
Hegel was surely right to say that philosophy "is its own time apprehended in thought." He also believed that philosophy responds only after the event: "the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk." That is more questionable. In our time, a veritable
Berlin Wall has stretched across the intellectual no less than the political landscape, dividing Marxist from non-Marxist thought. Although the real Berlin Wall is only now being breached, its intellectual counterpart has been coming down for some time. Since the sixties, indeed, there has been an increasing dialog across the great divide. On the one side, Marxism is more and more recognized to be an essential and indispensable part of the intellectual mainstream; and on the other, Marxism has developed in new and fruitful ways by adapting and incorporating aspects of other schools, like existentialism, structuralism, and analytical philosophy.

Brien's book is an important and impressive example of this. It is an ambitious and wide ranging exploration of some of the major themes of Marxist philosophy, centered around the concept of freedom. Brien's approach is well anchored in a detailed treatment of the work of Marx (both early and late), Engels and others in the Marxist tradition (Ollman, Althusser, Messauro). However, an unusually broad spectrum of other views is also explored and brought to bear in the argument. The ideas of the Hegelian philosopher Brand Blanshard, the feminist Nancy Chodorow, the physicist David Bohm, the social theorist Erich Fromm, and even the Zen thinker D. T. Suzuki, are discussed with sympathy and incorporated skillfully as the argument develops.

The result is an original, richly drawn and challenging work. Its main purpose is to develop an account of freedom and unalienated activity. However, his argument ranges far more widely than such a brief description suggests, to include detailed consideration of Marx's method, the idea of internal relations, feminism, human needs, and many other topics.

Brien gives a humanist interpretation of Marxism. He begins with an account of human reality in terms of the Heideggerian concept of “being-in-the-world.” He wants to rid this concept of its phenomenological overtones and interpret it in purely ontological terms. According to Brien, we have the possibility of transcending our situation: “human beings are always more than antecedent conditions may have made them be, by virtue of their capacity to make what they become by their own activity” (45). This rules out any purely deterministic and economistic account of Marxism, and obliges us to acknowledge that there is a measure of indeterminacy in social and economic life.

Marxism, Brien argues, seeks to overcome the alienation—the divisions and separations—imposed by capitalist social relations both in practice and in theory. Unalienated activity is freedom as a “mode-of-being”; a condition in which we are not divided from others or from ourselves by social relations. Perhaps the most valuable part of the book is Brien's extended exploration of this notion. He portrays it as a condi-

BOOK REVIEWS
sible to understand all this in terms of a theory which sees capitalism as a purely negative social form; and one which has no determining influence whatever on the new society which emerges out of it. On the contrary, if we are to do justice to the complexity and power of Marx's thought in this area, we must recognize the contradictory character of capitalism. We must see that there are both positive and negative aspects to it. Indeed, in Hegel's words, we must "see the positive in the negative."

Of course there are problems with such a position, some of which Brien describes; but a strong case can be made that it is Marx's position, nevertheless. And, if it is, then there are far deeper difficulties for Brien than he recognizes. It may be that there are real differences and incompatibilities between Marxism and existentialism — in which case, the synthesis that Brien is seeking is ultimately impossible, and a fruitful dialog and interaction is the most that can be hoped for.

SEAN SAYERS

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