gingly, with Derrida’s treatment of Aristotle and Saussure, Evans concludes that Derrida’s early writings as a whole, with all their claims to rigour, ‘overwhelmingly fail to live up to their own standards’. It is a ‘discouraging’ result, as Evans admits, but it makes for an important and necessary book.

Jonathan Rée


Here is an attempt to chart the relationship between historiography and linguistics, and to apply this to a case of the language of social distinction and domination, the language of class, estate and degree, and of power. The first task is fulfilled by the first and last essays. P. J. Corfield’s text, written for historians, is a competent account of the state of the art within the structuralist problematic that seemed particularly urgent in the ‘70s, when linguistics was seen as the model for all the social sciences to imitate: what conceptual tools can historians borrow from linguistics? William Downes envisages the converse question (how can the linguistic deal with the peculiarities of the historian’s pragmatic position?) from the more recent point of view of discourse linguistics and philosophy of language: he analyses the hermeneutic paradoxes of historiography in the light of Putnam, Grice and the concept of relevance (Sperber and Wilson), and applies his findings to the case study of Paul Robeson’s appearance before the Committee on Un-American Activities – and it appears that the intentional theory of meaning cannot adequately capture the intricacies of meaning and understanding of historical documents. The intermediate essays, written by historians, account for the constitution of the semantic field of class in Great Britain (Tudor and Stuart England, eighteenth-century Britain and the Victorian period), with an extension to the range of the study to other European countries (Spain, France and Germany), and to other continents (India, China, the US). Perhaps because it was more exotic to me, I found David Washbrook’s analysis of the penetration of and adaptation to the European ideologies of language in the Raj particularly compelling. Even if this collection does not really bring new light on the theoretical relationships between the two fields, it is excellently conceived and executed and, a rare thing in such cases, it reads as a single text, not a medley of discordant tunes.

Jean-Jacques Lecerle


Writing on the postmodern appears to be going through a curious bout of nostalgia as iconoclasm begins to look for its ancestors. In a series of sympathetic readings of the triumvirate of his title, Pefanis identifies Bataille as the key mediator in the constitution of the problematic of postmodern philosophy. Bataille, the theorist of excess and of a general economy based upon the destructive consumption of surplus, is at last beginning to emerge as a key figure, but behind him there are other key figures, notably Kojève, whose studies of Hegel influenced a whole generation from Queneau to Lacan. Behind Bataille stands the shade of Mauss and his theory of the gift, but behind Mauss stands the figure of Durkheim and the ‘total social fact’. In his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, Foucault speculated that the whole of modern thought might be no more than an attempt to escape Hegel, adding that it was quite possible that Hegel had outwitted us once more and that we might find him waiting for us, immobile and already elsewhere. Hegel might not be the only ghost lying in wait for us. The ghosts in question are probably more familiar in France than on this side of the Channel, and Pefanis does well to conjure them up.

The readings offered here are patient and cogent. Pefanis ranges from Clastres on sacrifice and violence to the Situationists, and provides sympathetic but not uncritical examinations of Lyotard and Baudrillard. He is cagey about claiming Bataille as a precursor of the postmodern, being anxious to avoid ‘the mistakes of modernism in the construction of a revised pantheon of universal values’, but in fact demonstrates the case very convincingly. He does rather more than continue the narration of the heterodoxial tradition in French thought (his stated ambition), and succeeds in locating it in its political and cultural context. Pefanis also displays, perhaps unwittingly or unwillingly, some very pre-postmodernist virtues. When he speculates that Lyotard’s ‘crisis of the meta-narratives’ can be seen as Lyotard’s own loss of political faith and his own crisis with the meta-narratives of Freud and Marx, he is probably right. But he is also coming very close to a very traditional-author-based history of ideas. Sadly he misses the irony of Lyotard’s position: the story of his or our incredulity at ‘Great Narratives’ has surely become a great narrative in its own right.

Pefanis writes engagingly and wittily, but the plethoric use of prefixes like ‘pre-’ and ‘post-’ does become irritating. Not the least of the text’s attractions is that Pefanis, like Baudrillard in his lighter and more convincing moments, at last gives space to Jarry. For all its distrust of seriousness and its insistence on play, the postmodern is all too often too serious for its own good (Baudrillard’s lugubriously ponderous Cool Memories being a case in point). Bored and sceptical theorists could do worse than revive Jarry’s putative ‘pataphysics’ or science of imaginary solutions. Heterology and the Postmodern appears in a new series entitled ‘Post-Contemporary Interventions’. Somewhere, Jarry’s Dr Faustroll must be laughing. Born at the age of 63 in 1898, when the twentieth century was minus two years old, he was obviously always destined to be the patron saint of the post-contemporary.

David Macey

Allen W. Wood, Hegel’s Political Thought, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990. xxi + 293pp., £30.00 hb, 0 521 37432 4, £10.95 pb, 0 521 37782 X.

Since its very beginnings with Russell and Moore, analytical philosophy has generally regarded Hegel as the paradigm of error and illusion in philosophy. What, then, is a respectable analytical philosopher like Wood doing writing a book on the man? Wood wastes no time in allaying any suspicion that he has succumbed to Hegelian temptation. ‘Speculative logic is dead’, we are told at the outset: Hegel’s dialectical approach is nothing more than an ‘utterly unconvinging’ mishmash of ‘shallow sophistries’ (p. 4). After this inauspicious start, however, Wood has gone on to write a remarkably good book. Its topic is, as its title indicates, Hegel’s ethical thought. It gives an excellent – clear, scholarly, useful and, on the whole, reliable – account of Hegel’s central ideas in this area. The main focus is on Hegel’s Philosophy of Right; though, where necessary, a full account is given of Hegel’s other works. Hegel is portrayed as advocating a distinctive ethic of ‘self-actualization’ which cannot be assimilated either to more familiar deontological or teleological approaches in ethics. Wood shows how the Philosophy of Right presents a series of ‘images’
of the development of freedom and self-consciousness, in which the human agent conceives of itself 'successively, ever more concretely and adequately, first as a "person" possessing abstract rights, then as a 'subject' with a moral vocation, then in the concrete spheres of ethical life as a family member, burgher, and finally as a citizen' (p. 32).

The book contains detailed and informative accounts of Hegel's views on freedom, rights, property, punishment and 'ethical life' (Sittlichkeit). Perhaps one should not ask for more. As it turns out, the rejection of dialectic is less damaging than one might think; and yet, inevitably, there is a cost. In characteristic analytical style, Wood tends to treat Hegel's ethical thought as a series of independent and separate doctrines on various issues. What is abandoned with dialectic is the systematic interconnections that Hegel sees between them – his attempt to unify his ethical ideas into a larger systematic whole. Indeed, the very subject of Wood's book illustrates this. For in Hegel's work, morality and ethics are only the initial parts of the larger whole treated in the *Philosophy of Right*. Wood's account takes us only up to the stage of 'ethical life', and stops short of the discussion of the State and political institutions with which the *Philosophy of Right* culminates.

Perhaps, as Wood asserts, the systematic and speculative side of Hegel's thought is in many respects flawed and untenable. However, that is surely an issue which needs to be investigated and discussed in any fully adequate treatment of Hegel's philosophy. If Wood is too quick to dismiss Hegel's dialectic, his treatment of Hegel's ethical ideas suffers at times from the opposite fault. Wood often confines himself to a descriptive exposition of Hegel's views. To be sure, Wood does an excellent job of this; but at times one wishes for more critical engagement with Hegel's ideas and more attempt to bring them into relation with modern discussion – and, yes, for intelligent criticism of them from an analytical perspective. Nevertheless, as an account of ideas which are often ferociously obscure and difficult, this book does an excellent and much-needed job. It contains perhaps the fullest and best treatments of Hegel's ethics available in English. For that Wood deserves the gratitude of even the most committed Hegelians.

Sean Sayers


In this book the author sets out to show that a 'strong' concept of the self needs to be placed at the centre of debates in political philosophy. He seeks to expose an 'intractable problem' at the heart of the Western tradition of political theory from Plato onwards: namely, that a political appreciation of the self must respect the complexity of the self while at the same time making it safe for society. The conclusion reached is that in social theory the freedom of the 'subject' is compromised for the sake of social order (and perhaps for the subject's sake too, as in the Rousseauian dictum of forcing the self to be free), for 'there is no alternative. Or rather, the alternative is to do what all the theorists considered (except Hobbes) do, Rousseau most of all. Representing this compromise as if it were actually the realization of true selfhood and the like – that is, tell the lie'. Alford wishes to maintain a delicate balance between the demands of both self and society, recognizing the necessity and benefits of social order without jeopardising the integrity of the self. In the opening chapter he usefully situates his argument in the context of recent work by Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel, and Charles Taylor. He wants to avoid the pitfalls of the aforementioned communitarians who, he argues, surrender the freedom and integrity of the self to the community (individuality is both constituted by the community and independent of it too), and of the liberalism of someone like John Rawls which relies on such a thin or 'weak' notion of the self as to render it trivial. The originality of his approach is to be found in the novel way that he draws on psychoanalysis – that of Heinz Kohut and Lacan much more than Freud – to give substance to his call for social and political theory to develop a deep or strong notion of the self.

Why the author has chosen the particular thinkers he has to examine the problem of the self in social theory is never explicitly justified (there are a few references to a vague entity called 'liberal traditionalism'), and the selection frequently assumes an arbitrary character. Part of the reason probably lies in his rejection of an historicist approach (which would seek to show that the self is first and foremost a historical concept) as he does not wish to assume – to give one example – that the self under capitalism must always be a possessive individualist. While this anti-reductionist posture merits respect, it does mean that the book lacks a real coherence owing to some glaring omissions: is it possible to discuss such a topic as the self without any reference to Nietzsche? (The argument that Nietzsche is of no relevance to political theory has now been rendered obsolete with some major studies on this topic in recent years.) Kant and Hegel are only mentioned in passing, as is Foucault (whose late work should be crucial to Alford's concerns), and nothing is said about Richard Rorty's 'post-modern' reading of Rawls. In many instances, therefore, the book has the flavour of a 'work in progress', cutting slices into the texts of some of the key thinkers of the tradition of political theory; and while the readings of particular thinkers are often incisive and instructive (the one on Rawls is the most novel), the book as a whole lacks a coherent unifying narrative which would lend (even more) instruction to the important story of the self the author wishes to relate. Despite these flaws, the book is a thought-provoking contribution to political thinking, adventurous in approach if limited in scope.

Keith Ansell-Pearson

Peter Singer, ed., *A Companion to Ethics* (1991), Oxford, Blackwell, 1991, £60.00 hb, 0 63116 211 9) forms part of the Blackwell Companions to Philosophy, a reference series designed to cover not only analytic philosophy but Continental and non-Western traditions as well. The collection is made up of 47 original essays which are divided into sections, each addressing a different aspect of ethics. These range from a historical outline of Western ethical traditions to a consideration of specific themes: how we ought to live, the nature of ethics and an overview of the application of ethics to contemporary problems. The strengths of the collection lie in the inclusion of a section on non-Western ethics (Indian, Buddhist, Islamic and classical Chinese ethics), areas that are not usually covered in histories of the subject, and papers mapping the new directions ethics is currently taking, for example feminist and environmental ethics. The collection is extensively indexed with valuable cross-references which, together with useful bibliographies and further reading suggestions that are included at the end of each entry, aid the book in its aim as a reference volume. This is more a collection for those already acquainted with the subject, and the originality of the papers makes it interesting reading for those who are.

Lucy Frith