REVIEWS

THE WATCHDOGS
Sean Sayers

Paul Nizan, *The Watchdogs: Philosophers and the Established Order*, Monthly Review Press, 1971
Paperback £1.35

1 INTRODUCTION

Nizan's book is a remarkable one and anyone interested in developing a radical philosophy should read it. It is addressed quite specifically to students and to the young - it is a call to arms against bourgeois academic philosophy and the world-order which it represents.

Nizan was an exact contemporary and close friend of Sartre's: they went through *Lycée* together and studied philosophy together at the *École Normale Supérieure*. Nizan's reaction to this experience, however, was very different from Sartre's. It is recorded, in a theoretical way, in *The Watchdogs* (his only book specifically about philosophy), but he describes the experience more directly in his auto-biographical novel (?) *Aden Arabie* (1):

> *Prudent advice, and the chances of my academic career, had brought me to the École Normale and that official exercise which is still called philosophy. Both soon inspired in me all the dusgust of which I was capable. If anyone wants to know why I remained there, it was out of laziness, uncertainty, and ignorance of any trade, and because the state fed me, housed me, lent me free books, and gave me a grant of 100 francs a month.*

Soon after leaving the *École*, Nizan joined the Communist Party (in 1927, in fact). He remained a member of the Party until 1939, when he broke with it in the wake of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. He joined the French Army and was killed almost immediately, aged 35, at Dunkirk.

The Watchdogs was written in 1932. The philosophers whom Nizan writes about in it are the now obscure and forgotten French academic professional philosophers of that time. But despite this fact, Nizan's book has the very strongest relevance to the situation Here and Now. Firstly, his attack on early 20th Century French academic philosophy is concentrated on one feature which it certainly shares with later 20th Century British academic philosophy - namely its academicism and its social role as ideology. And secondly, he deals with a number of the theoretical and practical problems which face the attempt to develop a radical philosophy. The publication of this book in English now is therefore very timely.

2 NATURE OF ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHY

The Watchdogs is a passionate work and in it there is no pretence of the 'scholarly detachment' which Nizan so hated. As Sartre says (2):

> *His books wanted to displease: that is their greatest merit... His was a call to arms, to hatred: class against class, against a patient and mortal enemy with whom there could be no accommodation.*

The Watchdogs, however, is more than a work of *mere* passion - it is also a *theoretical critique* of academicism, particularly in philosophy; and it is the best modern one I have come across, for Nizan does not take the image which academic philosophers have of their own activity for the real nature of this activity.

Bourgeois academic philosophy seems to be a harmless enough thing. Its themes have every appearance of being Timeless and remote from the immediate reality of everyday life: contemporary philosophers occupy themselves in 'debating' with Plato and Aristotle and in 'disagreeing with' Hume and Kant. Such philosophy appears to be - indeed claims to be - pure abstract thought; it claims to concern only 'the products of Reason' ('concepts' in the contemporary jargon) and not the real world as produced by human material activity. But these, according to Nizan, are illusions - merely the appearances which bourgeois academic philosophy presents:

> *Every philosopher, though he may consider he does not, participates in the impure reality of his age.*
> (p19)

Philosophy, argues Nizan, is not pure thought:

> *Philosophy-in-itself does not exist: there exist only different philosophies... The various philosophies are produced by different philosophers.*
> (p7)

Philosophy has a *material* existence, as well as a *spiritual-conceptual* being.

Academic philosophy is created and transmitted in an atmosphere of 'scholarly detachment'. It appears to be entirely remote from the struggles and needs of the world. Academic philosophers, both in their thought and in their lives, it would appear, have almost entirely withdrawn from any relationship with the concrete social reality around them. They frequently praise themselves for their 'coolness', their 'detachment', their 'ethical neutrality', etc etc. In short, they seem to have 'abdicated' from any socially valuable role, and their work consequently appears to be entirely 'trivial' and 'irrelevant'.(3)

But even this 'abdication' is not all that it appears:

> *This state of quiescence has a special significance. Lenin, an outsider who associated with the rabble, the ignorant laymen, made an authoritative contribution to the argument. Although he did not have philosophy in mind when he wrote these lines, they are perfectly applicable to our philosophers: "In politics, indifferent means satisfied... In bourgeois society, the label 'non-partisan' is merely a veiled, hypocritical, way of saying that the*

1 Published also by Monthly Review Press in hard-back (1968) but now issued in paperback by Beacon Press (1970).

2 In his preface to *Aden Arabie*, reprinted in Sartre's *Situations*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1965.

3 This is frequently the main target of criticism of recent British philosophy. See e.g.: Gellner, *Words and Things*; more recently also C. K. Mundle, *A Critique of Linguistic Philosophy*; and even Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (Ch.7) and Perry Anderson, 'Components of the National Culture', in *New Left Review* No.50.

person in question belongs to the party of the exploiters." In philosophy, too, indifferent cannot mean anything but satisfied... This is the real significance of abstention.
(pp45-6)

Nizan shares Lenin's uncompromising and stark view of the situation: for them there are only two sides: the side of the oppressed and the side of the oppressors. And Nizan argues that when one looks at the *real effects*, as opposed to merely the *intentions*, of bourgeois academic philosophy, it is apparent that such philosophy very definitely takes sides. The academic philosophy that Nizan is talking about, and the academic philosophy of our own time and place, is of no use to the oppressed. In fact, it is positively a hindrance to them, for it obscures and hides the very features of existence which the oppressed, in their struggle against oppression, must bring to consciousness. (4)

The great anonymous mass of human beings ... undoubtedly have a real need for a philosophy - that is, for a consistent world-view and a body of guiding principles and clearly defined aims - this mass is effectively deprived by the bourgeoisie of any ideological material which might prove relevant to their existences.
(pp84-5)

Just because of this 'irrelevance', academic philosophy fails to attend to the real conditions of social existence and thus tends to describe the world in idealised terms - ignoring the needs, the alienation and the misery which are the real facts of oppression. And by portraying the world in this one-sided way, academic philosophy idealises the world and thus has the effect of justifying the established order:

Thus, the supreme function of bourgeois philosophy is to obscure the miseries of contemporary reality: the spiritual destitution of vast numbers of men ... and the increasingly intolerable disparity between what they could achieve and what little they actually accomplished. This philosophy conceals the true nature of bourgeois rule... It mystifies the victims of the bourgeois regime... It heads them into culs-de-sac where their rebellious instincts will be extinguished. It is the faithful servant of that social class which is the cause of all the degradation in the world today, the very class to which the philosophers themselves belong.
(p91)

But is this academic philosophy worth bothering about? It seems to be an utterly trivial, esoteric and absurd pass-time of a small handful of professional philosophy academics - it seems a harmless enough thing. Again, however, Nizan insists that we look at the actual phenomenon of academic philosophy in its real context. Then we see that philosophy is not just a pass-time for academics - it has definite and real effects upon others.

First of all, most academic philosophers are employed as *teachers*, and their ideas are taught to students and effect them. For example:

When, day after day, M. Brunschvieg expounds his philosophy without ever mentioning that men suffer, that their private lives are often nothing but a welter of trivial, painful or calamitous episodes, M. Brunschveig's students tend to forget what real men are like. These dutiful disciples meekly surrender to the illusion (which is so comforting to their consciences) that any man - or rather, any representative of that abstraction they call Man - would embrace the philosophy of their mentor.
(p106)

Furthermore, the effects of the academic's philosophy do not stop with students inside the university; but via these students and other readers etc academic philosophy is disseminated more widely. The ideas which are worked out and refined by academic philosophers are subsequently simplified, crudified and assimilated ultimately even into contemporary 'common sense' (5). The ideas of academic philosophers, thus worked upon, are used in all branches of ideology: they appear in the pronouncements of politicians, in the newspapers and on TV, in moral and scientific thought - in every area of life.

The process may be briefly described as follows: a group of philosophers, occupying the top positions in the University hierarchy, produces groups of ideas. These ideas are the raw material worked up in the University. They pass through a number of different workshops where they are reshaped, polished and simplified - or, to be more precise, where they are vulgarised and made fit for public consumption.
(p108)

As regards philosophy, this process is much more clearly at work in France, where state control of education is more centralised and direct than in this country, and where philosophy is a part of the state-controlled secondary school curriculum. But even though philosophy *as such* is not taught in schools in this country, and even though philosophy as such plays a smaller role in the wider culture here, it would be wrong to think that the ideas of academic philosophers have no effects outside the universities. Although it is less apparent, much the same process is at work here as in France.

Indeed, as a teacher I have been struck by the fact that the students I teach have already formed a definite and surprisingly uniform philosophy before they arrive at university. They come to university with a homogeneous positivistic empiricist and liberal-individualist view, albeit often unconsciously.

Thus Nizan argues that academic philosophy is not merely an *esoteric* pass-time, it also has an *exoteric* form in which it is disseminated to the mass of the people.

Just because academic philosophy is not as it appears to be, it is worth attacking. Just because it is not about mere 'concepts' but about reality; and just because what it says about reality is not 'detached' and 'neutral' as it pretends, but serves to justify the established order; and just because academic philosophy is not absurd and pointless games with words but in fact has real and important social effects - just because academic philosophy is not as it first appears, it is worthwhile and even necessary to attack it.

This philosophy is not dead. But it must be killed... For a philosophy does not voluntarily bow out of existence, any more than a regime dies until it is attacked. A new philosophy does not triumph until its predecessor has been destroyed, but a considerable effort is required to bring about the latter's dissolution.
(p48)

'Academicism' is frequently used in an ill-defined and superficial way, and critiques of the academicism of recent British philosophy have frequently concentrated almost exclusively on its immediate appearances (6). Nizan's critique of

4 In so far as it impinges on them, which it does - see below.

5 Hence 'common sense' is not a neutral foundation from which to construct a philosophy.

6 See footnote (3).

academicism goes beyond this which is what gives it its depth and strength. 'Academicism', for Nizan, is not merely a style of thought; for he never loses sight of the fact that academic philosophy (like any other sort of thought) is not just thought - it has not only a conceptual-spiritual being, but also a social-material existence. 'Academicism' is not, therefore, merely a style of thought, it is also a social-material form. And Nizan's book is not therefore aimed just at *academic* philosophy, but more precisely at *bourgeois academic* philosophy.(7)

3 THE REVOLUTIONARY PHILOSOPHER

Because he remains aware of its political consequences, Nizan stresses the importance of the struggle in the ideological realm. But he is aware, too, of the limitations of this form of struggle. He discusses these matters in his last chapter in which he outlines his ideal of 'the revolutionary philosopher'. This chapter has great relevance to the present attempts to develop a movement of 'radical philosophers'.

First of all, and on the basis of the ideas I have already outlined, Nizan argues that *theoretical* work - work in the ideological domain - is a vital and a necessary part of the revolutionary struggle. And it is wrong, therefore, to despise intellectual work for not being concrete practical political activity. The vital message of Nizan's book is that knowledge and understanding are *weapons* that do have concrete practical effects:

> *Knowledge and understanding are weapons. The question now is: will the bourgeoisie be permitted to consign these weapons to the scrapheap, or will men take up these weapons once again and use them as they see fit? In the universities, the lycees and the elementary schools, young people are indeed learning how to handle and apply these weapons, but for strictly academic purposes. Is there no possibility of their using this knowledge and understanding in more productive ways?*
> (p136)

The tendency to despise theoretical work is widespread on the left in this country (and in America). The slogan that 'theory should not be divorced from practice' is twisted into its opposite: it is interpreted to mean that *only* concrete practical political activity has any real effects or any real value in the struggle. Against this Nizan stresses that ideological work does have real effects and that the struggle against bourgeois ideology is an important one. He quotes Marx (p127):

> *The weapons of criticism cannot replace the criticism of weapons. Material force can only be overthrown by material force; but theory itself becomes a material force when it has seized the masses.*

Like Marx, Nizan is also very conscious of the limitations of the 'weapons of criticism'; and so he also opposes a second tendency which has manifested itself on the left and particularly among some radical philosophers: the tendency to believe in the absolute value of theoretical work in itself, and the tendency therefore to struggle only for a more congenial intellectual climate in which to think.

The criticism has been made that some people are proclaiming themselves to be 'radical philosophers' while in fact taking the 'Academic road'. The whole of Nizan's book is an attack upon the 'Academic road', but his account of the 'revolutionary philosopher' is particularly important in this context. According to Nizan, the revolutionary philosopher must be closely in touch with the revolutionary struggle. He must identify his interests with those of the oppressed and exploited - the working class. Nizan continues:

> *But I would go even further and bluntly assert that the technician of revolutionary philosophy must be and will be a member of a particular political party.*
> (p138)

It seems to me that this is the one major place in which Nizan's views need rethinking in the light of our present situation. This assertion of Nizan's would seem to imply a denial of the value of a movement like Radical Philosophy which is independent of political parties; but I think it would be wrong to draw this conclusion from Nizan's ideas as a whole.

When considering a movement like Radical Philosophy it is crucial to see it in its context. Today, in Britain, the situation on the left is very different from what it was in France in 1932, when Nizan was writing. Then, the forces of the left were concentrated and united overwhelmingly in the Communist Party - 'The Party'. The revolutionary left at the present time, however, does not have the sort of unity which makes reference to 'The Party' possible. The left here now is split into sectarian fragments (and this is indicative of its impotence). Indeed, in the current situation many leftists have withdrawn from active political engagement in any of the 'Parties', and there has grown up a widespread suspicion against all 'Parties'. *It is in this context that a movement like Radical Philosophy becomes necessary.* If the forces of the left were united and strong in such a way that there was a 'The Party', then no doubt there would be less need for a movement with such a vaguely and broadly defined type of radicalism, or with such a limited area of activity (philosophy). But in the present context it seems to me that there is a very real need for a movement like Radical Philosophy, and very real and useful tasks they can perform.

As for an assessment of Radical Philosophy in this light - it is still too soon to pass any final judgement. Radical Philosophers (and other intellectuals) have only just begun the process of organising themselves as a group and of working together. Whether an effective group of radical philosophers will emerge from these efforts remains to be seen. But, already, some of the dangers which threaten the development of an effective movement are becoming clear. I have mentioned them already and tried to bring out the way in which Nizan's book is relevant to them. First of all, radical philosophers must resist all the forces of their training and the pressures of their situation (either as students or teachers) which push them to take the 'Academic road' - a road that can be taken even in Marxist clothes. But secondly, no sort of ultra-radical, 'practice not theory' type of sectarian idealism and purism - whether in a libertarian or Leninist guise - should be allowed to fragment and destroy the movement before it has developed.

Nizan describes the task with absolute clarity and simplicity. And although he says everything that Radical Philosophy has been trying to say - and much better - this only makes the task of contemporary radical philosophers more urgent. Now we can read Nizan and know what is to be done - but still we must do it. This is *hard work*, and would-be radical philosophers must undertake it together.

7 Nizan also has well developed views about the ways in which the academic set-up and the class situation of the academic (petit-bourgeois) effect him and his philosophy. For the sake of brevity and clarity, I have omitted any account of Nizan's sociology of bourgeois academicism. Nevertheless, it is an extremely important part of his argument and should not be forgotten or ignored.

FULL MARX

Karl-Peter Markl, Kevin Mulligan & Ali Rattansi

Situating Marx edited by Paul Walton and Stuart Hall, paperback £1.45; hardback £2.95

Sociology of Meaning by John B O'Malley, paperback £1.55; hardback £3.95

This review was written in the framework of the Saturday morning group on Radical Epistemology and the Critique of Method at the Social and Political Sciences Department, Cambridge, in September 1972

The growth of sophisticated Marx scholarship in recent years serves to bring home to us not only the diversity of intellectual traditions upon which Marx drew, but also the way in which these different traditions, working in different conjunctures, have developed within Marxism so that today we have not merely 'Marxism', but several different *kinds* of Marxism. This latest offering on 'Situating Marx' grew out of a symposium held at Birmingham University to 'record' the publication of McLellan's selections from the *Grundrisse*, and it is an attempt to come to terms with precisely this diversity of intellectual traditions; it is the first, tentative step towards 'rediscovering the "total Marx"', as the editors put it - an evaluation of the differing traditions, and the development of 'a Marxism for our times and thus for the times to come'. Especially, we are warned about the dangers of ignoring this latter task in favour of equally important problems within Marxist historiography, though it is perhaps ironic that most of the contributions to this volume remain imprisoned within the academicism of Marxist historiography; this is the major shortcoming of a volume which in other respects contains much that is of interest and value.

McLellan's paper on the *Grundrisse* (which in a slightly different form has appeared twice before, in *Encounter* November 1970 and as the introduction to his selections from the *Grundrisse*) outlines in a brief but lucid overview the interpretative shifts - he lists six - that have characterized the development of Marxist thought from the evalutionism of the German Social Democrats to the latest structuralist elaborations of Althusser; the paper concludes with an evaluation of the importance of the *Grundrisse*. The account, however, is too brief and there is little *critical* discussion of these developments; the important replies to Althusser by U Jaeggi and A Schmidt, for instance, are completely neglected. (1)

We believe, with McLellan, that any account of Marx's intellectual development which claims that he abandoned the concept of alienation in his later works or that his intellectual development was ruptured by one precise 'epistemological break' needs to be rejected (2). McLellan's discussion is not entirely panegyric, however, for he points out that even though the *Grundrisse* reveals that the growth of technology and automation, the rise in working-class living standards and scientific competence, the emergence of leisure - the very factors often cited to disprove Marx's analysis - are actually viewed by Marx as necessary preconditions for his revolution (3). There is little discussion of the vexed question of the transition from capitalism to communism, and he also confesses to being puzzled by the tension between the long-term view of the *Grundrisse* and Marx's prognostications about a fairly imminent revolution implied in such later political writings as the *Drafts for the Civil War in France* and his remarks on Bakunin's *Statism and Anarchy*.

The tension between these two views may be more apparent than real, for McLellan fails to consider the possibility that Marx's historical perception was even greater than he is given credit for, that the first and better known theory of revolution derived from an analysis of a capitalist system still undergoing and experiencing the birth-pangs of industrialization - a process of transition described by Engels in his preface to the English edition of *Capital* as being from 'the period of manufacture proper, based on the division of manual labour', to the 'period of modern industry based on machinery' (4) and in which it was threatened by an impoverished class-conscious labour force, while his reflections in the *Grundrisse* relate to a fully industrialized capitalism which, for historically specific reasons, has managed to contain the revolutionary threat and is well on its way to exhausting its potentialities for further development. (5)

Walton's paper *From Alienation to Surplus Value* is an analysis of the centrality of labour as a category in Marx's thought, and the way in which it provides the unifying element in all his work, from the *1844 Manuscripts* to *Capital*; what is problematic in Walton's remarks, as Nicolaus points out in his *Comment* on the paper (p.37), is his description of 'labour' as a central *ontological* assumption and as providing the *philosophical* basis for his economics. This leads Walton to misunderstand certain aspects of the relationship between Marx's early and later writings, a misunderstanding that results from confusing political economy with philosophy. Walton sees the Marx of 1844 as already having worked out his ontology - "man's special teleological nature" (p.20) - and argues that the only break in his thought is an empirical not an ontological one, consisting in a "shift from merely viewing capitalism as extracting surplus from labour to his demonstration of how this is based on the extraction of surplus-value" (p.28). Walton's assumption that labour is an ontological rather than a socio-economic category commits him to the view that the historicity which informs Marx's later work, of which he is clearly aware, is already present in the *EPM's*, and he therefore fails to understand (see p.27) McLellan's earlier remark that "what is new in Marx's picture of alienation in the *Grundrisse* is that it attempts to be firmly rooted in history", allowing Marx to treat the central themes of the Paris Manuscripts "in a much maturer way" (p.12). Walton is right to point out that there occurs in Marx's work a shift from focussing on the market mechanism of capitalism to its productive relations, but fails to realize its relation to the increasing historicity which informs his later work. In the *1844 Manuscripts* we find an *anthropological* conception of alienation in which the origin of alienation is found to be not a specific social formation but in human nature, alienated man being contrasted to man as a 'species-being'; it is only with *The German Ideology* that Marx breaks with this conception and analyses alienation and exploitation as being rooted in specific historical structures, and it is this transformation in his historical awareness which eventually resulted in Marx's view of the significance of the mode of *production* on which the theory of surplus-value extraction in its final form is based (6). To treat labour as an ontological category and thus to anthropologize the concept of alienation is to reverse a step that marks a crucial development in Marx's thought.

1 Urs Jaeggi, "Ordnung und Chaos", Der Strukturalismus als Methode und Mode.
Alfred Schmidt "Der strukturalistische Angriff auf die Geschichte" in 'Beitrage zur marxistischen Erkenntmistheorie', edition Suhrkamp, 1969.

2 A point very well made by R.J. Bernstein in his most readable text, *Praxis and Action*, 1972.

3 A point already emphasized by Martin Nicholaus in *The Unknown Marx*, NLR 48.

4 *Capital* Vol.I, Moscow 1961, p5.

5 cf. *interalia*, the works of A Touraine and Serge Mallet.

6 See, for a similar viewpoint, E. Mandel, *The Formation of the Economic Thought of Karl Marx*, NLB 1971, ch.10.

The problem of alienation raises, however, the converse problem of non-alienation and the classless society and Sohn-Rethel's *Mental and Manual Labour in Marxism* is a remarkably interesting and suggestive discussion of this theme. As he points out, in a socialist society "the control of social production cannot lie with the workers so long as such control necessitates intellectual work beyond their scope", (p.47) while it is an essential condition of capitalistic relations "that the technology of production be founded upon a knowledge of nature from sources other than manual labour". (p.46). One of the main criteria for judging socialist progress must, therefore, be the elimination of the division of "head and hand". The *intellectual* basis of this division Sohn-Rethel locates in the a-historical, universal character of mathematics and science; the possibility of classlessness and the abolition of the division of labour "can be theoretically established only by proving that the logic of scientific thinking originates in social history - failing this, it would be technocracy, not socialism, we must expect of the future". He finds the *social and economic* roots of this thinking in the rise of commodity production in the Greek City States, and initially appearing in the philosophy of Pythagoras, Heraclitus and Parmemides around 500BC; the reason for this lies in the fact that commodity exchange is a process of abstraction by action, operating in time and space - an activity abstract from 'use', developing its own institutions, especially money, which then permeate the character of thought, leading eventually to the development of the a-historical, timeless and universal logic of the abstract intellect.

Sohn-Rethal also argues that with the advent of monopoly capitalism and the emergence of 'scientific management' there is developing a growing contradiction between the commensuration of manual labour, now based on time and motion study, and the relations of capitalist production, requiring as they do a commensuration of labour based on the exchange value of products.

This essay is undoubtedly the most substantive one in the volume; several problems, however, remain outstanding and our purpose here can only be to state some of them though they merit a great deal of discussion:

(1) Sohn-Rethel assumes (see p.50) that merely by locating the socio-economic roots of universal logic he has thereby seriously undermined its validity - such an assumption is seriously questionable;

(2) In so far as social organization is a constituent feature of technology it is obvious that socialism will require a different technology; but it is by no means obvious, as Sohn-Rethel seems to imply, [and this follows from (1) above] that the abolition of the division between mental and manual labour will require the development, for instance, of a mathematics whose logical principles will be entirely at variance with the categories of mathematics under capitalism;

(3) It must be pointed out that within capitalism the relationship between commensuration of labour by the exchange value of products and commensuration by time and motion study is *complementary* rather than *contradictory*.

If Sohn-Rethel is interested in *applying* historical materialism to social and intellectual structures, O'Neill is concerned to defend its critical function against attacks by Habermas and Althusser; the former is taken to task for his scientistic and technological reading of Marx while the latter is more justifiably accused of having robbed Marxism of its rich critical heritage in the Hegelian system. O'Neill's own notion of *critique*, based on Hegel's *Phenomenology*, the young Marx and Marleau-Ponty, is however weak and his critique of Althusser remains ineffectual.

Lest one suspect that O'Neill's problems stem inevitably from an underlying commitment to phenomenology, O'Malley's *Total Marx and the Whole of Man*, from a similar phenomenological perspective, turns out to be much more sophisticated. The publishers claim for this article an original critique of historical materialism, from a non-Marxist standpoint; a close reading and a decoding of O'Malley's esoteric terminology suggests that both claims are misleading - his critique is directed rather more at the anti-humanist structuralism of Althusser and Godelier than at historical materialism as such, and his genuine phenomenological and dialectical insights stand in a relationship of complementarity rather than in opposition to Marxism. (For O'Malley's promiscuity in this respect see below). His objections to Althusser will be familier to those who have read the critiques in *New Left Review* (7): he castigates Althusser for his scientism and for the ambiguity inherent in his distinction between 'science' and 'ideology' (pp.102, 110, 111), rejects the concept of the 'epistemological break' and points out that Althusser emasculates the concept of *praxis* and eliminates human agency completely from the schemes of things (p.106). Needless to say, Marx can hardly be accused of having left Man out of history, thus rendering O'Malley's critique applicable only to Althusser and not to historical materialism as such. What O'Malley does question in Marx is "whether, even if social productivity is a measure of sociality, sociality is reducible to that measure" (p.112), and yet recognizes that Marx was by no means committed to this kind of determinism; O'Malley's remarks here provide an effective corrective against those who see the socialization of the means of production as the only goal of socialist practice. For O'Malley the goal is "'total subjectivity', the anticipated and unrealized existential fulfilment of the potentialities inherent in the category of transcendental subjectivity." (p.114) But this is indeed very like Marx's own notion of non-alienated being, of conscious understanding and control of social relations, what O'Malley himself calls 'historical subjectivity'. O'Malley's paper illustrates the importance and usefulness of a phenomological reading of Marx, not least as a corrective against anti-humanist and basically non-dialectical alternatives.

In the final section of the book Ian Birchall, Stanley Mitchell and Jerry Palmer discuss the relationship between Marxism and the analysis of literary and artistic activity. Though Birchall's is an imaginative reconstruction of Marx's views on literature from fragmentary remarks in various works, the discussion hardly gets off the ground, the comments on the paper being too short and schematic to mark any advance in the creation of a Marxist theory of literature and art for which a comprehensive evaluation of the general contributions of Walter Benjamin, Lukacs and, marginally, L Goldmann is indispensable. It is equally disappointing that there is, for instance, no discussion of Fischer's *The Necessity of Art*, Williams' *Culture and Society*, or Wollheim's *Socialism and Culture*, nor of the stimulating contributions made by Hauser and others to the social history of art.

The contributions to the volume, then, are of an uneven quality, more often raising familiar problems than proposing imaginative solutions and rarely descending from the level of historiographical disputes. Despite the attempt to transcend sectarianism, the conflict between the humanists and anti-humanists permeates the discussion, though precisely because of this it provides an accurate reflection of the current state of Marxism.

Published concurrently with *Situating Marx* is a book by John O'Malley entitled *Sociology of Meaning*, by which he means not a sociological study of meaning but rather a sociology based on a dialectical understanding of meaning as its epistemological principle. Those who follow the socio-philosophical debate on the

7 N. Geras, *Althusser's Marxism*, NLR 71.
A. Glucksman, *A Ventriloquist Structuralism*, NLR 72.

Continent rather than narrow minded versions of analytic linguistic philosophy will meet in it a selection of familiar terms and thoughts. Certainly a book was needed to bridge the gap between a number of very fruitful developments in 'European' thought and Anglo-Saxon academic philosophy. This implies a re-introduction into English philosophy of some of the vocabulary currently preserved by sociology in this country. Unfortunately, *Sociology of Meaning*, if it offers a bridge of the required kind, does not do so in a very convenient manner. The English readers, mainly sociologists and philosophers, whom we have consulted found its language largely incomprehensible. Some thought it read like notes jotted down for further elaboration. The reconciliation of two estranged areas of thought is severely hampered by O'Malley's linguistic idiosyncracies. Also, and surely quite independent of the grammar involved, the author never hesitates to use unusual words from an extreme variety of specific philosophical jargons - unknown to most British schools of philosophy or even theoretical sociology.

Despite all this we can profit a great deal from the content and meaning of *Sociology of Meaning*. It should be the aim of a further debate to analyse its place in, or its relation to, more received thinking. Only then shall we find whether we are dealing with an original contribution to critical social theory or merely with a very complicated 'Ersatz'.

IDEOLOGY IN SOCIAL SCIENCE
Peter Binns

IDEOLOGY IN SOCIAL SCIENCE, edited by Robin Blackburn (Fontana 75p)

This book has got some real gems in it which are not otherwise readily available to students, and Robin Blackburn has done very well to dig them out of their relatively obscure holes for all to see. (In one case, Edward Nell's "Economics: The Revival of Political Economy", the essay is published for the first time). The sixteen essays are sorted into three sections: 'Critiques', 'Key Problems' and 'Alternatives', but this is a somewhat arbitrary - for instance Hobsbawm's "Karl Marx's Contribution to Historiography" included in the 'Alternatives' is in reality more like a critique of non-marxist and vulgar marxist historiography, and Nell's abovementioned paper, supposedly a 'Critique' is definitely proposing the 'Alternative' of Classical Political Economy (as amended by Piero Sraffa and Joan Robinson).

The volume begins with Macpherson's brilliant "Post-Liberal-Democracy?". 19th century Liberal-Democratic theory was "an uneasy compound of the classical liberal theory (... individual right to unlimited acquisition of property, to the capitalist market economy, and hence to inequality), and the democratic principle of the equal entitlement of every man to a voice in choosing governments and other satisfactions". Macpherson traces through the growing strain and contradiction between these principles, throwing interesting light on Green's anti-landlordism and Mill's proposals for cooperatives of artisans. The symptoms of the complete breakdown in Liberal-Democratic theory are to be seen in the changes in the society justified ("Our present managed economy, managed both by the state and by the price-making corporation... is still capitalism. But it has made nonsense of the justifying theory"), and in the abandonment of Classical Political Economy for marginalism - a theory which justifies the status quo *whatever* it is.

Another gem is Nell's "The Revival of Political Economy". This is surely the best short (and clear) summary of what is at issue between Classicists and Marxists on the one hand and the neo-Classicists on the other. The importance of this issue for all aspects of radical social thought cannot be overestimated. The Labour Theory of Value stands or falls on it and so consequently do the concepts of class, exploitation and alienation. Nell destroys the claims of Capital by showing that the notion rests upon an ambiguity: "On the one hand it is property in the means of production ... On the other hand 'capital' also means produced means of production... 'Capital' is relevant to the analysis of the division of income among the members of society, but a non-specific fund has no bearing on production. 'Capital goods' are relevant to the study of production, but have no bearing on the distribution of income, since profit is earned and interest paid on the *fund* (value) of capital invested, regardless of its specific form. 'Capital goods', specific instruments, can only be converted into a fund of 'capital' on the basis of a given set of prices for these instruments; but to know these prices we must already know the general rate of profit... Hence the amount of 'capital' cannot be among the factors which set the level of the rate of profit."

The final five essays (in the 'Alternatives' section) are all important and interesting. Nicolaus's "The Unknown Marx", stands apart from the others. The Grundrisse is less unknown than when Nicolaus originally wrote this for NLR, but the author's claim that the Grundrisse throws essential light on contemporary aspects of Capitalism (specially on automation, leisure, and the absolute limits of the capitalist production process) cannot seriously be challenged. The other four articles should be read together. It is probably best to begin with Godelier's "Structure and Contradiction in 'Capital'", which presents us with one of the clearest examples of the structuralist approach to the subject, replete with illuminating parallels with Levi-Strauss. With this as a basis, the other essays can be seen as attempting to modify aspects of this analogy. Thus Geras ("Marx and the Critique of Political Economy") argues that fetishism, crucial to the critique of capitalism, is "the absurdity not of an illusion, but of reality itself..." a notion which stands outside the framework of Althusser (and Godelier). Hobsbawm ("Karl Marx's Contribution to Historiography") shows the difficulty of a structural model successfully envisaging "the simultaneous existence of stabilising and disruptive elements which such a model must reflect." Finally, Colletti's "Marxism: Science or Revolution?" shows that "This view clearly allows no room for a link between science and class-consciousness... let alone for the 'partisanship' of science".

Overall, the book is an odd mixture of an open-minded anthology (witness the above paragraph) and intellectual partisanship. For the latter see Nairn's article on "The English Working Class", backed up by Stedman Jones on "History: The Poverty of Empiricism". Nairn's significance is overwhelmingly derived from a reaction to historians like E P Thompson, and as a consequence his paper appears weaker and limper than it might in the company of one of the latter's pieces such as "The Peculiarities of the English."

But this, and a few other flaws, do not in any important way diminish the excellent value of this book. It contains some quite outstanding papers, and it will surely remain a classic for some time to come. What is more it is quite reasonably cheap and won't fall apart as soon as you open it.

"The true and lawful goal of the sciences is none other than this: that human life be endowed with new discoveries and powers. But of this the great majority have no feeling, but are merely hireling and professorial...In general, so far are men from proposing to themselves to augment the mass of arts and sciences, that from the mass already at hand they neither take nor look for anything more than what they may turn to use in their lectures, or to gain, or to reputation, or to some similar advantage." (Bacon)