing it, which is ultimately didactic. *The Philosophy of Childhood* is a sustained argument *against* the conception of children as pre-persons to be developed into people like us, and for developing the philosophy of childhood as an authentic philosophical area. His inspiration comes from the author's experience of teaching philosophy in a Scottish primary school using techniques developed by Matthew Lipmann to facilitate philosophical questioning and dialogue between children. This leads Matthews to the conclusion that children are natural philosophers, whose philosophical wonder is driven underground by adult emphasis on 'useful' questions. They are fortunate if they have an adult philosopher around to pick up questions like 'Are we "live" on video?' or 'The Universe is everything and everywhere, but then if there was a Big Bang, what was the Big Bang *in*?' Otherwise, they must wait until they are adults in university philosophy departments to pursue them.

Noticing this capacity in children to recapitulate the insights of our greatest philosophers, even though they have not heard of them, leads Matthews to argue against such theories of childhood development as Piaget's and Kohlberg's. I found these arguments cogent, acquiring their force precisely because Matthews has a capacity for listening to what children say, and recognizing that they may be exploring different and equally satisfying theories to the ones Piaget argues they have failed to grasp.

The final third of the book is taken up with exploring some of the issues which the philosophy of childhood might cover: children's rights, the possibility of a non-phoney literature for children, child art, childhood and death, and the kind of understanding that terminally ill

children can display. Much of it is moving, some of it persuasive, and all of it tantalizing enough to persuade me that these are problems worth taking up.

Of course, questions remain before we can conclude that children are 'partners in a joint effort at understanding it all'. They seem to need adults to sustain and utilize their philosophical insight. A child cannot raise questions about the prime mover (or first flea) without first having grasped the concept of causality. We all have difficulty sorting out genuine philosophical issues from mere confusion, and it may be impossible for a child. However, Matthews is not arguing for *simply* listening to them. Our strengths and weaknesses are different, and Matthews's evidence of their ability to philosophize demonstrates that they are neither miniature adults nor pre-rational, pre-scientific and slightly less than human. At the very least, this suggests reconsideration both of how we conceptualize childhood, and how we should listen to and teach children.

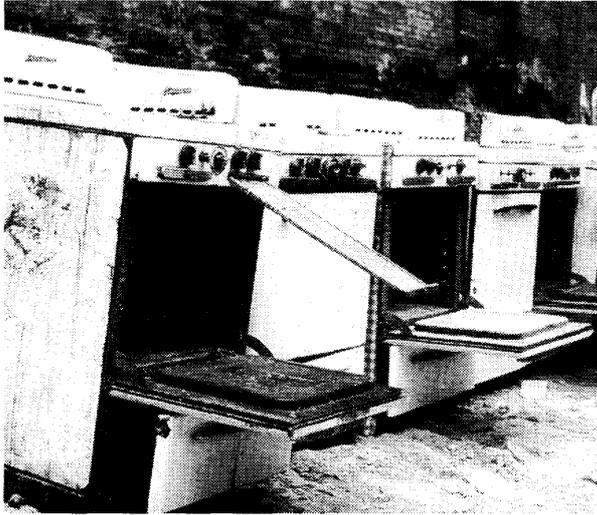
Both Gaarder and Matthews believe that children should be encouraged to do philosophy. But Gaarder's approach is to teach them the history of the subject, to introduce them to our fully human world ('It's the only way to become a human being'); Matthews's approach is to listen to their questions and discuss with them, on the assumption that we already share this human world. I find his children far more plausible than Gaarder's, and his arguments more stimulating. But Gaarder's book will sell more copies, because it fits into a prepared slot rather than challenging our preconceptions. I think that he would hate this irony.

Anne Seller

The order of things

Genevieve Lloyd, *Part of Nature: Self-Knowledge in Spinoza's Ethics*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1994. 182 pp., £21.95 hb. 0 8014 2999 4.

Genevieve Lloyd's account of Spinoza is also a running battle with the Cartesian heritage of thought in philosophy and in the 'commonsense' of our age. There are long passages expounding Descartes rather than Spinoza; Spinoza is then presented as offering an alternative model, according to which we are not substances, our bodies are not external to our selves, and the individual mind is not the clear light of consciousness but a necessarily inadequate idea of the body and a perspectival awareness of the world. Neither body nor mind have clear boundaries. Lloyd comes within an inch



of attributing to Spinoza the view which I have claimed follows from his definitions: that the body of which one's mind is the idea is one's world, rather than just the body enclosed by one's skin:

the continued existence of an individual depends not just on what goes on within the bodily superficies of what we would regard as an individual body, but on the pressure of conflicting forces from outside. The corresponding truth about minds is that they are not ideas of self-contained material things but rather states of confused awareness of what is happening in the universe as a whole.

At the same time, she wants to maintain that for Spinoza the mind has 'scope for expansion that is causally independent of the body'. On the face of it, this is difficult to reconcile with Spinoza's view that body and mind are trans-attributively identical – that 'thought cannot produce ideas for which there are no nonmental correlates'. If thought expands, the body's interaction with its environment must also expand; the causation of this expansion can be 'mental' only in the sense that we can only understand the mechanism of the change under a mentalistic description, not in the sense that the mental event occurs first and causes the bodily one.

The 'paradox' that individuality of mind depends on inadequacy of ideas leads to a whole chapter on truth and error, which, for all its intriguing suggestions, seems to me not to resolve that bigger paradox: the place that error has at all in a philosophy in which every idea is (trans-attributively) identical with its object. One might think of an accurate map misoriented, but that is an image not a theory. I don't think that Lloyd's account in terms of perspectivity does the trick either. Her critique of Descartes' account of judgement and error is more convincing than her vindication of Spinoza's.

The relevance of Spinoza's account of the mind-body relation – in contrast to Descartes' – for feminism has

already been pointed out by Genevieve Lloyd in *The Man of Reason*, and is discussed here in Chapter 5, 'Dominance and Difference'. For Descartes, the body is sexed, the mind unsexed. While Descartes was no feminist, it is easy to base a certain kind of feminism on this. But if Lloyd's Spinoza is right, it is the wrong kind of feminism. The mind is the idea of the body, and so is itself different in the two sexes. 'To be a male or female mind is to be the idea of a male or female body.' But Lloyd further argues that 'in some contexts, being the awareness of a female body will amount to something very different from being the idea of a male body. At other times, and in other contexts, the differences will be minimal.' For if the powers of bodies are partly determined by wider social organisms of which they are a part, the mind will be not only sexed but gendered – that is, differentiated along the lines of the socially determined differentiation of the powers of the sexes. This opens the way for a non-utopian feminism, in the sense of one that is based neither on an unsexed mind, nor on transhistorical male and female natures, but on the men and women of particular societies.

While Spinoza, as Lloyd is quite aware, was no more a feminist than Descartes, he is co-opted on the grounds that for him the powers of bodies and therefore also of minds are socially determined and can therefore also be socially enhanced; a better society can enable women to do what they are currently unable to do, and not in the obvious sense that external obstacles can be removed, but in the sense that a woman in a better society will have intrinsically different – enhanced – powers of body and mind. Yet particular men and women will take their differences with them into that society.

'Something remains in all this of the ideal of a shared human nature that transcends difference. But the sameness here, unlike the Cartesian version, is not an already existing metaphysical status, but an idea of wholeness to be achieved.' It will be clear that this is one of those books on Spinoza which apply his thought creatively to common concerns, rather than working its way minutely through his geometric demonstrations. This is in no way to disparage its standards of scholarship, which are excellent. Occasionally, though, I think he is updated against the tendency of his thought. For instance, Lloyd's claim that for Spinoza insight comes from confrontation with death: 'It is in really knowing that we must die that we know that we are eternal.' It is difficult to square this with Spinoza's Proposition LXVII of Part IV of the *Ethics*: 'a free man thinks of death least of all things; and his wisdom is a meditation not of death but of life.'

Andrew Collier

Beyond Freud

Nancy J. Chodorow, *Femininities, Masculinities, Sexualities: Freud and Beyond*, London, Free Association Books, 1994. ix + 132 pp., £8.95 pb., 1 85343 380 2.

This is an important small book: compact, lucid and moderate. It is not absolutely innovative, but it presents a clear and forceful argument for the increasingly prevalent view that there is no normal heterosexuality. It follows that homosexualities cannot be seen in simple opposition to heterosexualities, as abnormal or perverse; at least not from the perspective of clinical psychoanalytic practice, on which Nancy Chodorow draws in her final chapter to discuss the cultural and individual specificity and variety of sexuality. Psychoanalytic theory, she argues, cannot provide grounds for moral or political positions: we cannot use it to claim that all sexualities should be defended, any more than we can use it to affirm the superiority of heterosexuality. If she had wanted to be more transgressive, she would have entitled her second chapter 'Heterosexuality as a Symptom'. Characteristically, instead she calls it 'Heterosexuality as a Compromise Formation', concluding that we should treat all sexuality 'as problematic and to be accounted for'.

An attractive aspect of Chodorow's book is its concern with passionate love. She has an acute sense that to associate passionate intensity only with perversion, narcissistic immaturity, or a sense of sin, is to leave the heterosexual norm looking pretty dull. She wants more enquiry into heterosexualities and how they come about; and more awareness of loving affection in discussion of homosexualities. Her broadest concerns are with the problem posed by the claim to universality in psychoanalytic theory, the status it has accorded heterosexuality (in keeping with dominant cultural norms), and the challenge represented by the politics of difference.

The first chapter rethinks Freud on women. While noting positive aspects as well as limitations, Chodorow concludes that he was most convincing in giving a psychodynamic account of what women, and femininity, mean in a masculine psyche. What does Freud's question, 'What is femininity – for men?', mean for women? The question, formulated in this way by Shoshana Felman, is part of Chodorow's enquiry. Her discussion of theory is too carefully articulated to summarize. However, she stresses the multiple ways that women figure in Freud's writing: as 'woman' the theoretical subject, but also as a range of characters in case studies and as their own objects ('object to a self that constructs and reconstructs her subjectivity'); in terms of their socio-historical position, and as agents in

the making of psychoanalytic theory, as patients or analysts. She notes, importantly, Freud's positive attitude towards hysterics and homosexuals, in opposition to dominant ideas of degeneracy and inferiority; and his sense of how social expectations and habits inhibited both women and men.

The second chapter reviews a range of modern psychoanalytic writing, and argues that belief in the naturalness of heterosexuality has deprived us of stories of how it comes about. For all her talk of cultural stories, Chodorow seems to think that there should be one central account with many versions. She has unexplained reservations about 'the castration complex [as] a nodal origin', but credits it with the pragmatic virtue of generating theoretical consistency. This evasion in the service of consistency is the crucial point from which her thinking should be developed further. Her confusion repeats Freud's. There are, she says, more accounts of homosexual development, because it is believed to diverge from something that doesn't seem to need accounting for (she cites comparable gay and lesbian claims for an innate sexuality). Freud suggests both that heterosexuality is natural (universal and universally desirable), and that it needs explaining. If everyone is constitutionally bisexual, then 'any sexuality is partly constructed through the repression of its opposite'. Chodorow draws on Kenneth Lewes's analysis of Freud's inconsistencies, and his conclusion that since the Oedipus complex always involves a series of traumas, no single identification, object love or sexuality can be considered normal. Even what Freud accepts as the best result is the result of a trauma.

Chodorow herself does not embrace total relativism, believing that sexualities *can* be evaluated comparatively (for example, the perversity of wishing to humiliate, as against other forms of sexual passion and affection). But this line does not fall between 'homo' and 'hetero'. *That* line Chodorow rejects as part of a normative cultural system which consolidates uncritical assumptions about gender and sexual difference, and sustains inequalities.

In her range of references Chodorow footnotes awareness of Lacan, Foucault, French theory and derivatives (with neither hostility nor engagement), but draws largely on US research and theory, which includes the interesting work of Arlene Stein and Karin Martin. So, there is a sense of a particular community of ideas. That Lewes can say that all outcomes of the Oedipus complex must be neurotic, and Chodorow can say that all sexuality is 'problematic and to be accounted for', strikes a bit of a chill, but this may be the cost of having thought that it could all just come naturally. However, this book means to open up happier and more diverse ways of thinking about loving, and goes some way towards doing so.

Elaine Jordan