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**a Journal of Dialectical and Historical Materialism**

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# NST

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## a Journal of Dialectical and Historical Materialism

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# Oscar Wilde's London: Human Identity and the Bourgeois Illusion in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Victor N. Paananen

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* Oscar Wilde reveals an understanding of the consequences for a man, and indeed for a generation, of the attempt of late-bourgeois culture to find human identity through the total subjectivism advocated in the influential work of Walter Pater. It was, however, unfortunately the case that Wilde was not able to act upon his awareness of the corrupting impact that Pater had had in order to change his own life before self-destruction was complete. Pater's journey into the isolated self is the final phase of the Romantic inward quest, but it is a quest that discovers nothing beyond the pleasures of one's own sensations: "Every one of those impressions," Pater writes in the conclusion to *The Renaissance*, "is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world" (Pater n.d., 196). This formulation is the final and extreme version of the bourgeois illusion that human identity is independent of social relations.

Pater's influence was felt at a time when the opposing Marxist understanding that human identity is social in character was also winning adherents in England. Wilde's novel depicts the attempt to sustain an identity in the bourgeois illusion but also leads us to see, as did the Marxists, that identity is in fact created by activity in the world and by the social relations that such

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activity reveals. Despite Pater's profound influence on the thought and the life of Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* also serves as Wilde's critique of Pater's ideas.

Dorian's relationship to his portrait functions in the novel as a highly effective representation of these two contradictory views of human identity in this age. Dorian is frozen in his youthful beauty in the conscious artificiality of high bourgeois culture, but his portrait, hidden in a locked room, records his true identity as his activity shapes it. It is an identity determined by social relationships and not one that is either innate or found through a subjective quest. It is the real Dorian, while the Dorian seen in West End drawing rooms is an illusion.

Although life in the West End of London is conducted in furtherance of Lord Henry's pronouncement that the "aim of life is self-development. To realize one's nature perfectly" (Wilde 1985, 41), and although the doctrines of Walter Pater that Lord Henry mouths would relegate all events and all sins to the status of strictly mental realities (42), at least one of the West End's inhabitants, the painter Basil Hallward, is aware that one pays for one's beautiful sins "in remorse, in suffering" and "in the consciousness of degradation." Dorian proves Hallward's estimate to be true, and he in time pays for his sins, but the payment seems for much of the novel to be exacted only in the portrait while Dorian himself remains a beautiful art object until the denouement proves that he has, in fact, defined himself socially. "To pay for one's sins" is to admit social relationships as the basis of human identity.

The West End and East End were, by the time late in the nineteenth century when Wilde's novel was written, routinely invoked as the material manifestation of the contrasting poles of wealth and poverty on which English civilization was based. Dorian Gray's victims are Basil Hallward, the voice of social conscience in the novel, and the East End brother and sister Sybil and James Vane, who fall into Dorian's way in his pursuit of pleasure (which from a Paterian perspective can also be called the pursuit of self-development). The poor, whose world is routinely identified as the East End by characters in the novel, are kept in the minds of the readers through frequent references in

the dialogue—but often this dialogue consists of exchanges in which West End residents are urged to forget that the East End exists: “The less said about life’s sores the better,” says Lord Henry, and the Duchess of Harley responds, “You are really very comforting . . . for I take no interest at all in the East End” (Wilde 1985, 64–65).

The people of the East End included not only a proletarian population that contributed to the surplus value upon which the West End lived but also a vast reserve army of labor that kept wages low and surplus value high. The East End is also the dockland and therefore port of entry for the wealth of British imperialism at the height of its power: Wilde pictures a world of “Women with hoarse voices and harsh laughter. . . . Drunkards . . . [and] grotesque children huddled upon doorsteps” (Wilde 1985, 117), but it is also the world into which the ships bring the opium that Dorian eventually seeks, where he will be “seen brawling with foreign sailors” (173) and among “Malays . . . playing with bone counters” (223). Although there is no hint of it in the novel, this is also the area in which firm working-class resistance to exploitation had recently taken shape in the London dock strike of 1889.

The Marxist critic Alick West has described the events of the novel in a way that recognizes that Dorian’s quest for “sin” must lead him to the East End:

The girl Dorian Gray loves comes from the East End, and he leaves her also. But then the East End becomes his obsession. He puts off his gentleman’s dress and in disguise haunts the opium dens of the slums. He returns to his aesthetic solitude and with fascination studies in the artist’s work his deepening loathsomeness. And in the East End, where the aesthete seeks distraction from his boredom, the gentleman is found by his enemy. (West 1958, 139)

Economically the West End and East End are part of a relationship defined by the nature of capitalism. Without East End victims, the West End is not the West End; however much Dorian’s beauty is admired by others in the West End, he has no

identity in that gilded cage other than his class identity as a “gentleman.” Dorian becomes human when he at the end of the book assumes the features that have already taken shape in the portrait: human identity is socially defined, and Dorian’s true identity, based on a quest for “sin” that is in itself an admission that self-development independent of social relationship is impossible, is by then monstrous.

For a time, Dorian follows the path recommended by Pater in submitting himself to art, and he briefly finds his emotions engaged by it so deeply as to give him the illusion of living by means of it. This self-deception happens when Sybil Vane’s performances so grip him that he deceives himself that he is in love with her. “I wish I could love,” Dorian laments late in the novel. “I am too much concentrated on myself. My own personality has become a burden to me” (Wilde 1985, 242). Love is, of course, itself discovered through relationships with others. [As the Marxist critic Christopher Caudwell explains, “‘love’ . . . is man’s name for the emotional element in social relations” (Caudwell 1938, 130)]. But Dorian’s “love” is for the commodity represented by Sybil’s performance and not for Sybil herself. Sybil has come to the world of illusion herself because her own world, the world of the poor, offers her only deprivation. But she can sustain neither her own nor Dorian’s illusion, and Dorian comes to see her love for him, if it is to be admitted as social relatedness, as only vulgar contact with the masses. Thereafter her performances reveal to him only her lowly origins. Dorian had previously participated in the bourgeois pretense that in matters of art or “love,” class can be ignored.

The workingman James Vane, Sybil’s brother, is deeply class-conscious. He knows that he is too shabby to visit Hyde Park; he eats his dinner at 5 o’clock even though the novel has told us that no person of fashion can dine before seven. He has no aspirations to enter the fashionable life of the West End: “Society!” he says. “I don’t want to know anything about that” (Wilde 1985, 89). He hates young dandies like Dorian by a “curious race-instinct” (93). He resents his mother’s and Sybil’s need for the illusions of the stage which allow them to hide from life: “I should like to make some money to take you and Sybil

off the stage. I hate it” (89). He has in the novel the role of enforcing class relationships: he attempts to revenge Sybil against the gentlemen. But Vane is himself killed in an accident that can accurately be called a class crime, resulting as it does from the gentlemanly sport of hunting.

When James Vane dines in a shabby home in the Euston Road, there is “the rumble of omnibuses, and the clatter of street-cabs” (97), but, when West End people dine in Mayfair, “the dim roar of London is like the bourdon note of a distant organ” (23). The bourgeois illusion of a socially independent reality requires the suppression of the commercial reality which maintains the bourgeoisie. Or, as Oscar Wilde put it, “A gentleman never looks out of the window” (Ellmann 1988, 215). Only once in the novel does Dorian “in his own delicately-scented chamber” admit to hearing from outside “the sound of men going forth to work” (Wilde 1985, 159, 162).

Yet, despite Wilde’s usual insistence that nothing matters except fine sensations, some social concern on Wilde’s part was evident both before his imprisonment (as seen in a work like *The Soul of Man under Socialism*) and after his imprisonment (which produced “The Ballad of Reading Gaol”). But Wilde’s “Socialism” was, in fact, anarchism, a political faith that is possible only when class relationships are ignored. To Wilde “Socialism” is “of value simply because it will lead to Individualism” (Wilde 1930, 258). The historical era that he admires is the one that formed bourgeois culture with its belief, shared by Wilde, that the “primary aim of [one’s] life is self-development” (284):

One might point out how the Renaissance was great, because it sought to solve no social problem, and busied itself not about such things, but suffered the individual to develop freely, beautifully, and naturally, and so had great and individual artists, and great and individual men. (Wilde 1930, 283)

Wilde frequently expressed agreement with Pater’s argument that life’s goal was no more than a perfected sensibility. He did, moreover, argue in behalf of an art for art’s sake philosophy and in behalf of the viewpoint that sees ethical sympathies as without

justification (as the preface to *Dorian Gray* demonstrates). Yet Wilde was himself like Dorian in seeking out his own “beautiful sins” that were possible only when one enters into social relationship. One “may commit a sin against society,” Wilde admits in *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, “and yet realize through that sin his true perfection” (Wilde 1930, 266). Like Dorian, Wilde felt “that pride of individualism that is half the fascination of sin” (Wilde 1985, 272). Thus, even though to a disciple of Pater “What is outside of him should be a matter of no importance” (Wilde 1930, 263), Wilde’s quest for “sin” was his admission that the social context of one’s action is what creates identity; and, as Joyce Carol Oates has observed, “It is . . . the fact that he involves others in his life’s drama . . . that constitutes Dorian’s sin” (1981, 4).

The story of *Dorian Gray* therefore expresses the tragic division in Wilde himself. Retreating into aestheticism and anarchism as a thinker, Wilde as a sinner knew that value resided in social relationships: in fact, in order to be sin, sin must have a victim. Although the imputed narcissism of the homosexual might be a corollary to the self-admiration and concern with individual flowering that links Pater and the anarchists, Wilde’s own sexual affairs of course involved him in relationships, often with working-class youths. “Why am I so fascinated by pimply little railway porters?” Terry Eagleton has Wilde ask in Eagleton’s play *St. Oscar*. “To encounter something a little more real than cucumber sandwiches,” but also “To expiate my sins as a social fraud” (Eagleton 1989, 28).

From what Georg Lukács might call Wilde’s own “intensive experience” of a life in which West End self-indulgence did not suffice for his beautiful sin, Wilde was to write a book that presented, as Lukács puts it, “the essential social factors that determine the world depicted” (1964, 147). In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* Wilde, in fact, painted a far more comprehensive picture of a necessary relatedness than he was willing to admit to in life. The novel serves Wilde as the portrait in the locked room serves Dorian: it admits what self-obsessed West End residents choose to deny. Wilde would assert that he preferred West End illusion to East End social reality:

On meeting Olive Schreiner, he asked her why she lived in the East End. "Because the people there don't wear masks." "And I live in the West End because the people there do." He announced also, "A gentleman never goes east of Temple Bar." (Ellmann 1988, 258)

But, of course, Wilde's search for the sensation to which one's life is dedicated under the principles of Pater to which he subscribed, took him, like Dorian, far east of the traditional boundary of Temple Bar.

Actually, Wilde entertained the male prostitutes that both his lover Alfred Douglas and he enjoyed in the West End, but for the novel Wilde can transfer Dorian's sin to the locale in which its social content is made evident. Using the East End in the way that he does in the novel, Wilde evokes the class relationship that gives the West End its identity; in the novel the East End can also house the social activity that gives Dorian his individual identity (as revealed in the portrait). Wilde's own need for the East End revealed the truth about its relationship to the West End.

Wilde, despite his apparent success in ignoring social realities, knew what relationship existed between the classes in England. Speaking of his feelings while attending chapel services with the other prisoners during his time in Reading Gaol, he said: "I long[ed] to rise in my place and cry out, and tell the poor disinherited wretches around me that it is not so; to tell them they are society's victims, and that society has nothing to offer them but starvation in the streets, or starvation and cruelty in prison!" (Ellmann 1988, 518). Wilde had been pulled in two directions ever since Oxford, where Pater's influence on him was countered by that of the socially conscious Ruskin. Yet it was Pater that he allowed to determine the course of his life, and having presented his critique of Pater by writing *Dorian Gray*, he characteristically enacts this fundamental contradiction in his nature by writing a preface that is a classic restatement of Pater's art-for-art's sake argument. As Richard Ellmann noted, "Wilde the preface-writer and Wilde the novelist deconstruct each other" (1988, 315).

After his imprisonment, Wilde meant to modify his

statements about art: “The essay he had planned which would have allowed pity into his aesthetic system, making explicit what he always underplayed—the power of art to exorcise cruelty and to offer a perpetual Last Judgment in which the verdict was always merciful—never got written” (Ellmann 1988, 556–57). Instead Wilde was first reunited for a time with Alfred Douglas: “Most of their time went in dawdling about the cafes or the beaches, good-humoredly competing for Neapolitan boys” (Ellmann 1988, 551). When with Douglas, Wilde seemed to have had what Richard Ellmann has identified as an “attitude toward sexual transactions” that “was the conventional one of his class. He did not think of his behavior with boys as of any consequence . . . they were prostitutes, to be bought or sold” (Ellmann 1988, 436). Seeing them as commodities, Wilde could choose not to admit the actual social relationship in which he participated. In order to sustain the bourgeois illusion of a socially independent existence, he resorted to the self-deception made possible by the fetishism of the commodity. And yet Wilde ultimately knew, as did the “sinner” Dorian Gray, that he was at all times shaping his own identity through relationships such as these. His feelings for the boys, whatever name he gave those feelings, were what Caudwell called “the emotional element in social relations.”

Wilde seems at the end of his life like Coleridge’s *Ancient Mariner* who must endlessly repeat the same story. A fable he narrates not long before his death has the moment of self-recognition familiar from Dorian’s story:

In a mirror he saw the being whom he had pursued in youth. “This time you shall not escape me,” he said, but the being did not try to escape, and hid its face no more. “Look!” it cried, “and now you will know that we cannot see each other again, for this is the face of your own soul, and it is horrible.” (Ellmann 1988, 566)

But, knowing that his own socially determined identity similarly existed for him to see if he consented to look into the mirror, Wilde continued to the end in the pretense that one could “wear a mask of glass” (Wilde 185, 82)—even though he has Lord Henry say that one cannot do so—that separates oneself from the impact

of relationship on identity. He spent his final days “playing gentleman,” as Richard Ellmann puts it, choosing an illusory isolation like that of the West End even in his final poverty in Paris (1988, 571). The work of Pater not only “had a strange influence over [Wilde’s] life” but led him to throw away that life (47). Striving to be a beautiful Dorian Gray in the West End, he publicly denied the relatedness to other people that would have allowed him to admit his genuine identity. Pater professed to offer the way to authentic existence—“To burn always with this hard gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life”—but he inspired Wilde—and his generation—in an attempt to transform consciousness and the sensations that it contains into art objects, commodities claiming only beauty for themselves while masking the social relations that make such “self-development” possible (n.d. 197). The direction in which he would continue was forecast when Oscar Wilde decorated his flat in Tite Street, Chelsea, and finding that one window overlooked a slum street, covered it “with a wooden grating . . . copied from a Cairo pattern” (Julian 1969, 145–46).

*Department of English*  
*Michigan State University*

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**REPLACES AD PAGE.**

# Out of Engels's Wastebasket, etc.

Danny Goldstick

## *Introduction, partly abstracted from the Abstract*

Engels's anti-"apriorism" did not mean he had no use for "*a priori*" knowledge in the sense of general truths known otherwise than by inference from the knower's own experience. A rational principle like the preferability of simpler to less simple causal explanations could be one example. Lenin too likely had or came to have an antiempiricist take on objective rationality.

\* \* \*

Perhaps the very first thing necessary when the pendulum swings back to pro-Marxism in the different nations of the Second World might *not* be a full restoration of the Marx-Engels-Lenin trivia industry in all its glorious excess. The present title is something of an exaggeration, though, because the paragraph from Engels that provides the starting point for the reflections below, while indeed written with a view to publication and then suppressed by Engels himself (arguably with good reason), never was actually thrown out by him, but got retained in the second of the four folders that he jointly labelled "Dialectics of Nature," and eventually it did see the light of day, of course, with the publication of all those notes as the *Dialectics of Nature* in 1925.

In preparing his book *Anti-Dühring*, Engels wrote a long passage, "On the Prototypes of the Mathematical Infinite in the Real

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World,” which he eventually did not include in the book. The following comes from the opening paragraph:

The fact that our subjective thought and the objective world are subject to the same laws, and hence, too, that in the final analysis they cannot contradict each other in their results, but must coincide, governs absolutely our whole theoretical thought. It is the unconscious and unconditional premise for our theoretical thought. Eighteenth-century materialism, owing to its essentially metaphysical character, investigated this premise only as regards content. It restricted itself to the proof that the content of all thought and knowledge must derive from sensuous experience, and revived the principle: *nihil est in intellectu, quod non fuerit in sensu* [“nothing is in the intellect that has not been in the senses”]. . . . modern natural science has extended the principle of the origin of all thought content from experience in a way that breaks down its old metaphysical limitation and formulation. By recognizing the inheritance of acquired characters, it extends the subject of experience from the individual to the genus; the single individual that must have experience is no longer necessary, its individual experience can be replaced to a certain extent by the results of the experiences of a number of its ancestors. If, for instance, among us the mathematical axioms seem self-evident to every eight-year-old child, and in no need of proof from experience, this is solely the result of “accumulated inheritance.” It would be difficult to teach them by a proof to a bushman or Australian Negro. (1987b, 544–45)

Three or four criticisms of what Engels says here come to mind immediately. The first point of criticism, of course, is the racism expressed. The criticism certainly can be mitigated on several counts. The evidence disproving any racially based innate psychological differences is much stronger today than it was in Engels’s time. It is a pretty good bet that Engels, widely traveled though he was, never met any Bushmen or Australian Aborigines, but was entirely dependent on the biased reports of

nineteenth-century missionaries and traders. As among the diverse peoples that he did encounter, the mature Engels did not exhibit any significant prejudice. His friend Marx was of Jewish origin, his own wife was Irish, and these were two of the ethnic groups facing the worst prejudice in England, the country he lived in. It is proper to mention as well Engels's firm friendship and support for Marx's son-in-law, Paul Lafargue, cofounder of the French Socialist Party, who was reportedly very proud of the African part of his personal heritage. So Engels should not be judged too harshly on the score of racism here. Nor does he actually say, in the words quoted, that the cognitive capacities of Bushmen or of Australian Aborigines, though different, were at all inferior to those of Europeans, overall.

Secondly, there is the matter of "the inheritance of acquired characters," which Engels says here that "modern natural science" has recognized. In fact, pretty well all the evolutionists of Engels's day did accept it—including Darwin.<sup>1</sup> For one thing, it was difficult to see how unaided natural selection could be sufficient to make evolution proceed fast enough for the limited time span which geology then allotted.

A third point on which present-day opinion might find fault with these remarks by Engels is the tautologous character, as is widely maintained today, of mathematical axioms that Engels declares can only be known on the basis of experience, that of our ancestors if not our own. But in what he wrote for *Anti-Dühring* and did publish, Engels says the mathematical axioms could be reduced to two, "The whole is greater than its part," which is "pure tautology," and "If two quantities are equal to a third, they are equal to each other," which, "as Hegel has already shown, is a conclusion, the correctness of which is vouched for by logic" (1987a, 38).<sup>2</sup> Engels clearly means by a "tautology" here a sort of statement which achieves triviality by merely repeating itself, like "Every quadrilateral is quadrilateral," for example (or, what is the same proposition in different but synonymous words: "Every quadrilateral is four-sided").<sup>3</sup> So it does seem that on this score anyway, if not on the others, Engels in his published works expressly favored (something like) what is today the more-or-less prevalent view, despite any diver-

gence from it that might be read into what he said about mathematical axioms in the above quoted passage. But he did not throw out what he had written there either. The point of discussing this quotation here is the light it arguably casts on other views which Engels held. We will be coming to that next.

A fourth and final matter that might at least give rise to some raised eyebrows is the way the quoted passage explicitly embraces qualified innatism, even though it is Eugen Dühring's philosophical "apriorism" which Engels expressly singles out for attack in *Anti-Dühring*, starting with the first chapter of part 1. On the question of innatism too, by the way, Engels's thinking in this passage apparently runs along the same lines as Darwin's.<sup>4</sup>

The problem of interpretation we encounter here is that of determining how far the sort of innatism Engels embraces can be reconciled with his vehement anti-"apriorism." Just what is the "apriorism" of Eugen Dühring to which Engels takes such exception? If we look at what Engels says about it in the first chapter of his *Anti-Dühring*, part 1 (actually chapter 3 of the book), we read that Dühring maintains, according to Engels, the following:

Like the chemical composition of bodies, the general constitution of things can be reduced to basic forms and basic elements. These ultimate constituents or principles, once they have been discovered, are valid not only for what is immediately known and accessible, but also for the world which is unknown and inaccessible to us. (1987a, 33)

Engels objects:

Herr Dühring's . . . conception is idealistic . . . and fashions the real world out of ideas, out of schemata, schemes or categories existing somewhere before the world, from eternity—just like a *Hegel*. (34)

The last phrase ironically echoes the deprecation of "a Hegel" which Engels has just quoted from Dühring (30). But, as Engels observes, this idealistic conception of abstract categories somehow preexisting the real world is indeed found in Hegel, and

before Hegel it occurred in the philosophies, e.g., of Plato and Kant. It is an *idealistic* conception in Plato because he did conceive these preexisting abstractions as specially akin to what is mental. It is an *idealistic* conception in Kant because to be a Kantian you have to trace these world-ordering categories to the constitution of *your own* mind. And it is an *idealistic* conception in Hegel because that philosopher roots these concepts in something like the creative mind of God. To this idealistic conception Engels counterposes the “materialist conception” that

the principles are not the starting point of the investigation, but its final result; they are not applied to nature and human history, but abstracted from them; it is not nature and the realm of man which conforms to these principles, but the principles are only valid in so far as they are in conformity with nature and history. (34)

Can this be squared with Engels's innatism? Is it consistent to maintain both that a predisposition in favor of some principles is innate in people and also that people do not *start off* their investigations with them? Of course, the most thoroughgoing innatists still must (or should) admit that the actual *formulation*—the *correct* formulation—even of inborn principles requires the expenditure of time and effort, humanly fallible effort. On the other hand, with his belief in the inheritance of acquired characteristics Engels can trace back the source of any innate principles that might be inborn in us to a prior learning experience on the part of our ancestors. Arguably, the substitution of natural-selection mechanisms for the inheritance of acquired characteristics would permit *essentially* the same process to take place in the course of evolution: the world's actually being a certain way would tend to give thinking to that effect some relative “survival value” (true belief in general being more advantageous to the believer than error); and so even the remote descendants of those who first possessed an innate predisposition in favor of thinking that way would inherit this trait only because of the actual facts about the world which rendered that way of thinking essentially correct.

What was important about the “materialist conception” which

Engels stressed in opposition to Dühring's "apriorism" was, first, the extramental *causation* of even the most fundamental of our concepts; and, secondly, the antidogmatic openness to conflicting evidence that Dühring's claims of absolute certainty for his first principles would exclude. On the first point, for example, Engels insists:

Even the apparent derivation of mathematical magnitudes from each other does not prove their *a priori* origin, but only their rational connection. Before one came upon the idea of deducing the *form* of a cylinder from the rotation of a rectangle about one of its sides, a number of real rectangles and cylinders, however imperfect in form, must have been examined. Like all other sciences, mathematics arose out of the *needs* of men. (37)

As for Dühring's dogmatic wish to credit his principles with an absolute immunity to any questioning or qualification, Engels quotes him declaring it would be

a degradation of the basic forms of consciousness and knowledge to attempt to rule out or even to put under suspicion their sovereign validity and their unconditional claim to truth, by applying the epithet "human" to them. (quoted in 1987a, 35)

With a further page reference to Dühring, Engels comments:

Hence, in order that no suspicion may arise that on some celestial body or other twice two makes five, . . . Herr Dühring dare not designate thought as being human, and so he has to sever it from the only real foundation on which we find it, namely, man and nature. (35)

In part 1, chapter 10 of *Anti-Dühring* Engels observes that Dühring's attempted "application of the mathematical method to history, morals and law . . . to give us . . . certainty of the truth of the results obtained . . . as genuine, immutable truths" is only a new version of the old

*a priori* method, which consists in ascertaining the properties of an object, by logical deduction from the concept of

the object, instead of from the object itself. First the concept of the object is fabricated from the object; then the spit is turned round, and the object is measured by its reflexion, the concept. The object is then to conform to the concept, not the concept to the object. (89)

\* \* \*

Some people believe in a rigid distinction between reasoning capacities as such and (conscious or unconscious) mastery in practice of the *specific* patterns of good reasoning. To such people there will appear to be some conflict between the innatism which Engels endorsed and what he wrote at about the same time in a first draft of the preface to *Anti-Dühring* (likewise to be found in his *Dialectics of Nature*): “theoretical thinking is an innate quality only as regards natural capacity. This natural capacity must be developed, improved” (1987b, 338).<sup>5</sup> However, coming from the kind of innatist who does not attribute any experience-preceding obviousness or unimprovable finality to our genetically inherited insights into how to reason, a remark like this should really appear quite in order.

One of Engels's single-sentence *Dialectics of Nature* notes reads:

*Unity of nature and mind.* To the Greeks it was self-evident that nature could not be unreasonable, but even today the stupidest empiricists prove by their reasoning (however wrong it may be) that they are convinced from the outset that nature cannot be unreasonable or reason contrary to nature. (1987b, 502)

By “stupid empiricists” Engels above all has in mind natural scientists suspicious in principle of any theoretical postulates going at all beyond the correlation of observational data. Contrary to the common interpretation of many commentators, friendly and otherwise, Engels certainly thinks that nature's “reasonableness” rules out its containing anything which is (as we say) *logically impossible* within it—that is, anything which is describable with complete literal accuracy in straight-out *inconsistent* terms.<sup>6</sup> But there is surely more to *reasonableness* than that meager

requirement, which it would be no big deal that even “stupid empiricists” respected, and which it would not embarrass them in the least to freely acknowledge. Logic and mathematics aside, what are the principles of *reasonableness* to which Engels is appealing here?

One of them, surely, will be the methodological Simplicity Principle—which does *not* declare nature to be simple overall, but does postulate (say) that, as between two specific conflicting explanations of what is going on anywhere that are equally deep-going and equally consistent with some finite body of data, the simpler of the two accounts will more often be the truer one. (How to formulate the methodological Simplicity Principle still remains highly controversial, and the preceding is not at all intended to be any more than a sort of gesture in the direction of what is meant.)

The point is well taken that any extrapolation whatever of an observed pattern of occurrences into the future is necessarily made on the basis that such continuity is *simpler* than any (rationally envisageable) alternative. To the objection that this must therefore disqualify all inductive evidence for the Simplicity Principle as being “circular,” the reply is surely available—at the very least—that, after all, negative empirical evidence, running counter to the expectations encouraged by the Simplicity Principle, is extremely easy to *imagine* (but by and large has not been found in fact). Arguably, the most that can be said is that the positive case for the Simplicity Principle cannot *solely* rest on the empirical evidence. Besides that empirical support, the Simplicity Principle does “stand to reason.”

In both our scientific and our everyday efforts to understand things and make predictions, we need to distinguish between a pattern in what we have observed which does, and which does not, “mean something” and hence justify an expectation that future observations will conform to it as well. We need to be able to tell with some reliability which observed patterns really are the manifestations of lawful regularities or tendencies in things and which ones are mere coincidences, in no way apt to hold good, except by chance, in any further instances beyond those already noticed. For real underlying regularities or

tendencies in things to be responsible for any observed patterns, there will have to be specific causal mechanisms in operation to explain what takes place each time such a pattern is exemplified; and, where a pattern that has been observed in things does *not* “mean anything” specially, different sorts of mechanisms will have to have been operative, by happenstance, on all of the same occasions of which notice has been taken to date. When comparing alternative hypotheses about such mechanisms in the light of everything else that is known, the superior simplicity of one such story to another warrants a surmise that it is likelier to approximate the actual truth of the matter. It is here that the distinction lies between the sort of case where it is and is not reasonable to make the surmise that an observed pattern in things will be apt to hold good in any further instances beyond those noticed already. This is the distinction between relatively good and relatively bad “arguments from analogy.”

In connection with the dependence of even the most advanced empirical science upon the discovery of analogies, Hegel himself observes:

Analogy is rightly held in high esteem in the empirical sciences, and very important results have been arrived at by this path. It is the instinct of reason which surmises that this or that empirically discovered determination is grounded in an object's inner nature or kind, and which proceeds on that basis. (Hegel 1991, 266)

\* \* \*

For his part, Engels, in one of his longer *Dialectics of Nature* notes, first quotes from a report of chemist Justus Liebig's speculation that organic life has existed from all eternity and then starts to argue against it:

Liebig “prefers, *ceteris paribus*, the simpler of two hypotheses,” but a thing may appear very simple and yet be very complicated.—The assumption of innumerable continuous series of living protein bodies, tracing their descent from one another through all eternity, and which under all circumstances always leave sufficient over for

the stock to remain well assorted, is the most complicated assumption possible. (1987b, 577)

It does not appear as though Engels is going along with Liebig's appeal to *simplicity* merely for the sake of argument here; but Engels does insist that theories which postulate *more* going on than their rivals are on that account really more complicated, not simpler.

Without joining those who reject it altogether, some methodologists deny there is anything more to the Simplicity Principle than empirical scientists' preference for *convenience* of theoretical formulation, in the interests of minimizing mental labor. In a passage approvingly cited in another connection in the *Dialectics of Nature* (Engels 1987b, 487). Hegel comments rather tartly upon physicists' appeal to "convenience" to justify their theories on specific gravity:

If convenience be all that is desired, surely it would be more convenient to banish calculation and thought altogether. (Hegel 1892, 193)

Oblivious to Hegel's advance criticism, the empiricist physicist-philosopher Ernst Mach made a philosophical federal case out of the Simplicity Principle towards the end of the nineteenth century—only, believing as he did that science just correlates sense experiences, he described the principle involved as "economy of thought." No wonder Lenin hit the roof when some of his Bolsheviks, disappointed by the failure of the 1905 revolution, started to veer towards Mach's mental-construction view of science, which could not fail to reflect on the objectivity of Marxist social science too. In *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1962) he went after the philosophical texts of Mach himself. For instance, in *Erkenntnis und Irrtum* Mach had written:

The "complete and simplest description" (Kirchhoff, 1874), the "economical presentation of the factual" (Mach, 1872), the "concordance of thinking and being and the mutual concordance of the processes of thought"

(Grassmann, 1844)—all these, with slight variations, express one and the same thought. (quoted in Lenin 1962, 171)

Lenin comments:

Is this not a model of confusion? “Economy of thought,” from which Mach in 1872 inferred that sensations *alone* exist, . . . is declared to be *equivalent* to the purely materialist dictum of the mathematician Grassmann regarding the necessity of co-ordinating thinking and *being*, equivalent to the simplest *description* (of an *objective reality*, the existence of which it never occurred to Kirchhoff to doubt!). (1962, 171)

Lenin observes:

That it is more “economical” to “think” that only I and my sensations exist is unquestionable, provided we want to introduce such an absurd conception into *epistemology*.

Is it “more economical” to “think” of the atom as indivisible, or as composed of positive and negative electrons? Is it “more economical” to think of the Russian bourgeois revolution as being conducted by the liberals or as being conducted against the liberals? One has only to put the question in order to see the absurdity, the subjectivism of applying the category of “economy of thought” *here*. Human thought is “economical” when it *correctly* reflects objective truth, and the criterion of this correctness is practice, experiment and industry. (1962, 170)

And again:

Indeed, if we do not recognize the objective reality given us in our sensations, whence are we to derive the “principle of economy” if not from the subject? Sensations, of course, do not contain any “economy.” Hence, thought gives us something which is not contained in sensations! Hence, the “principle of economy” is not taken

from experience (= sensations), but precedes all experience and, like a Kantian category, constitutes a logical condition of experience. (1962, 171–72)

In the following passage both the inner quotation and the paraphrase outside of quotation marks are approvingly taken by Lenin from the antimaterialist Wilhelm Wundt's characterization of Mach:

Mach's principle of the economy of thought is essentially apriorist. . . . The connection . . . is either in things, as an "objective law of nature . . . or else it is a subjective principle of description." . . . The principle of economy with Mach is subjective. (1962, 172)

The Menshevik P. S. Yushkevich had written of postulates regarding which

it would not be exact to say that they have been deduced from experience, since scientific experience is possible only because they are made the basis of investigation. (quoted in Lenin 1962, 173)

Lenin responds that Yushkevich has fatuously overlooked

the *idealist* character in general, and the *Kantian* character in particular of the idea that there can be postulates which are not taken from experience and without which experience is impossible. (1962, 173–74)

Surely Lenin is quite right to agree with the idea that solipsism is in itself a simpler, more "economical" account than one which attributes sense experience to material causes outside the mind. The solipsist account, of course, leaves the mind's experiences and their patternings completely unexplained and unexplainable, and this explanatory shallowness is a good reason for rejecting it. To insist that the simplicity criterion is just for adjudicating as between rival *explanations* of what is observed is to treat it as a guide to what correctly reflects objective reality rather than a principle of mental "economy." Here as elsewhere, Lenin's basic objection to Mach's philosophy is its antiscientific refusal to acknowledge *objective* reality. Mach notes a

psychological preference for theoretical simplicity, but he refuses (unlike Kirchoff and Grassmann, as Lenin interprets them) to see this as reflecting anything about the way things are in a world of realities that does not consist just of experiences. Practice, experiment, and industry are the criterion of truth for Lenin, and so he objects to the imposition of any *a priori* claim said to be immune to all testing by the standard of that criterion on the grounds that somehow it “precedes” all experience. Here Engels even at his most innatist would surely agree. For Engels too it is experience, our interactions with the rest of the world, or at any rate the interactions of our ancestors, which are responsible for the formation of any concepts at all that we have and which provide the touchstone for testing all our concepts. Engels certainly does not suppose a concept’s biological entrenchment in our heredity renders it infallible and immune from testing in experience.

For his part, when Lenin opposes any postulates that are not “taken” from experience but rather are “derived from the subject” what he is really against is the idea of something supposedly scientific in the human mind which nevertheless does not correspond to anything real in the external world that could be seen as necessary for causing it. (For, if there is a real world outside the mind, any correspondence between it and the mind’s conceptions would have to be mere—improbable—coincidence unless such causation actually were operative; so that to deny such causation is in effect to deny that anything extramental really is at all reliably knowable.)

Can we not suggest just the same, though, that Lenin may have missed out on something here by failing to grasp fully what the Simplicity Principle is all about? At any rate, what he wrote does not prove that he did fully grasp it. In Lenin’s *Philosophical Notebooks*, written mostly six or more years after *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, there is no abatement of the materialist conviction that “nature is reflected in the human brain” (1961, 201), and certainly no suggestion of embracing the “agnostic” philosophies of Hume, Kant, or Mach. However, in his study of Hegel’s texts, Lenin does copy down word for word in his notebook the above-quoted remark about analogy being an “instinct”

of reason, applauding it as “an acute observation” (1961, 182); and, indeed, only a few pages earlier, he expressly permits himself this partly self-critical remark “concerning the question of the criticism of modern Kantianism, Machism, etc.” (counting the nineteenth-century Germans Ludwig Feuerbach and Ludwig Büchner as “vulgar materialists”):

1. Plekhanov criticizes Kantianism (and agnosticism in general) more from a vulgar-materialistic standpoint than from a dialectical-materialistic standpoint, *insofar as* he merely *rejects* their views a limine [from the outset], but does not *correct* them (as Hegel corrected Kant), deepening, generalizing and extending them, showing the **connection** and **transitions** of each and every concept.

2. Marxists criticised (at the beginning of the twentieth century) the Kantians and Humists more in the manner of Feuerbach (and Büchner) than of Hegel. (1961, 179)

Although in the following quotation from his *Philosophical Notebooks* Lenin doubtless had Hegelian *objective idealism* more in mind than the *subjective idealism* he found in a philosophy like Mach’s, his remark has surely some application to Machian (and other) positivism as well:

Philosophical idealism is *only* nonsense from the standpoint of crude, simple, metaphysical materialism. . . . On the other hand, philosophical idealism is a *one-sided*, exaggerated . . . development (inflation, distention) of one of the features, aspects, facets, of knowledge into an absolute, *divorced* from matter, from nature, apotheosized. (1961, 363)

*Department of Philosophy*  
*University of Toronto*

#### NOTES

1. For example: “I think there can be no doubt that use in our domestic animals has strengthened and enlarged certain parts, and disuse diminished them; and that such modifications are inherited (Darwin, *Origin of the Species*, sixth

edition, chap. 5). Cf. Richard W. Burkhardt, Jr., "Lamarckism in Britain and the United States":

In the years immediately after the publication of *On the Origin of Species*, the question about acquired characters was not whether they could be inherited, which was widely assumed to be true, but instead their importance in the evolutionary process relative to natural selection, isolation, and other factors. (Burkhardt 1980, 345)

2. In his *Science of Logic* ("Greater Logic"), Hegel calls what amounts to the " $a = b, b = c, \text{ therefore } a = c$ " inference "the mathematical syllogism" and comments:

If its prerogative of being immediately *self-evident* is looked at more closely, it will be seen that it lies in the formalism of this syllogism which abstracts from all qualitative distinction of the terms and only takes up their quantitative equality or inequality. But for this very reason it is not without presupposition or unmediated; the quantitative determination, which is the only thing in it taken into account, is only *through abstraction* from qualitative difference and from the determinations of the Notion. . . . The self-evidence of this syllogism, therefore, rests merely on the fact that its thought content is so meagre and abstract." (1969, 680)

The reasoning here would appear to be that in this inference complete abstraction is made from everything about  $a$ ,  $b$ , and  $c$  but their *magnitude* in a particular respect (e.g., area); and so, as far as  $a$  and  $b$  are concerned, we are left here not with two things which are equal, really, but rather just one and the same thing—the magnitude that they share in common with each other, as well as with  $c$ , which is all that remains in thought (meager as such thought content is) when complete abstraction is made from everything about  $a$ ,  $b$ , and  $c$  except their shared magnitude. On this reading, Hegel is tracing the transitivity of equality to the transitivity of identity. In the absence of a philosophical precommitment that the man's statements must always be interpreted as ignorant, fanciful, and silly, it seems most natural to understand Hegel here as certainly considering "things equal to the same thing are equal to each other" to be what today we would call *tautologous* (undeniable without self-contradiction).

3. The last two sentences of one six-sentence note in Engels's *Dialectics of Nature* read: "Spencer is right in as much as what thus appears to us to be the *self-evidence* of these axioms is *inherited*. They are provable dialectically, in so far as they are not pure tautologies." (1987b, 536) We surely can take it that Engels is not using "dialectically" here in contradistinction to "logically." He must mean by "dialectical proof" something like the sort of treatment Hegel gives "the mathematical syllogism."

4. Charles Darwin's "M Notebook": "Plato . . . says in Phaedo that our '*necessary ideas*' arise from the preexistence of the soul, are not derivable from experience—read monkeys for preexistence." (1974, 30)

5. Engels goes on to say: “and for its improvement there is as yet no other means than the study of previous philosophy.”
6. So I argue, at any rate, in Goldstick 1995.

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# The Uses of a Contemporary Materialist-Feminist Literary Criticism

Doris Grieser Marquit

## *Introduction*

The justification of materialist-feminist criticism for serious students of literature lies in the insight it provides into the genesis, meanings, and effects of literary works. To take the high ground here, truth, like virtue, may well be its own reward, and it is certainly possible to maintain that in the broadest sense and in the long run, understanding can hardly fail to prove useful. More immediate and specific *uses* are a bonus, not a pragmatic argument for a tactical approach, and could not in themselves justify an underlying theoretical position if it were otherwise untenable (see Barrett 1980, 34). Fortunately, such a criticism is, it seems to me, grounded on a sound materialist aesthetic.

A critical approach to literature can present itself by asserting claims to truth or to utility. Such claims, whether implicit (even concealed) or tendentiously spelled out, are always made in particular historical contexts, including the intellectual context set by the ongoing literary critical debate. Current feminist literary discourse at the theoretical level is saturated with the vocabulary and ideas of what is often simply called "theory," especially, of course, French feminist theories. The emphasis is on the linguistic construction of difference, the problematizing of categories, the deconstruction of basic concepts. This is a climate in which truth dons quotation marks and the question of usefulness (in any practical sense, even for the understanding *Nature, Society, and Thought*, vol.

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of literature, and certainly for feminism as a social movement) seems anachronistic.

It is indeed not easy to assert a credible truth claim in a climate where the “real” is seen as “not only something we construct, but a controversial construct at that” (Moi 1985, 45). No truth claim can be made as if it were self-evident, a question of direct representation of reality. I shall argue that the usefulness of a materialist feminist criticism is that it enables us to make a philosophically justifiable truth claim.

To make my position clear at the outset: As a feminist I seek to end the oppression and exploitation of women, as a materialist I look to material reality for causes and solutions, and as a cultural worker I deal with consciousness and its written expression. I shall be supporting materialist feminism as I understand it, and arguing for the credibility of an approach to literary criticism with that theoretical grounding. I shall argue also that materialist-feminist criticism provides the best means of countering the racial and class exclusivity that often characterizes literary criticism, and also feminism.

### ***What is materialist-feminist literary criticism?***

Literary and cultural criticism is something that teachers and scholars of literature and language do, and they do not do it in a vacuum; a discussion of materialist-feminist criticism should begin by considering it as a practice *in situ*, on its home territory in the academy. Educational institutions (in our case in developed capitalist countries, in the specific historical conditions of the late-twentieth-century world) are at the heart of a society’s apparatus for maintaining existing social relations and class divisions. Academic feminists have not always been self-critical enough of how our vantage point, “the point from which you can see what you see” (in the words of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu [cited by Stabile 1994, 48]) affects our vision. Such influence is easier to detect from a distance: French feminists have charged their U.S. counterparts with being privileged and corrupted by “unanalyzed complicity with the capitalist, individualist, imperialist, patriarchal ideologies” of institutions such as the university (Draine 1989, 147–48). The fact that a person’s

paid work (or part it) is writing academic articles, for instance, places her in relationships in her society that necessarily influence her consciousness. Such influence is not a simple determination; when consciousness of this location becomes a part of a critical theory, it influences critical practice. Materialist-feminist criticism takes as one of its concerns understanding the implications of institutional and individual class interests.

Contemporary feminist critics work within disciplinary intellectual and ideological settings also. Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt, in an important essay just ten years old but early in the current theoretical debates, see what they call a “looseness of our hold on the material” as at least in part the result of academic literary study, which tends to divorce “the study of ideas and language from the study of social conditions and has fostered a view of intellectual activity as a solitary individual enterprise rather than as a project with social origins and political consequence” (1985, xvi). Among prominent recent trends, poststructuralist theory often perpetuates formalistic practices, and much feminist psychoanalytic theory is clearly ahistorical. Most feminist critics reject the view of history as the “essentially tragic story of individual suffering” rooted in an unchanging human nature, oppose formalism as an approach to literature, and know that our ideas and culture (as well as our gender) are socially constructed. Nevertheless, we maintain some critical practices contradictory to these understandings and against our own interests; “we disassociate ideas from material realities.” Besides being theoretically indefensible, a practice that emphasizes male power and domination, while at the same time celebrating qualities associated with women and “women’s nature,” may lead to an essentialism that obscures historical change, cultural differences among women, and complex social causation .

Materialist-feminist criticism is characterized by an explicit commitment to materialist analysis, with an emphasis on the economic, although the boundaries between it and other feminist criticisms are fluid. Newton and Rosenfelt conclude that constructing a materialist-feminist literary theory requires analysis of “the circumstances of cultural production” and also of how

these are “inscribed in the text” at a particular moment in history (xix). Materialist-feminist understanding of *ideology* (culture, images, myths, language) grants it an existence to some degree independent of economic causes (“relative autonomy”), yet rejects the *psyche* as the principal battlefield and “male literary constructs” or “symbolic modes” as the main enemy of women’s freedom and power. And finally, although feminist criticisms of many kinds recognize the literary canon as socially constructed, it is materialist-feminist criticism that most insists “on the social and historical relativity of aesthetic standards” (xxiv).

### *History of feminist literary critical debates*

Many of the elements of a working definition of materialist-feminist criticism have been suggested in the foregoing discussion. I should like to background my elaboration by providing a very condensed summary of twenty years of American feminist criticism. An early anthology called it a “new critical direction,” and spoke of “the emergence of *feminist criticism*, a new literary analysis based on the tenets of the American women’s movement” (Donovan 1975, 1). These early essays did what we were doing in our first women’s studies literature classes in the early seventies: looked at images and stereotypes of women in literature, read neglected women writers, found positive role models, attempted to define feminist writing. The project (as we would say now) was straightforward, if not necessarily easy. The ensuing years were full of enthusiastic activity by feminists, much by (mostly) young women in English Departments (as well as American Studies and foreign language departments). Feminists began to worry about sorting it all out; the spirit of that period is caught in Annette Kolodny’s metaphor of “dancing through the minefield” (1980). Kolodny takes a positive view of all this, urging a “playful pluralism, responsive to the possibilities of multiple critical schools and methods” (Kolodny 1980, 161). The apparent unity of early movement days actually was illusory to some extent, and in any event was unlikely to continue in different circumstances.

Few regretted moving on from the first simpler approaches,

but everyone did not see pluralism as just a fruitful chaos. A more serious problem with pluralism was seen to be that it favors “liberal tolerance over radical commitment” (Leitch 1988, 315). At the very beginning of the American feminist critical endeavor, a now-classic essay by Lillian Robinson described “the myth of pluralism” as “the greatest bourgeois theme of all,” noting its “rejection of ideological commitment as ‘too simple’ to embrace the (necessarily complex) truth” (1971). And very recently the “flight to the anthology” of U.S. feminist critics has been diagnosed as a symptom of a critical genre so “intrinsically mired in pluralism” as to be in full retreat to ineffectiveness (Doan 1989, 149). Sharp differences about how the “effectiveness” of feminist literary criticism might be measured were to become increasingly clear.

By the end of the eighties, we were no longer ignored in academia. The venerable *PMLA* (*Publications of the Modern Language Association*) was declared in 1989 by a prominent (nonfeminist) critic to be “publishing a steady stream of feminist articles” (Levin 1989, 79) and a flurry of correspondence appeared over several issues taking seriously the charge that the journal is dominated by feminism and unnamed other “approaches now achieving hegemony” (Levin 1988, 819) whose proponents attempt to veto any criticism. (The distress of the traditionalists came to a fruition of sorts at the end of 1994, when an “anti-MLA” organization was founded called the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics, opposing “highly politicized” conceptions of literature. The *New York Times* reports that its membership at present “is mostly older male scholars” [Grimes 1994, B2].)

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, names familiar from the first days of feminist critical writing and by then embarked on their massive three-volume history of women writers (1988–94), were writing in 1989, from the position of established academics themselves, of “the vitality manifested by a feminist criticism that has moved into a position of greater power within the academy while maintaining its dissident perspective on literature and culture” (B3).

Taxonomies of English-language feminist literary criticism have traced two chief types of effort from early days: (1) to

examine the images and stereotypes of women in literature (literature largely produced by men), to expose misconceptions about women in criticism, and in general to probe “the ideological assumptions of literary phenomena” (Elaine Showalter has called this “the feminist critique”); and (2) to explore literature by women, women’s literary tradition, as well as questions of female language, style, and creativity—“gynocritics” has been coined in English from the French (Showalter 1985, 128). Often a third type is listed: to study the biological, psychological, social, linguistic forces shaping life and literature—“cultural criticism” (Leitch 1988, 315–16).

With what has been called a persistent lack of methodological sophistication, U.S. feminist critics initially used sociohistorical approaches to literature, moral and political judgments, and aesthetic evaluation. What was furthest from congenial ground for the first generations of Anglo-American feminist critics—theory and philosophy on a high plane of abstraction—has been taken up with a vengeance by the next. It is not only the influence of French feminism and psychoanalysis that we have to thank (or blame) for this; postmodernity is upon us, and it is in this world that we will be working out the next stage of our critical endeavors.

Seeing feminist criticisms as phases in a progress through time risks falling into a history-of-ideas mode (one idea causes the next) and obscuring the material conditions of the production of these ideas. Much “feminist metacriticism,” accepts this interpretation, and describes the different types of feminist criticism

not as equally available options but as constituting an evolutionary sequence. By the time “our” feminism was only ten years old it was already spoken of as being in its third phase, having gone through “early” attacks on the sexism of books written by male chauvinists (androtexs), concentrated “late” on the specificity of women’s writing (gynotexs), and arrived subsequently at the phase we are in now, which is characterized by a pervasive interest in theory, much of it provoked allegedly by difficulties encountered in the first two phases of this brief history. . . . [T]his is very much a third-phase view of feminist

literary criticism, and . . . many women who think of themselves as in some way feminist still engage energetically in first-phase exposes of androtexes as well as in second-phase explorations of gynotexes. (Ruthven 1984, 20–21)

This “evolutionary sequence” view, however, decidedly begs the question.

Two major directions are generally assumed to constitute contemporary feminist literary criticism—on that portion of the planet on which such a concept exists: Anglo-American sociohistorical criticism, and the French psychoanalytic mode. Several major articles have reinforced the view that feminist literary criticism in the United States is now a field divided between these two main tendencies. On the one hand is a cluster of eclectic feminist criticisms emerging from the traditions of the last fifteen to twenty years of literary feminists writing in English. On the other hand are some emerging criticisms (often coming from university departments of comparative literature or philosophy, rather than English and American literature) strongly influenced by psychoanalysis, deconstruction, and French feminism. The first group emerges from such home-grown practices as the first two “phases” of feminist criticism mentioned above. The second looks to Freud and Derrida, and, most immediately, Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva.

Unfortunately this account, while initially persuasive, is distorted. It should be noted that this dichotomized schema is inadequate because it vastly oversimplifies the two sides it identifies. Although the designation is convenient shorthand, it is clear that the undifferentiated “Anglo-American” feminist literary criticism often posited (and popularized by Toril Moi [1985]) is a mythical beast. (*Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, v. 12, no. 2, Fall 1993, devoted a cluster of articles to the question). Differences between British and U.S. feminism as social movements are marked. British feminism has ideologically allied with the political Left; U.S. feminism has enjoyed more widespread mainstream middle-class acceptance (notwithstanding recent backlash). Feminist literary criticism in England lacks the

institutional support that some American feminists have found in universities, as Janet Todd has pointed out (1988). The risk of oversimplifying the French side of this divide is even higher, since the complexities of Continental theory about women and gender are great.

Second, the early American phase is preempted, in this view, by what has justly been called “white feminist criticism.” It has been Black feminist criticism in the United States that has occupied most clearly a position sometimes rather unconvincingly claimed for feminist criticism in general—an “antagonistic relationship to the dominant culture.” In her ground-breaking “Towards a Black Feminist Criticism,” Barbara Smith pointed out that no one at that time seemed to know the Black woman existed—much less her literature, existed (1977). Since that writing, there have been (as Nellie McKay reminds us) much “angry reaction” from Black and Third World feminists “toward the exclusion and neglect they have noted in white women’s scholarship which arrogantly purported to represent a common women’s condition” (1987, 166).

Third, the French vs. Anglo-American dichotomy schema is seriously out of date, and distorts the present reality by failing to distinguish materialist-feminist criticism as a separate approach, with its own continually developing theory. Materialist-feminist criticism is erased (the current term), or rather silently discounted as a version of early sociohistorical literary criticism, easily dismissed as naively empiricist. Toril Moi, in her *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985) is deaf to this strain, as is Betsy Draine in her otherwise excellent summary article in *Signs* (1989, 144–70).

A strong case has been made by Felicity Nussbaum that materialist feminism constitutes a “third kind of feminism” that, by being ignored by the dominant trends and left out of the mideighties critical debates, “lost a crucial opportunity to intervene in ‘national’ debates as a methodology with global implications” (1993, 264). During precisely the same period that poststructuralist literary criticism and French feminist theory were making their impact, materialist-feminist criticism began to claim an identity as a separate current. According to Donna

Landry, the “founding moment for Anglo-American materialist feminism” (Landry and MacLean 1993, 6) arrived in 1980, with the publication of Michèle Barrett’s *Women’s Oppression Today*, although Annette Kuhn (1978) and Christine Delphy (1981; 1984) were being read at about the same time. Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt (1985) played an important role in preparing the ground for the present interest in a literary and cultural feminist criticism grounded in materialist social philosophy.

We need to remember also that feminist literary criticism has not developed in isolation, but in multiple contexts, all in crisis: current literary theory, contemporary feminism, and the postmodern world. The proliferation of theoretical work in language and literature has found room for feminists: indeed the increasing sophistication of recent analyses may “accord the feminist critic a position closer to the mainstream of critical debate.” At the same time, this academic acceptance may widen the gap between feminist criticism and its political origins. The early emphasis in feminist thought on “sameness” has shifted toward valuing female difference and defining this difference in a male-dominated culture:

Though the problematic relationship between language and experience is central to much twentieth-century thought, contemporary feminist criticism finds here a particularly acute challenge, a challenge at present complicated by cross-cultural misunderstandings and disagreements. Simply put, the current debate is between the dominant concern in American feminist criticism, with its experiential basis, and the dominant concern in much French feminist criticism, as evident in the commitment of *l’écriture féminine* to language, theory, textual femininity, and the female unconscious . . . between the view on the one hand that experience is separable from language and on the other hand that language and experience are coextensive. (Frye 1986, 15)

When French feminist criticism first reached the United States about 1980 (although it was a few years later before much

became available in English), the concept of *féminité* as a new way to challenge to male-centered thinking was intriguing and suddenly “theory” seemed to be where the intellectual action was. This French connection brought a surge of academic feminists into participation in the lively, if arcane, debates about literary theory that have set the tone in the most prestigious journals and conferences in recent years. But it has triggered a fierce resistance, also (Draine 1989, 146–47). Anglo-American feminists have accused the French and their followers of setting up an essentialist definition of Woman, “of creating a chimera in the notion of a separate women’s language: of elaborating the ideal of women’s writing in such a way as to align Woman with the body and the unconscious, thereby reinforcing patriarchal stereotypes of the feminine;” of mysticism and elitism; of being corrupted by its base in male-generated philosophical systems with male mentors like Lacan and Derrida and even more questionable ones like Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Freud; of constantly citing male writers as exemplars of feminine writing: “of failing to analyze the material conditions that have kept women from writing . . . of denying the material reality of women’s oppression;” of criticizing liberal humanism “from the Left” but actually replacing it with nihilism, of deserting the field of political action for that of intellectual contemplation and writing.

In the early eighties the “schism in feminist criticism between the poststructuralists and the non-poststructuralists” (which as Susan Friedman [1983, 250–51] notes was strictly within the First as opposed to the Third World, where material and ideological conditions dictated different priorities) was bitter. The new feminists were poststructuralists, and regarded all the old as “mired in naive, unsophisticated and regressive essentialisms” (252). A similar literary changing of the guard occurred a generation ago, when the New Critics regarded the old Romantic evaluation and appreciation of literature as naive, impressionistic, and nonrigorous (Wald 1992, xx). For the bright, serious graduate student, the appeal in both periods was to the apparently more demanding and credible approach. In the intellectual excitement of the New Criticism in the 1950s, the asocial and

even reactionary implications of its formalism escaped notice. Feminists in U.S. universities in the 1980s confronted also a generational gap: a cohort of feminist graduate students had “no activist experience at all, either inside or outside the academy” (Friedman 1983, 257). Their teachers often had struggled to establish women’s studies programs in schools, and even had experience in the streets in the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements; these young women often believed they lived in a postfeminist era. Some, Friedman points out, who delighted in intellectual play with feminist ideas, found poststructuralist notions about “the non-referentiality of language, the undecideability of meaning, the impossibility of agency” (258) congenial.

Critics working in the new modes found it easy to charge others (often lumped together as “the Anglo-Americans”) with naïveté about language, with being “oblivious to one hundred years of European philosophy” and ignoring the fact that “languages are communicative systems with only arbitrary connections to reality.” The French-influenced critics complain also of the Anglo-Americans’ “rejection of Freud and Lacan, their preference that feminist discourse confine itself to observable data and consecutive logic, their attachment to the fictions of self, individual, and personal identity” (Draine 1989, 147–48). Scorn has been directed particularly at U.S. feminist critics, as empiricists who speak of “women’s reality,” and believe that research is capable of uncovering the truth about women, and that language then can correctly speak about that truth.

All factions in these critical wars seem to have been at some time accused of *essentialism*—a belief in distinctive, universal, and inherent attributes. While most feminists have been able to reject the biological determinism that explains the characteristics of women (including family and societal roles) by female biology, essentialism has been harder to identify in discussions of women’s experience or feminine writing. In the case of alleged *empiricism*, precision in definition is needed. *Empiricism* may refer to an insistence that sense data is all we can know, and a rejection of any theory in favor of practical observation. No school of feminist criticism, it seems to me, errs in this particular

way. Nonetheless, *empiricist* as a term of reproach seems often to be used against anyone making any reference at all to material conditions of life, to concrete human experience (whether of author or fictional character), or to the physical world as knowable reality. Materialists are indeed likely to be tarred with this brush. The feminist materialist Michèle Barrett herself uses *empiricist* imprecisely, eliding it with *biologist*, one who assumes “that differences in social behaviour are caused by the observed biological differences with which they correlate” (1980, 12–12). Materialists may be happier with a recent use of the term in the mental health field. Paul R. McHugh (cited by Crews 1994) distinguishes between *empiricists*, “those who bind themselves to methodical study of facts” and *romanticists*, “those who rely upon feelings for evidence, on metaphors for reality, on inspiration and myth for guidance.”

The meanings of philosophical terms such as these may give literary critics legitimate pause. Only the ill-informed or disingenuous, however, would charge contemporary materialist feminists with naiveté or lack of sophistication. Materialists have been problematizing their categories and interrogating their assumptions for some time now. Janet Todd argued forcefully in 1988 for a feminist literary history “historically specific, archival, ideologically aware but still empirically based” in opposition to “the theoretical modes that have killed off not only the authoritative male author but the tentative and hardly heard female one as well” (7). Todd was concerned to defend American sociohistorical feminist criticism, including the early work of the 1970s, as still useful, rather than to develop materialist theory, although her discussions of class and ideology in particular are certainly theoretically informed. Materialist feminism has been associated with socialist or Marxist feminism, stigmatizing it in the United States especially; perhaps this stigma is wearing off. At any rate, theoretical work in the name of materialist-feminist criticism is now advancing apace. Recent books in the last two years by Judith Newton (1994), Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (1993), and Rosemary Hennessy (1993) suggest that this current is moving to a position of more prominence.

***Important elements of materialist-feminist criticism***

Materialist-feminist criticism begins with the material conditions of social life, the society in which a literary text was produced, and which it in some way (however complex, indirect, or mediated) embodies or reflects. This criticism involves

an analysis of literature and an analysis of what is not literary; an analysis of the circumstances of cultural production and an analysis of the complexities with which, at a given moment in history, they are inscribed in the written text. (Newton 1994, 7–8)

Rosalind Coward noted rather early in the current literary critical debates that

we need to know about the institutions which make a piece of writing available; about the financial and ideological policies of the publishing groups; about the audience which is being created through various marketing strategies, about the patterns of consumption of writing created through, for example, mass paperbacks or hardbacks for libraries. (1985, 226)

A materialist critic does not turn a blank gaze on the physical world, picking up facts and data at random, but brings a philosophical understanding that “the materiality of the social consists of divisions of labor, state power, and ideology” (Hennessy and Ingraham 1994, 1). A *feminist* materialist critic will look at how these interact with “gendered, racial, national, and sexual subjectivities, bodies, and knowledges.”

The assumption that gender is socially constructed is widely shared among feminists, so widely shared that it risks becoming an unexamined truism. The idea that gender is also (or alternatively) discursively constructed is the subject of much current examination. A contemporary materialist-feminist criticism will make explicit and develop further the first of these, while not neglecting new insights from the second. The fact that these constructions “enforce unequal relations of power” in the society will be in the foreground of materialist-feminist analysis (Newton 1994, 7).

Literature is an ideological practice. Contemporary materialist-feminist criticism draws on recent work by materialists, including specifically Marxist work on ideology following Althusser, to bring more informed understanding to the study of ideology. At the same time, as Hennessy and Ingraham point out, “while materialist feminists have made use of postmodern critiques of empiricism to develop analyses of the role of ideology in women’s oppression, they have also insisted that ideology is only one facet of social life.” (1).

The concerns of materialist-feminist criticism with the actual conditions of life, and the relations of institutions and power, are combined with explicitness about its politics. Materialist-feminist criticism does not claim to be “objective” in the limited sense of remaining aloof and neutral in social conflict; it is nothing if not engaged, committed, aligned. Materialist-feminist criticism knows and flaunts its own alignment, and seeks to uncover the alignment of other approaches, including those that claim to have none, to be nonpolitical. Raymond Williams declared in *Marxism and Literature* (1977) that

writing, like other practices, is in an important sense always aligned: that is to say, that it variously expresses, explicitly or implicitly, specifically selected experience from a specific point of view. (Wald 1992, epigraph)

To raise the question of whose interests are served—by culture, by literature, by criticism—is to move from alignment to *conscious* alignment, to commitment (in Williams’s definition). Landry and MacLean, in their recent *Materialist Feminisms* (1993), cast a wide net, and insist on considering the consequences of different critical approaches for

those with a stake in political and social change, particularly participants in struggles against imperialism and for self-determination across the globe, feminists, and members of anti-racist and gay liberation groups. (8)

Materialist feminism, drawing on the tradition of historical materialist analysis, has foregrounded class as a category of analysis, and has not always given race appropriate attention. Histor-

ically it has done sexuality even less justice. Felicity Nussbaum argues that “feminism’s complicity with racism has not yet been thoroughly examined” (1993, 265). Nonetheless, materialist-feminist criticism offers a mode of analysis that would make such examination possible, even as it “considers the relation between multinational economic and political structures and feminism” (264). Materialist analysis recognizes that our attention must be on “historically specific forms of racism”—not universal and unchanging racism but “racisms” (in Hazel Carby’s phrase, 1990, 85).

Finally, materialist-feminist criticism may wish to approach a text with close reading, linguistic analysis, psychological analysis—in short a multiplicity of approaches—as long as they are situated in an understanding of the history, ideology, and class structure of the society in which that literary text was produced.

### **Uses of materialist-feminist criticism**

Materialist-feminist criticism has two important uses already suggested in this discussion: the first relates to our intellectual and theoretical work, our roles in the current literary critical debate; the second to our practice as teachers and activists. In the academic arena, materialist-feminist criticism enables the feminist critic to participate in the ongoing literary-critical and philosophical debates, to challenge as well as learn from “Theory” (if not entirely on its own terms, at least with some of its language) as it is understood today, without being either lost in its abstract complexities or forced into a know-nothing retreat. Both of these are nonproductive paths to follow, yet I believe they are real temptations. Materialist-feminist criticism is useful as a shield and buckler in these theoretical battlefields, which have become more hazardous than any of us could have imagined twenty years ago, when feminist literary criticism was a much simpler thing.

And a contemporary materialist-feminist literary criticism is useful in giving us a bridge to the world, the world we work in as teachers and (to whatever degree) as feminist activists. Most people with a developed interest in literary criticism are also

teachers. We teach literature not only at different levels, but in various settings. Our students in introductory literature, composition, and writing courses; in Women's Studies courses and those under such rubrics as Humanities, Western Civilization, and American Studies; in adult education and even secondary school classes, can learn from a study of literature grounded in their actual world, and put what they learn to their own uses. *All* our students (with the exception of some graduate students) are readers and citizens more than they are apprentice scholars. To discuss literature and culture with them, to communicate to them whatever insights into these things that we have acquired in our own study, a materialist-feminist criticism provides a theory, an approach, and a strategy.

Another use of materialist-feminist criticism for us as teachers, but not only as teachers, is in the canon wars, still very much with us. What works do we pay attention to, what literary texts do we read, teach, analyze, use as the basis for our theory *and* our practice? Enlarging the canon was an early goal of feminist critics—bringing in works by women, discovering or rediscovering or rehabilitating undervalued women writers. Feminist critics have never accepted “the view that the canon reflects the objective value judgments of history and posterity, but see it instead as a culture-bound political construct” (Showalter 1985, 11).

A materialist-feminist criticism gives us some questions to ask in this far-from-over struggle; possible displacement of the established “great works” is currently a contentious issue in the wars over multiculturalism. Precisely how does the cultural construction of the canon take place; whose interests are served? The canon (the very word carrying the odor of sanctity from its origin) claims to consist of the best that has been thought and said in the world. But how are the criteria for selection set? The qualities of the works already chosen define the criteria of aesthetic merit; the old boys choose the new. Ellen Messer-Davidow points out that traditional principles of literary judgment “maintain a closed system of literature” (1987, 74). We know that, as fashions in criticism change, different schools tend to define as good those kinds of literature their methodologies enable them to study—as New Critics valued metaphysical

poets for complexity and irony, the New Historicists have most to say about the Renaissance. Within our own ranks, Showalter contrasts the early feminist critical attention to the Victorian novel with the focus of gender criticism at the end of the 1980s on the 1890s (1989, introduction).

Materialist-feminist criticism also usefully steers us toward considering the institutional practices that determine exactly *how* we read a particular piece of writing:

how the institution of “literary criticism” and its diffusion through the education system determine how certain pieces of writing are designated as “literature.” or “potboiler,” making distinctions on the basis of nebulous notions like “quality.” (Coward 1985, 226)

Hazel Carby asks, “What . . . does the debate about the opening up of the canon mean in relation to the material conditions of existence of most black people?” (1990, 84).

It is not clear that canon reform is sufficient. A materialist critic, Alan Wald, in an essay called “Hegemony and Literary Tradition in America” (1992, 143–54), demonstrates the impossibility of using the same criteria to evaluate a stanza from *The Wasteland* and “Plainview 2” by Scott Momaday, which is not from the Western cultural tradition that dominates Euro-American literature. Wald argues not for reforming the canon or “a mere pluralistic expansion of it,” but for abolishing it. Any term like “aesthetic merit” must come “not from any illusory universal qualities (which are often only masks for select themes that ratify the dominant culture), but from the cultural context of each nondominant grouping itself” (153).

Of approaches to literature available to the feminist critic today, materialist-feminist criticism presents the strongest challenge to the canon. It became clear as deconstruction moved onto center stage in U.S. literary criticism that the leading deconstructors still “privileged” the usual canonical texts; the canon remained undisturbed. Feminist criticism has indeed added some works to the canon, but some feminist criticisms seek to do more, to add various nontraditional *kinds* of texts, a wide range of “cultural discourses,” including the mass media

and popular culture, not just the “literature” previously valorized in an elite canon. Will these additions change existing criteria for the literary canon?—“do we implicitly or explicitly modify the aesthetic compact?” (Robinson 1987, 27). When literature by African-American women is assimilated into a *general* American canon that was formerly mostly white and male, our sense of the nature of the canon is altered. A canon consciously constructed with material interests in mind generates standards of literary excellence markedly different from those previously assumed.

Such new standards are perhaps initially most obvious in subject matter, but will be seen to include considerations of perspective, style, and technique also. Feminist criticisms still in touch with their historical roots in a profoundly disruptive social movement not only recognize but draw on the “existence, experience, and culture” (in Barbara Smith’s words) of African-American women, of working-class and lesbian women. Most recently, writing by people of lands formerly colonized by the European powers—“uncanonized” writing formerly designated as marginal and peripheral—is being recognized (see, for example, Ashcroft et al. 1989; Williams and Chrisman, 1993; Myrsiades and McGuire 1995; *PMLA* 110 [January 1995], special issue on Colonialism and the Postcolonial Condition).

Feminist voices like Gayatri Spivak (1987; 1990) and Trinh Minh-ha (1989; 1991) taking part in the discourse of “postcoloniality” bring various emphases to this subject matter, but as works from former colonies move into the formerly exclusively “metropolitan” canon, some degree of materialist understanding almost inevitably comes with them. Under conditions of colonial domination, the civilization and culture of the colonizer were held up as standards against which everything characteristic of the culture of the colonized—appearance, dress, music, art, language, politics—was judged inferior. Toni Morrison has used the term “discredited knowledge” for false standards imposed on the former colonies (cited in Smith 1994, 896). In a recent essay on the anglophone Caribbean, Faith Smith quotes Gauri Viswanathan on the effects of the British canonical text on the colonized subject:

In effect, the strategy of locating authority in English texts all but effaced the often sordid history of colonialist expropriation, material exploitation and class and race oppression behind European world dominance. (Smith 1994, 897)

In this context we would expect to find political engagement, and Linda Hutcheon has recently concluded that postcolonial theorists and cultural activists agree that “postcolonial criticism has positioned itself as a broad anti-imperialist emancipatory project” that adds “a more overtly politicized dimension” to Commonwealth studies (1995, 7–8).

Within the general anticolonialist orientation of postcolonial studies, however, one fundamental difference of focus may be seen to divide critics into two groups, with feminists in both. Teresa Ebert offers a perceptive summary of this theoretical and political division; the most prevalent mode, she argues,

engages postcoloniality as a regime of power/knowledge relations and foregrounds the problems of representation; it is, therefore, part of the project of exploring the discursive politics of truth. In contrast, the second mode does not take postcoloniality to be simply a problem of cultural politics, as Foucauldian genealogy proposes, but instead understands it as basically an economic issue that has to be explored in the context of the international division of labor and poses the problem of the economics of untruth in the relations of metropolitan and periphery. (1995, 204–5)

Postcoloniality as cultural politics risks substituting discourse for political economy, and here materialist analysis can be an important reality check.

Feminism has always been a worldview with an activist agenda; the activist element remains (for most of us) even if we make those nouns plural: feminisms are worldviews with agendas. Interest in philosophy and theory need not in itself smother activism, but may clarify its focus. Several writers have pointed out, for instance, how different the implications are when we speak of oppression (or multiple oppressions) instead of

exploitation (Aguilar 1993, 194; Bourne 1987, 3). Hazel Carby remarks in a popular article:

I agree with Barbara Harlow that today we hear a lot about oppression but nothing at all about systems of exploitation; that the concept of resistance is frequently used but the concept of revolution has disappeared. Oppression and resistance are terms more easily applied to individualist and pluralist ideals of political change. (1990, 85)

Materialist feminism is a social philosophy, with implications for political practice; in literary criticism it pulls together the study of literature and the feminist criticism of society. Toril Moi speaks of feminists welcoming critical approaches that can be successfully appropriated to their own political ends. She maintains that the “political evaluation of methods and theories is an essential part of the feminist critical enterprise” (1985, 87). Ellen Messer-Davidow makes a complex and well-developed argument against the uncritical borrowing by feminist critics of traditional methods, all of which are, in varying degrees, “fundamentally incompatible” with our endeavor (1987, 65–66). Her theoretical case is made primarily in terms of epistemology, the separation in traditional literary study of “the knowers from the knowing, the knowing from the known” (67), and the obscuring of agency (75). But she writes here and elsewhere (see especially Messer-Davidow 1994) with the assumption that academic feminists support the “*making* of social change,” and that we need to increase our understanding of it as well as our ability to make it (1991, 300). To this end Messer-Davidow urges a teaching and research project that “reconnects feminist inquiry and action” (1991, 301). Sandra Harding declares the sex/gender system has become visible to feminists because “we belong to a social movement that aims to redistribute power and privilege” (cited by Messer-Davidow 1987, 92).

Deconstruction has contributed its attitude of skepticism to received opinion, to the natural, inevitable “nature of things,” and it has been more successful in bringing “deconstructing” into common academic parlance than Marxists have been with the

similar concept of “demystifying.” Clearly this is good for any resistance strategy against entrenched institutions and the present holders of power. But this weapon needs to be aimed. Some forms of deconstructive criticism lead to a radical skepticism more demoralizing than liberating and to political paralysis. Feminists and Marxists have challenged this retrogressive tendency. “To question one’s assumptions is not necessarily to abandon one’s politics,” in June Howard’s happy phrase (1988, 171). Speaking for a materialist feminism, Mary Poovey says that “feminism must rewrite deconstruction so as to incorporate its strategies into a political project” (1988, 51).

Challenging the French influence when it was new on the U.S. scene, Ann Rosalind Jones raised political objections to “the assertion of a shared female nature made by *féminité*.” Will this assertion, she asked, help us in feminist action toward goals such as working in the public world; freedom for reproductive and sexual choices, “the affirmation of historically conditioned female values . . . and the exploration of new ones”? She argued that “the concept of *féminité* as a bundle of Everywoman’s psychosexual characteristics flattens out the lived differences among women” (1981, 95). From a Third World perspective, Trinh Minh-ha is acutely aware of the problem: “Yearning for universality, the generic ‘woman,’ like its counterpart, the generic ‘man,’ tends to efface difference within itself.” She observes that the term *woman* “more often than not reflects the subtle power of linguistic exclusion, for its set of referents rarely includes those relevant to Third World ‘female persons’” (1989, 97).

Delia Aguilar credits “postmodernist devices” with deconstructing the concept of a “universal woman” in recent years, but contrasts the “personal is political” slogan of the sixties as a prelude to political change, with the current idea that “self-transformation is itself political change” (1993, 192, citing Linda Kauffman). Aguilar contends that the retreat from politics induced by “the exaltation of the essential female” has too often been replaced with the “relabeling of what is considered political, restricting it to the personal, the local, and the discursive” (194).

Materialist-feminist criticism keeps history at the center of our engagement with literature, and does not permit us to evade the responsibility of defending at least a working definition of the relationship of literature with the world, of art with life. It reminds us, by taking history seriously in this way, of the question of ethics and ideological commitment—the implications of philosophy for politics. Poststructuralist theory seeks to do away with history just when nondominant groups begin to write theirs. From this perspective it appears that “post-structuralist theory could be disabling for women, making history disappear even before we have had a chance to write ourselves into it” (Peterson 1994, 991).

Postmodernism’s stress on the *discontinuity* of history has been found especially problematic by Black writers. We know that the victors write the history of the battle; historical accounts do not emerge accidentally. The history of African Americans has been mistold and in part obliterated in the interest of perpetuating their subordination and exploitation. In *Beloved* Toni Morrison sets out to fill in a gap in recorded history, the experience of slavery, and she gets her history right, through painstaking research (see Ferguson, 111). This restoring of historical continuity is purposeful and solidly grounded in material reality. Louise Erdrich takes land struggles of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa at the end of the last century as her subject in *Tracks*; according to a recent critical article her work “seems to be a reaction to the excesses of poststructuralism and postmodernism, which attempt to reject the referential function of language and narrative” (Peterson 1994, 991). A materialist-feminist criticism directs our attention to the question of whose interests are served by what history, of who has a stake in historical change.

African American literary “theory” has often stayed close to material reality; Friedman cites the “experientially based and ethical/political criticism” of women of color (257). Barbara Christian, in her influential essay “The Race for Theory,” stresses “the need to become empowered—that is, seeing oneself as capable of and having the right to determine one’s life.” She

notes that “such empowerment is partially derived from a knowledge of history” (1990, 577).

However much the new linguistic and other approaches may teach us about literary texts, sharpening our insights into how they are generated and work their effects, they cannot offer what Teresa Ebert calls “the revolutionary knowledge of historical materialism” (1996, xiii) needed for revolutionary politics and material struggle. A contemporary materialist-feminist criticism has a role to play here. Its *use*, under which perhaps all its specific uses and functions are subsumed, is to insist that culture and ideology are areas of political contestation—of struggle—but cannot ever be disconnected from “material conditions in a given historical period” (Barrett 1980, 112). Materialist-feminist criticism suggests grounds for developing analytical and interpretive methods that can enrich our understanding, enliven our reading and teaching of literature, and help us do our work in the world more effectively. It brings us back to the real world out of which literature comes and to the real history we are trying to make.

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*Department of Women's Studies*  
*University of Minnesota*

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## Background Materials

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### Defend Science, Criticize Science

Richard Levins

At a time when science is being viewed with growing hostility by the far Right and with suspicion by much of the population, when we have to defend science against irrationalism and despair about being able to understand the world at all, the defense of science has to begin with a criticism of science. I want to talk about where science goes wrong.

Error is inevitable in science as in all decision making. It is inevitable because the only source of knowledge is experience and reflection on that experience in the light of previous knowledge. That is, we approach the new by pretending it is like the old. It *is* like the old often enough so that science is possible. But it is unlike the old too, and then our most creative thinking and broadest base of knowledge of the known are necessary. Science is not unique in this regard. There is no fundamental epistemological difference between Euro-North American science and other traditions. The uniqueness of modern capitalist science is that it is a particular moment in the division of labor when people, institutions, and resources are set aside in order to organize experience for the explicit purpose of finding out.

There is nothing shameful about making mistakes. They are a necessary part of discovery, and at their best scientists take pride not in having been right all along but in being open to mistakes.

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But it is not acceptable to continue making the same kinds of mistakes when these have already been challenged. Then it requires a deliberate decision not to know, a militant commitment to active ignorance and to the dismissal of the knowledge of the people most affected by the applications of bad theory. In the areas of applied science that combine natural and social processes, that is what has been happening all too often:

Pesticides create pests.

Antibiotics give rise to new pathogens.

Hospitals are the foci of infection.

Suppressing forest fires can ruin forests.

Agricultural development increases the gap between rich and poor.

Flood control increases flood damage.

Infectious disease has not disappeared: old diseases once thought conquered have come back with a vengeance and the list of apparently new diseases grows weekly.

What we are observing in our science is a growing contradiction between our exquisite sophistication in the small and an irrationality at the level of the scientific enterprise as a whole, a contradiction made more destructive by increasing technical power.

There is a pattern to the failures of science, rooted in its social position as a knowledge industry in our society and in the philosophical biases it mostly shares with the conservative-liberal consensus that has informed the common sense of Euro-North American capitalism and of modern science since they grew up together from the seventeenth century on.

First, many scientifically guided programs fail to achieve their stated goals because other, unstated goals or unrecognized constraints stand in the way: alleviate hunger (but without touching the power of the landed oligarchy), provide health care for all (but under the control of the insurance industry), save our forests (to the extent the timber industry says we may), keep our water clean (without interfering with the production of agricultural surpluses or the expansion of the chemical and oil industries).

Second, as we face more and more complex problems, the

philosophical limitations of our science are increasingly overwhelming its technical rationality:

1. Our science still prefers the description of fixed, passive things studied in isolation to the understanding of webs of processes. But we are confronting surprising, rapid, pervasive qualitative changes. It is necessary to shift our point of view and recognize that “things” are moments in the intersections of processes. Therefore the two big questions of modern science are dynamic and integrative rather than descriptive: why are things the way they are instead of a little bit different, and why are things the way they are instead of very different. The starting point for answering both questions is that things are the way they are because they got that way, not that they always were, must be, and always will be that way.

The first question asks about the restorative, stabilizing, homeostatic processes that keep things recognizably what they are, and the changes that allow for sameness; while the latter focuses on the processes of destabilization, evolution, succession, and development, and analyzes patterns of difference. Furthermore, the answers to one of them depend on the answers to the other. Public health was caught by surprise by new diseases and the return of old ones because it did not see infectious disease as a co-evolution of people organized in different societies with a world of microbes in changing environments.

2. Industrialized science is fragmented into narrow disciplines, so that much of what happens is a surprise that comes from outside—“side effects,” “not my department.” Medicine does not talk to plant pathology although both deal with the evolving patterns of parasitism and of vulnerability. The ministries of health and agriculture spray the same habitats independently and with divergent goals. And as tasks are divided and subdivided the working scientists become increasingly focused on means while nobody is concerned with the whole.

3. Our science is beset by false dichotomies: natural/social, heredity/environment, physical/psychological, random/deterministic, thinking/feeling, at equilibrium/changing, objective/ideological. But rather than accept them as mutually exclusive, decide between them, subordinate one to the other, or

try to rank them, we need to see how they interpenetrate. We have to recognize that human biology is already a socialized biology without being less biological for that. Extreme or unusual environments reveal latent genetic or other individual differences, while heredity influences not only the responses of organisms to their environments but also how they select, transform, and define their environments. Therefore the understanding of heredity as a norm of reaction is preferable to heredity as the fixing of "traits." The processes of thinking and feeling take place in a physical-chemical structure through physical-chemical processes, but these are themselves transformed by what we feel and do. Random processes can have quite predictable outcomes while deterministic processes sometimes look as if they are random. The world is not at equilibrium, but aspects of it are, so we can talk about the relative equilibria among processes that gives our world some coherence and continuity. For instance, we can have a stable age distribution in a growing population.

Preconceptions—ideology—are essential for approaching any new problems and start us with some sense of what is relevant in a cloud of sensory and theoretical inputs. Objectivity without passion can lead to indifference and irrelevance, reaching the extremes of allowing the indefensible, while passion without objectivity leads to helplessness and despair. Therefore, instead of maintaining the pretense of indifference and detachment, I acknowledge that I am guided in my work by the hypothesis: "all theories are wrong that promote, justify, or tolerate injustice." (I was encouraged in this by Herman Weyl's formulation that in his physics he was seeking truth and beauty, but if he had to choose between them he would chose beauty, and truth would follow.)

4. There is too absolute a polarization of intervenor and intervened, manager and managed, so that we are caught by surprise when nature acts, responds to our actions through indirect pathways, feedbacks, delays, spontaneous variation, and when we do not acknowledge that we are also created and recreated by the surroundings we create. While an older tradition sought objectivity by hiding and pretending to remove ourselves from the science, we now recognize, especially thanks to feminist theory,

that the scientific is also personal and with Marx that the manager is also managed. Public health was caught by surprise because it did not examine the agenda of medical research as a social product but acted as if it were dictated by nature.

5. Science can neither subordinate the whole to its parts, as proposed by reductionism, nor dissolve the parts in wholes as advocated by mystical traditions that see connection as identity and everything as “one.” Reduction as a tactic is a valuable part of research, but reductionism as a philosophy leads us astray when it ranks smaller objects as more fundamental, and does not see how wholes create parts; it claims as “modern” only the study of the smallest pieces of reality, and reacts to a new problem by looking for the magic-bullet molecule. There is no one-to-one relation between problems and solutions but a many-to-many relation that can only be dealt with at the level of changing wholes. Public health was caught by surprise because it looked at separate diseases and looked for the right molecule to fix each.

6. Good theory should not dissolve the particulars of each situation into universal laws that abstract away the complexities of the real world, nor should it glory only in the exquisite uniqueness of each place or object. Rather it seeks to relate the particular to the general by explaining patterns of difference and similarity and respecting both regularity and anomaly.

7. Despite the stingy know-nothingism of the current crop of rulers, we have to struggle for the legitimacy of theory. Especially North Americans pride themselves on being a practical people. The demand that theory connect to reality is well founded. But such pragmatism has carried with it a contempt for the apparent intellectual detours needed to understand a phenomenon in more than its immediate expressions, and it has fostered anti-intellectualism, the use of the term “theoretical” as a put down, and institutionalized shortsightedness as a virtue, although nature takes its time. Public health was caught by surprise by the appearance of new diseases and the resurgence of old ones because it extrapolated from the decline of infectious disease over only one or two centuries in only part of the world and in one species without looking at parasitism as a general phenomenon of evolutionary ecology. It was caught by surprise because it

accepted the dichotomy of “applied” and “basic” research rather than carrying out a practical research with a long-term fundamental perspective.

8. The cult of expertise makes the rest of us passive consumers. Yet we need a democratization of science that will make it possible to combine the detailed, intimate local knowledge that people have of their own circumstances with the generalized and comparative knowledge that requires some distance from the particular. We need to tap the collective intelligence of our whole species to solve the enormous problems of our relations with the rest of nature and with each other.

When people join together to confront their problems, different urgent needs are likely to come into conflict. Therefore we need the boldness to recognize that when just causes come into conflict they are both asking too little, accepting too many constraints.

There is a growing uneasiness about the fragmentation of knowledge, an interest in ecology not only as specific environmental problems but as a way of thinking about the world. We see inter-, trans-, and nondisciplinary programs and interest in complexity as such. But against this there is a growing commodification of science as a knowledge industry and a proletarianization of scientific workers as power passes to managers with MBA’s. As with any commodity production, this new method of doing science allows only a tenuous relation between the usefulness of its products and their marketability, develops an agenda guided by the expected profit, and makes the bottom line a metaphor for all that is really valuable.

We cannot accept a passive defense of science as it is, but must respond to both the vicious and the accurate criticisms of science by the advocacy of a dialectical, materialist, democratic, partisan, and self-aware Science for the People.

As of now, the outcome of this conflict is still in doubt.

Based on a talk, “Facing the New,” at the Processes of Change conference held at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 9–12 November 1995.

*New York Marxist School  
and Harvard School of Public Health*

# Confrontation between Reformism and Class Struggle: A Current Evaluation of Germany's Party of Democratic Socialism

Georg Polikeit

### *Factual background*

The "Party of Democratic Socialism" (PDS), which originated from the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, the leading (state) party of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), had, as of 31 December 1994, 123,751 members, according to its own figures. Hence it is, in number of members, the fourth strongest political party in Germany, behind the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) with 860,000 members, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) with 675,000 members, and the Christian Social Union (CSU) with 177,000 members. The PDS has more members than the Free Democrats (91,000) and the Greens (40,000).

At the federal elections on 16 October 1994, the PDS received a little more than two million votes, equivalent to 4.4 percent. It thus achieved its reincorporation into the German Bundestag, although only barely, and only because in four of the electoral regions in Berlin its candidates had received the most votes in comparison with all other candidates. The PDS thereby won four direct mandates; otherwise the PDS would have fallen under the 5 percent cutoff.

The picture of a party of significant political weight that emerges from the above numbers is, however, differentiated *Nature,*

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significantly through an extraordinarily unequal division. Five years after the incorporation of the GDR into the West German FRG, ninety-eight percent of all PDS members still live in eastern Germany. In 1995 the PDS membership in the area of the former FRG amounted to a little more than 2,000. Hence, in spite of its presence in the Bundestag, in western Germany it has fewer members than the German Communist Party (DKP), which has about 6,000 members.

The difference in the election results is also important. The PDS in eastern Germany, with a voter share of between 16 and 23 percent, is represented with significant fractions in all five regional parliaments. In a great number of cities and communities it constitutes a significant force on the local level. In western Germany, on the contrary, the PDS is not represented in a single regional or municipal parliament. At the regional elections in Bremen on 15 May 1995, it achieved only 2.4 percent, against its own expectations and in spite of the expenditure of enormous efforts and resources. At the Bundestag elections in 1994, the PDS chalked up 0.9 percent on average in the western states.

It becomes clear from these numbers that during the past years the PDS has not achieved a "western extension," in spite of considerable effort. Although the PDS pursues in the Bundestag a politics within the overall national framework, and tackles problems of east as well as west Germans, it has remained *de facto* a "party of the east Germans." Its attempts to find support points within the spectrum of the "nondoctrinaire" west German Left have not borne fruit, for example, with the "fundamentalist" Greens, with the "independent" Left, with factory councils and unions, with the pacifists and various well-known activists of the West German peace movement, in the circles of those who left the DKP in 1989/90 including the remnants of former Maoist and other "communist" groups, with left-oriented feminists, and in the antiauthoritarian autonomous youth movement.

In the area of the former GDR, about one-fifth of the population feels itself represented by the requests and wishes, feelings, anxieties, and demands of the PDS. In western Germany, on the contrary, the PDS could not break into the voting power of the

SPD and the Greens, nor into the considerable growing number of nonvoters, who do not participate in elections out of dissatisfaction with established politics and out of resignation over the dominant conditions.

More precise information about the sociological stratification of the PDS adherents is not available. By their opponents the PDS is often dismissed as "the party of the former ones." This distorted simplification is of course used with the intention of isolating and attacking the PDS. Certainly many of today's PDS members and elected officials were formerly members of the SED, and many were also party and state functionaries at various levels of the GDR. But to dismiss the PDS simply as "a successor organization" and a "special interest group" neither does justice to the real, extraordinarily contradictory development processes that have taken place within this group of people during the last five years, nor does it take into account the fact that in the PDS there are also participants who formerly were not or were only peripherally socially active, and also not a few who stood in more or less open opposition to the former GDR regime.

Neither does the occasionally circulated picture of a "party of the former GDR intellectuals" do justice to the real situation. It is based above all on this: that in many leadership positions, especially on a central level, and in many parliamentary fractions of the PDS, intellectuals who were educated in the GDR are often the spokespersons, and the activists are teachers and professors, members of academic institutes, lawyers, journalists, writers, and artists.

But if one takes into consideration the totality of its members and voters, then the PDS is much *more* than a party of intellectuals. In order to maintain and expand its bases in the region of the former GDR, it must especially pay attention to the concerns of ordinary people. These are, above all, worries about jobs and the explosion in rent prices, the closing down of kindergartens and of other social institutions, increasing medical and illness costs, ever-higher financial charges with ever more sharply reduced social and community services, regression with respect to equal rights for women and the advancement of women, and above all the absence of future prospects in the east German living

environment. Precisely because the PDS attends to the real everyday needs of many people on the community as well as on supraregional level, it has received electoral support in eastern Germany.

To be sure, the “intellectual” varnish of the party’s profile and style of several of its internal political debates can occasionally be an obstacle to its development. A strong anchoring of the party among factory workers and unions—that part of the eastern German population that continues to be involved in the production of material goods—is at present not apparent; the former enterprise organizations of the SED were dissolved in 1990 in the course of the “renewal” of the party. Enterprise councils and unions are rather poorly represented numerically in the leadership strata and parliamentary fractions of the PDS.

Today’s PDS has nothing to do with the former SED either in theoretical-programmatic or organizational aspects. It is de facto not a “renewed SED,” but rather a completely new party, with entirely different political and programmatic bases as well as organizational structures.

At its last party convention at the end of January 1995, the PDS was defined by its presiding officer, Lothar Bisky, as a “modern, democratic, left-socialist party.” The PDS consciously does not wish to be a *communist* party.

From a theoretical standpoint, the PDS has not only broken with what in its ranks was often inexactly and arbitrarily lumped together under the concept of “Stalinism,” but also with an overall theoretical orientation to the foundations of Marxism. Instead, the party emphasizes its “pluralistic character” in regard to theory and worldview. It wants to bring together, in accordance with the foundation documents of the party (program, statute, party convention decisions) diverse theoretical starting points and historical roots, which it states may also be found in the social democratic and communist labor movement, in pacifism and antifascism, in religious and other forms of humanism.

What is striking here is not only the total turnaround of former points of view as to the character of the party, as it was represented before the “turn” of 1989/90 in the SED (and internationally in most other Communist parties). Further, we find a whole

complex of areas in which Marxist analyses and evaluations have been given up, that is, thrown overboard, under the influence of the historical breakup of the socialist regimes in eastern Europe. We are dealing here not only with the manifold questions about the causes of the breakup of the socialist states and about the conclusions that are to be drawn for future conceptualizations of socialism. Also, in the PDS analysis of the sociopolitical situation in the world and in Germany, and its estimation of the development tendencies of today's capitalism, we can recognize a far-reaching renunciation of the basic views and fundamental principles of Marxist theory and social analysis.

***Socialism as "path, value-orientation, and goal"***

In a "Five Point Resolution" adopted by the majority at the last convention of the PDS—after contradictions escalated sharply, almost to the point of a split—the "socialist character of the PDS" was defined thus:

Socialism is for us a path, method, value-orientation, and goal. It is for us connected with manifold forms of socialization, overcoming capitalist domination, ecology, democracy, solidarity, social justice, human emancipation, overcoming of patriarchy, freedom and realization of human rights, elimination of unemployment, protection of minorities, equal opportunity in education and culture, and decentralization.

One critic has called this an "enumeration of all the true, the good, and the beautiful." In fact, the assertions of the dominant PDS politicians, and the related theoretical representations, no longer comprehend socialism as the product of class struggle and are no longer drawn from a historical-materialist analysis of history or of the capitalist social system—understandings that are fundamental to Marxism. No longer is socialism understood as a unique social formation that follows from capitalism, forming itself out of a revolutionary break with a capitalist social order and, with the socialization of the means of production, achieving its own economic basis, because only through the elimination of private ownership of the means of production is the capitalist

exploitation of human beings by other human beings eliminated. Socialism now appears instead in the dominant PDS conceptions as, above all, a future vision based on reason and moral insight, as an ideal construct determined by a humanistic ideal of humanity for harmonious social development—as a utopia, by which one lets oneself be inspired through practical politics, knowing at the same time, however, that an abyss will forever remain between utopia and reality.

It is certain that, in this visionary “value” conception of socialism, negative experiences with the practice of the formerly socialist countries, with their centralized, administrative-bureaucratic social and economic systems, reflect the fact that ultimately socialism was the loser in the confrontation with capitalism. But under the shock of defeat there arose a shortsighted view of the historical results and experiences of “real socialism,” a one-sided accentuation of its negative aspects. This led also to absolutized conclusions in regard to any future socialism, which often amounted to a total rejection of what Marxist theory had previously said about it. The actual manifold stages and processes of development of the socialist states that came into existence after 1917 have thereby been regarded as questionable and deserving of criticism, as a morally condemned past. Thus the contradictory nature of the internal and external historical conditions of development has gone unnoticed, as has the dialectical interrelationship of the negative and positive results achieved under those conditions.

The often premature and overdone socialization of all means of production, including small business and trade, and the extreme centralization and bureaucratization of the socialist planned economies, killed the initiative of many people. This effect occurred not least because the capitalist market economy in its economic development tempo as well as in its possibilities for consumption—certainly in the highly developed capitalist industrial states—seemed to many people superior to “real socialism.” These experiences resulted in an undialectical, generalized “short circuit,” in which the question of property relations, the socialization of the means of production, the “expropriation of the expropriators” as Marx called it, is no longer viewed as the essential

fundamental condition for the development of socialist relations in society.

The PDS ideologues, therefore, now emphasize above all the “manifold forms of socialization” and the overcoming the predominance of capital in the economy and society, but no longer speak of the overall elimination of capitalism as an economic and social system. The horror of bureaucratically administered “state ownership” has led to replacement in the PDS party program of this concept by variously expressed notions of a “market economy oriented to the common good,” linked to “explicitly social and ecological goals,” and a “strategic steering of the economy by the state” under “democratic control of the public” (citations from the PDS program). With this, the recognition of the real structure of today’s state monopoly capitalism and the necessity of eliminating the economic and political power of the dominant class and of the economic power centers of big business and finance capital are at best the theoretical starting points of the PDS. “The PDS prefers a multiplicity of ownership of the means of production just as it prefers a just equalization, equal competitive opportunities, of all forms of property.” That is all that the program of the PDS has to say about this.

### ***Contemporary capitalism’s potential for development and capacity for reform***

Parallel to the relativization and the underestimation of the property question, and the related question of power, what is missing from the PDS program is a clear analysis of today’s social conditions. The word “imperialism” has been banned from the linguistic lexicon. At the same time so has consciousness of the existence, in this system of late capitalism, of legal reactionary and aggressive development tendencies, internal and external, which were theoretically comprehended and generalized by Lenin at the beginning of this century.

The reactionary tendencies of current developments in Germany are traced, in many basic political declarations of the PDS, to the dominance of “conservative forces” in federal German politics. Not explained are where this conservative dominance originates, and what class and system interests it represents. That the

reactionary and aggressive characteristics of the conservative development of law in Germany (and in many other highly industrialized capitalist states) might have something to do with the fundamental legalities of state monopoly capitalism at the end of the twentieth century, or with the refinement of the insoluble contradictions of capitalism in its imperialist stage, or with the fundamental crisis of this system, is never considered.

Instead of this, the perception of the “superiority” of capitalism at the end of the eighties resulted in a conception of the “development powers of capitalism” that overemphasizes these powers in a one-sided way, and discounts the equally present manifestations of this system’s deep crisis on a world scale. On this basis arise continuing conceptions of the allegedly receptive character of contemporary capitalism for social, ecological, democratic, and humanistic reforms.

The PDS presents itself in many of its documents as an anti-capitalist party that aims at the overcoming of capitalist social relations. In this regard it still today distinguishes itself in a certain manner from those former government parties in eastern Europe that once designated themselves as Communist parties but since their “renewal” after the “turning-point” have taken the path to a full adaptation toward western social democracy, to an openly announced social democratization (such as Hungary).

The basic clearly defined anticapitalist consensus that unites PDS members does not preclude the treatment of present world crises, in PDS theoretical analyses and in statements by PDS leaders, as **not** primarily phenomena of the crisis of the capitalist system. Instead they are simply presented as a crisis of modern civilization or as a global crisis of the human condition of existence the solution to which must be found beyond the “system question.”

The appeal to human reason (also by capitalists and the power-brokers of imperialism) replaces insight into the real problematic of system and class struggle, as was characteristic of the Gorbachovian “new thinking” at the end of the eighties. Not recognized (or at least not sufficiently recognized) are the system-conditioned limits of the “capacity for reform” set by capitalism, an economic system dedicated after all to the profitable accumu-

lation of capital and not to the satisfaction of the needs of the great majority of human beings.

On this basis, conceptions also arise in the PDS program materials of a fundamental "reform alternative" within capitalism, as a step-by-step "transformation" of the capitalist system into a new model of society that is supposed to stand beyond capitalism and socialism. "We need a third way" was the programmatic title of a book on "the self-understanding and program of the PDS" edited in 1990 by former PDS chairman Gregor Gysi. In January 1993 Gysi gave up his office as party chair to Lothar Bisky, in order to concentrate more intensively on his duties as chair of the PDS group in the Bundestag and to fight for his own sociopolitical views without the obligation of considering other tendencies. In an elaboration in the beginning of 1994 that he called the "Ingolstadter Manifesto," Gysi brought into currency the conception of a "new social contract" that would lead to the "transformation" of capitalism, a continuation of his conceptions of reform politics within the framework of capitalism. This text (as well as the later "ten theses on the political situation in the FRG," elaborated in terms of his premise) encountered so much opposition in the party that the leadership put the concept to a vote at its last party convention at the beginning of 1995.

Gysi's arbitrary interpretation of historical events tied his notion of a new social contract with a glorified memory of Roosevelt's New Deal. With no thought of a class analysis of the system-connections of Roosevelt's politics, Gysi wrote as if Roosevelt had been something like a socialist reformer of capitalism:

The welfare state, the social restrictions on the capitalist markets, the New Deal, were all at once successfully arrayed against the socially irresponsible state, against the absolute power of capital in the labor market, and against the ideology of the unmanageability of the market economy.

The task today, as then, is seen as being to transform all "new social, ecological, and cultural necessities" into "effective

demand” that “steers capital in new directions,” he explained in his manifesto. For that “it requires again a New Deal, a new social contract.” The partner for such a contract he already outlined in another place:

Wherever, historically, there are unions, enlightened entrepreneurs, women scientists and men scientists with realizable projects, and women politicians and men politicians with humane visions and a pragmatic regard for new opportunities, it has been possible during crises to bar the path to poverty, reaction, and war.

Clearly this conception of “modern socialist politics” is so close to the programmatic declarations of the Social Democrats and the current conceptions of “social partnership” that it could be taken as their position as well as that of “Christian” politicians and managers of big capital.

That prevailing PDS policies no longer view the class struggle as the driving force of the working class, nor the decisive force for the “overcoming” of capitalism and the effecting of a social transformation in the direction of socialism, is an expression of the internal logic of their position.

### ***Internal party countertrends***

It must be stressed, however, that the course that has been set by the leadership group around Bisky and Gysi is by no means undisputed within the PDS and, in fact, encounters significant resistance.

Counterpositions have been published and debated in the Communist Platform group of the PDS, especially since the beginning of 1990. Involved in this process are only a few hundred actually enrolled members, although the Communist Platform claims to be represented in some two hundred PDS circles and twenty-five regional groupings.

According to the PDS constitution, the formation of platforms and working groups within the party, even with independent organizational structures of their own, is not only permissible but desirable. Prior to the last party convention, however, the party leadership mounted a campaign against the Communist Platform

using the slogan of a purported struggle against “Stalinism,” which, in turn, was jubilantly presented in the bourgeois media as a sign of the disintegration of the PDS. After serious confrontations, an “incompatibility” clause was adopted by the party majority in January 1995. “Stalinistic opinions” were declared to be incompatible with membership in the PDS. At the same time, it was resolved that “antidemocratic, antiemancipatory, antiliberal and avant-garde type and centralized concepts of socialism and party organization” were rejected—whatever such terms might mean. It was subsequently disclosed, in any event, that “democratic-communist positions” were not to be banned from the PDS. After this party convention the Communist Platform stated that, in spite of its critical view of the party convention resolutions, it nevertheless wished to remain in the PDS and continue to work with it.

The resistance to a rightist direction in the PDS is, however, broader and more pronounced than the movement encompassed by the Communist Platform. Numerous rank-and-file PDS members and activists are involved, in particular, with concrete, on-the-spot political activity as well as representing social interests and, thus, are necessarily concerned about the capitalist annexation of the former GDR. Based on these activities, fundamentally anticapitalist attitudes are increasing and becoming established, even if these members are not willing to be categorized into any organized movement. Many of the high-level debates on “global problems” and “reform alternatives,” the “transformation of capitalism,” and a “new social contract” are simply being ignored on the grass-roots level, where they are seen as being abstract and removed from reality. However, this often involves the development of a kind of pragmatism that recognizes the struggle for reforms within capitalism as a priority, without viewing the concepts of class and system as an important underlying question of the party’s political orientation.

A Marxist Forum was founded in the PDS after the party convention in January 1995 by a group of scholars, cultural workers, parliamentary representatives, and PDS functionaries under the leadership of Bundestag representative Uwe-Jens Heuer. This should also be seen as a reaction to the pronounced borrowing of

social reformist theories by the leadership. A declaration by thirty-eight well-known public figures entitled "In Great Concern" made an effort to warn against the rightward drift in the party and against surrendering to the "pressure to accommodate" exerted by those in power. "Weakening the concept of opposition, abandonment of the class struggle and jettisoning the question of property in favor of a social contract; . . . the socialist objective is transformed into a noncommittal vision"—such was the manner in which this declaration formulated other points of criticism. In order to counteract these, the Marxist Forum pursues the goal of "analyzing the social, economic, and political situation with the instruments of Marxism, to further develop Marxist theory under concrete circumstances, and to contribute to the theoretical substantiation of the PDS."

### ***Opposition or accommodation?***

Only an incomplete picture of the PDS would be provided if an outline of its policies is limited to such programmatic and theoretical questions. The party's practical policy, its appearance before the Bundestag and the state parliaments in which it is represented, its activities in social and other movements are, in fact, not unrelated to its programmatic orientation. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that the PDS has represented a spectrum of current political proposals and positions in many areas in the last five years that largely agrees with the standpoints of other leftist forces, including those of the Communists.

Such activities have included supporting company employees who fight against the closing of their enterprises, struggles against the dismantling of social welfare programs, proposals for job creation, initiatives for advancing women's equality and right to decide on the number of children, peace policy initiatives against the deployment of German soldiers for other than defensive purposes, and opposition to the new German "Great Power" and hegemonical policy in Europe. The PDS was active in the fight against politically motivated blacklisting and persecutions in present-day eastern Germany as well as for the rehabilitation of persons politically persecuted in West Germany during the Cold War period. It is worth bearing in mind that the conduct of the

PDS in the Bundestag has meant a gain for the democratic movement and the Left with regard to many current political questions. Numerous impulses from extraparliamentary democratic and social movements from eastern and western Germany have been taken up in the more than one thousand motions, legal initiatives, and inquiries that the PDS group in the Bundestag has assiduously compiled and submitted in the past four years.

The PDS parliamentary initiatives and activities, however, have to struggle with the problem that they are largely carried out in closed session and scarcely known to people outside the parliamentary process. The established media adhere to a conspiracy of silence, and when now and then some note is made concerning the PDS, the account is in a manipulated form without real information on the political content of the initiative and packed in a shell of anticommunist, delimiting catch phrases. On the other hand, some members of the PDS group have attempted by other means to make the public aware of their parliamentary initiatives, but these efforts have seldom met with success because of the lack of facilities and experience.

The priority accorded to activities in extraparliamentary movements and the necessity of combining parliamentary work with extraparliamentary struggle has been emphasized by the PDS in numerous documents. In practice, however, this has remained largely a one-way street. The PDS parliamentarians have, in fact, submitted the demands and represented the interests of extraparliamentary movements in parliament. But its parliamentary activities have not been linked with extraparliamentary actions, nor has such coordination been sufficiently organized in any systematic way.

There are also those in the PDS who believe that experience shows parliamentary representatives to be easily susceptible to the pull of a certain "binding" into "official parliamentary work" and "integration" into the mechanisms of those "established" in parliament. Concerns about a development in this direction are nourished by comments made by the top candidates of the PDS in which theories about a "democratic constitutional state" are espoused with reference to both the former West German Federal Republic and the present German state that completely ignore the

imperialist character of this political system as well as the limitations of bourgeois parliamentarianism and the limits of bourgeois democracy.

These questions also provided the background for a debate on the “oppositional role” of the PDS that played a large part at its last party convention. The catalyst for this debate was the fact that the PDS was, as a result of its electoral strength, in a position in the state parliament of Saxony-Anhalt to “tolerate” a state-level coalition government with the Green Party headed by a Social Democrat. This coalition would not otherwise have had the majority required to govern. A similar situation arose in the state parliament in Mecklenburg–Lower Pomerania, where a coalition between the SPD and the PDS was numerically possible. There were heated debates in the PDS as to whether and under what circumstances it could participate in or “tolerate” such a government.

The Five Point Resolution adopted by the January 1995 party convention specified that the PDS “stands in principle in opposition to the prevailing social relations in the Federal Republic of Germany.” This represented the indispensable minimal consensus upon which all of the various movements in the PDS could agree in order to avoid a breakup of the party. However, a passage follows that opens the way for the PDS fractions in the various parliaments to enter into coalition governments or to “tolerate” the governments of other parties. The question of whether the party participates in a parliament in the opposition or becomes a part of the government “does not affect the understanding of the PDS as, in principle, an opposition party” was declared as the interpretation. Critics saw a contradiction in this as well as in a compromise formulation in the adopted text that was designed to reconcile the standpoint of those members who believed in fundamental opposition to the capitalist system with the aspirations of reformist elements seeking “participation” in the institutions of the “democratic constitutional state.”

The impression arises that there are repeated debates in the PDS at present with regard to this question, much the same as those that took place a few years ago between the “fundamentalist” and the “realist” wings of the Green Party. The

victory of the “realists” over the “fundamentalists” in the Green Party provided for a marked shift toward the right, and today that party is largely integrated into the capitalist system as a coalition partner for the Social Democrats.

The fear on the part of the PDS with regard to more pronounced integration into the established system has become all the more relevant as the ruling circles in Germany have begun to vary in their strategies to combat the PDS subsequent to the 1994 election results.

Those in power do not want to reconcile themselves to the existence of the PDS at any price. It is their declared aim to destroy this party politically as soon as possible. This is due, on the one hand, to the fact that the origin of the PDS in the former SED is a reminder of the political tradition of the German working-class movement. The memory of the existence on German soil of a socialist state that grew out of antifascist roots and that, in spite of all of its undesirable developments, was responsible for some achievements that people still today regard as being good and, after their annexation into the capitalist system, even view as a loss, is to be erased from the minds of the population without a trace. On the other hand, the ruling class is also afraid that a party with socialism as its ultimate goal that demonstrates decided opposition to capitalist “modernization policies” has a chance of increasing its influence in the coming years as social conflicts intensify and becoming an effective crystallizing core of extraparliamentary opposition and anticapitalist aspirations.

Up to now the ruling classes participated in a conspiracy of silence, social isolation, and discrimination through anticomunist campaigns in the media as well as direct repression of its members or simple financial extortion as the primary means of pursuing their aim of politically destroying the PDS. There have been constant campaigns to brand the leadership and parliamentary representatives of the PDS as “collaborators in the Stalinist dictatorship” and “informants” of the state security apparatus. This goal has also been served by the state’s demands for payment of millions of marks for alleged tax debts.

These repressive tactics against the PDS, informed by crude anticomunism, will probably be at the forefront of the

procedures used by the established powers in the future as well. But at the same time some apparently believe that the aim of their efforts has not been well served by these methods. Therefore, a "second line of strategy" to combat the PDS has evolved. It is designed to complement the attempts at the social isolation of, and discrimination against, the party by means of offers to some of the members with parliamentary seats in return for corresponding political behavior. The goal of this tactic is to split the PDS and to integrate a part of its membership and those having parliamentary seats into the established political system in the same manner as experienced by the Green Party. Leading Social Democratic politicians have made it clear that they intend to experiment with this approach.

Understandably, questions about the basic programmatic consensus of the party and its fundamental attitude with regard to the capitalist system acquire more than purely abstract significance under these circumstances. The fate of the PDS will, in fact, most probably depend on which of these two factors prevail: the voices of anticapitalist opposition across wide sections of the membership and their commitment to concrete representation of interests directed against the policies of the ruling classes, or those tendencies in a section of the party that are striving, at the parliamentary level in particular, toward "political feasibility" in the sense of negotiating with other politicians and becoming recognized as a "partner" in the parliamentary and political machinery, even at the price of fundamental concessions in the party's programmatic position. Thus the chair of the PDS, Lothar Bisky, might be correct in stating in his report at the last party convention that the prospects for the PDS "are by no means ensured for any length of time."

An important question in this connection is that of the PDS's relationship to other forces on the left in Germany, including the communists. No initiatives can be expected from the SPD or the "realist" wing of the Green Party in terms of accelerated development of extraparliamentary resistance to the socially reactionary and imperialistic Great Power political course of the right-wing conservative government led by Helmut Kohl. The development of extraparliamentary movements mainly depends

on whether the forces on the left operating outside of the various parliaments, in particular, those critical to the system and the anti-capitalist Left involved in diverse fields of activity and organizations, can be united into a stronger common force capable of coordinating their goals, projects, and actions. It is to be expected that the PDS will make a major contribution in this regard. This, however, must be done in such a way that it is free of all suspicion that the PDS is aiming at political integration of the other leftist forces for the sake of implementing its own party agenda and is pursuing a kind of claim to act as an "patron" with regard to all others.

The relationship of the PDS to the communists, in particular to the DKP, should be considered within this framework. After crisis-frought internal differences in connection with the "world-historic political upheaval" of 1989/90, the DKP stabilized itself as an independent Communist party based on programmatic principles that have been thoroughly examined and freed from doctrinaire limitations. However, it continues to adhere to its Marxist orientation and basic theoretical positions and its attendant policy. Up to now there have been a few discussions between the PDS and the DKP at the central level that served to demonstrate that there is a much agreement with regard to current political questions without glossing over the existing theoretical and programmatic differences. Other than weak attempts in the European and Bundestag elections in 1994, practically no real and effective cooperation developed on the basis on these accordant positions. After some wavering, the PDS nominating committee accepted the candidacy of DKP members on the PDS electoral lists for the European and Bundestag elections. This represented progress in efforts to establish a constructive relationship between the two parties. But a "party coalition" or even consultation with the DKP leadership was expressly rejected by the PDS leadership when it came to questions about the election campaign or final selection of candidates.

The DKP has repeatedly stated that it would like to pursue a constructive relationship with the PDS in the sense of cooperation based on partnership and solidarity. It emphasizes, nonetheless, the mutual acceptance of the independence of both parties as a

prerequisite for this cooperation. Yet influential persons in the top leadership of the PDS continue to press for the party's distancing itself from the so-called "C-groups," among which they include the DKP. They maintain that any connection to these "followers of Stalinism" can only harm the PDS. In reality, the advocates of such positions are only prostrating themselves before the prevailing anticommunist state doctrine that, for defamatory purposes, places an equal sign between the terms *communist* and *Stalinism*, and which, in the final analysis, is also used against the PDS.

Right-wing developments in Germany demand not only that the PDS and the DKP arrive at a more constructive and effective mode of cooperation, but also that the German Left as a whole extract itself from the resignation that has dominated recent years and throw off the state of relative passivity into which it has fallen. This involves assuming political responsibility for Germany's development, which has a decisive influence on the development of Europe.

*Wuppertal, Germany*

Translated by Sara Fletcher Luther and John Neumaier  
*Poughkeepsie, New York*  
and Alan Faulcon, *Berlin, Germany*

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*Editor's note: The following statement, referred to in the preceding article, was published as a paid advertisement in Neues Deutschland on 18 May 1995 over the signatures of thirty-eight members of the PDS, many of them well-known GDR intellectual, cultural, and political figures.*

### **In Great Concern ("Appeal of the 38")**

After the first meeting of the Fourth PDS Party Convention we are very concerned over the future of the Party of Democratic Socialism.

The PDS went into the 1994 election with a party program

and an election program in which certain questions susceptible to consensus were settled after reasonably long discussion, and other questions were left open. The party led a good electoral campaign and reached its goal, the reentry into the Bundestag [parliament]. This represents a definite opposition force in future parliamentary politics.

It must be assumed, therefore, that those in power will seek new ways to eliminate this force. In addition to the old politics of exclusion, the attempt will be made, especially by intelligent SPD politicians, to make the PDS ultimately superfluous through co-optation.

Instead of a discussion of how the electoral mandate is to be realized under these new conditions, a phantom battle has been initiated in some quarters under the absurd slogan of "reform against Stalinists." The fundamental consensus of the party is violated in three points: weakening of the concept of opposition, abandonment of the class struggle, and putting aside the question of property in favor of a social contract; rejection of the SED [Socialist Unity Party] and the GDR under the verdict of Stalinism, and the narrowing of pluralism in the party. The socialist objective is transformed into a noncommittal vision.

This unnecessarily chosen change in direction is groundless, irresponsible, and dangerous. If the PDS gives way to the pressure to accommodate, it undermines the foundations of its existence. The more the Federal Republic develops toward the right, the more important becomes the activity of a consistent left opposition party. We do not know how great the opportunity of this party is. The way of accommodation leads in any case to superfluosity, to nothing.

The combination of the heritage of the GDR, defense of the interests of eastern Germany, and a determined all-German opposition is not weakness, but, with its corresponding politics, the true strength of the PDS.

In order to use the tradition of a great historical movement for a new, entirely different future, three things are necessary:

1. To preserve the character of the PDS as a consistent opposition party, to continue the determined resistance to the

right-wing developments in Germany, to defend eastern German interests and the interests of all those discriminated against and disadvantaged by the shift to the right.

2. To undertake a common attempt to analyze intelligently and radically the past and present and therefore not to throw overboard carelessly in favor of new fashion the valuable and important things we have learned from Marx.

3. To defend the pluralism that has historically grown up in the PDS. It is precisely here that there is an essential change in contrast to the SED. It is absurd to commit to openness in a future socialist society and at the same time renounce solidarity with one another in the present PDS.

We invite all comrades and sympathizers who share our concerns, and others who would like to dispel these concerns, to a discussion 29 May 1995 at 6:30 p.m. at Wustrower Strasse 14, auditorium 4.

Susi Fleischer	Heidrun Hegewald
Prof. Dr. Helga Hörz	Prof. Dr. Ingrid Mittenzwei
Renate Richter	Gisela Steineckert
Laura von Wimmersperg	Heinz Behling
Prof. Dr. Michael Benjamin	Gerhard Branstner
Wolfgang Brauer	Prof. Dr. Erich Buchholz
Prof. Dr. Ernst Engelberg	Dr. Kuno Füssel
Günter Görlich	Prof. Dr. Uwe-Jens Heuer
Prof. Dr. Herbert Hörz	Dr. Heinz Jung
Prof. Dr. Friedrich Jung	Prof. Dr. Ernstgert Kalbe
Prof. Dr. Hermann Klenner	Dr. Horst Kolodziej
Prof. Dr. Hans Krusch	Prof. Dr. Moritz Mebel
Prof. Dr. Werner Mittenzwei	Prof. Dr. Harry Nick
Eberhard Panitz	Prof. Dr. Kurt Pätzold
Prof. Dr. Siegfried Prokop	Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Richter
Prof. Dr. Ekkehard Sauermann	Prof. Dr. Walter Schmidt
Dr. Arnold Schölzel	Prof. Willy Sitte
Prof. Dr. Gottfried Stiehler	Armin Stolper
Prof. Dr. Manfred Wekwerth	Dr. Winfried Wolf

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## Book Reviews

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### **Russian Philosophy before Russian Marxism—A Rich and Diverse Heritage: A Review Essay**

*A History of Russian Philosophy: From the Tenth through the Twentieth Centuries.* 2 vols. Edited by Valery A. Kuvakin. Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1994. 747 pages, cloth \$89.95.

Barriers of language, distance, and a seventy-year Cold War have hindered most people in the United States from knowing, let alone comprehending, Russian culture and thought. United States philosophers have shared in this ignorance. Prior to the three-volume *Russian Philosophy*, edited by J. M. Edie, J. P. Scanlan, and M.-B. Zeldin in 1963, only a few scattered works in English like those by N. O. Lossky (1951) and V. V. Zenkovsky (1953) had appeared; and these were strongly biased against materialism.

Making an enormous leap forward, the present volumes bridge the abyss and in intelligent expositions introduce us to the treasures of Russian philosophy, almost entirely from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Selections from the writings of Chaadeyev, Khomyakov, Belinsky, Chernyshevsky, Bakunin, Mikhailovsky, Leontyev, Solovyov, Berdayev, and Lossky are included. The editor, Valery A. Kuvakin, professor and chair of the Department of History of Russian Philosophy at Moscow State University, observes that heretofore two tendencies seemed

*Nature, Society, and Thought*, vol. 7, no. 4 (1994)

to prevail in the interpretation of the meaning of “Russian philosophy”: the extent to which that philosophy concurred with, modified, or departed from Western philosophy, particularly Marxism; and an exaggerated version of its “specific national features” (16–17). On this issue Mikhail Maslin has written an illuminating appendix, “Russian Philosophy Abroad: Western Interpretations.”

This work is unique and welcome for several reasons. It is a collective but also pluralistic product, each chapter (except for the selections) written by one or two of a team of twenty-one philosophers who evince special and detailed knowledge of their subjects. It is “the first work by Russian historians on their national philosophy to be published in English” (13). It makes available the wealth and “the wide diversity of thought” of Russian philosophy (“Russian” taken in a multinational sense to include Ukrainian, Greek, etc.). It displays the “polyphonic” nature of Russian philosophy, in which various idealist and materialist themes play off against each other, competing, interweaving, parting, uniting, developing. And it places the philosophers in their settings—personal, social, cultural, historical. The economic environs, so strongly stressed in Soviet historiography, are referred to but not fully spelled out.

In contrast to the “religious-deterministic” interpretations of emigré historians, “Western centrism” (dating from early Hegelianism), “Eastern centrism” (dating from Russia of the 1830s), and the Soviet method of “standardization,” which blurred the “individual uniqueness” and “personal contributions” of philosophers, these essays give us insight into the personalities, living situations, existential problems, struggles, and problematics of particular thinkers, pointing up the questions that drove their thinking and that were matters of personal passion and commitment. This “novelistic” method of writing philosophical history is appropriate also because Russian tradition has consistently taken a “high interest” in the human being (570). Philosophers (even “spiritual” ones) up until the 1917 revolution were nearly always dissidents shut out from the establishment, and from the time of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, philosophy came to mean any form of deep social critique advanced by the intelligentsia; thus chapters, very incisive, on Dostoyevsky

and Tolstoy are included here.

Moreover, because of this intimate relation between social affairs and philosophy as the conscience of society, the contributors to this work conceive of philosophy as “a form of national self-awareness”—a sign of the present times too. Through the centuries philosophy has reflected the shifting conflicts of classes, values, and forces of development in Russian history, as well as the more durable factors of Russia’s position between East and West, its adoption of Orthodox Christianity in 988, the Tatar-Mongol invasion, and its drive to achieve state security culminating in the reforms and absolutism of Peter the Great (1672–1725). “The split between the people, the authorities (state), and the intelligentsia” was profoundly determinative of subsequent Russian philosophy: through the nineteenth century themes evolved that were distinctly Russian: anthropocentrism, philosophy of history, antistatism and anarchism, revolution, messianism, prophecy, apocalypse, and eschatology (13–15). While the authors do not analyze it, Marxism merged with this caldron of ideas, was modified to adapt to it and to make use of it, and drew strength from it. One cannot begin to understand Soviet communism, both theory and practice, without understanding this history of Russian society, culture, and philosophy. The thought of the Russian intelligentsia not only reflected the course of Russian history with all its contradictions; the ideas of the progressive intelligentsia helped to direct it. In spite of the conservative inertia, the work of a significant portion of the intelligentsia was a signal and a preparation for a revolution, both economic and spiritual; and indeed a revolution did arrive, though not exactly the kind that any could foresee. If such a teleology is not explicit in this study, it is strongly implicit.

After an introduction beginning with the ninth-century Slavonic missionaries Cyril and Methodius, this work divides into nine parts; “the era of modernization,” featuring Peter the Great’s “brain trust,” required to build the new society, and the polymath Mikhail Lomonosov; the Age of Enlightenment (the Masons, the revolutionary Radishchev, and Decembrists); early idealists—Chaadayev, the Slavophiles (Khomyakov, Kireyevsky,

and others) and “Official *Narodnost*” (conservative nationalism) coupled to “Russian theism”; “radical publicist writing”—Belinsky, Herzen, Ogarev, Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyubov, Pisarev; the revolutionary movement—Bakunin, Lavrov, Tkachev, Mikhailovsky; philosophy and literature (Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy); philosophy and religion—Danilevsky, Leontyev, personalism, Yurkevich, Solovyov; philosophy and science—Sechenov, Mendeleev, and the cosmism of Tsiolkovsky and Vernadsky; and “idealism and new systems”—Neo-Kantianism, Rozanov, Berdayev, Shestov, Bulgakov, Florensky, Lossky, and Frank.

Maslin’s valuable eleven-page annotated bibliography of sources in English, German, and Russian concludes the volumes. The final part on idealism embraces the writings of emigré philosophers who were born in the last half of the nineteenth century. The study therefore excludes all philosophy of the Soviet period—that is, Marxism-Leninism—although the careers of two philosophical scientists, Tsiolkovsky and Vernadsky, to whom expositions are devoted here, extended into the Soviet period.

In part because Russia’s socioeconomic development even through this era was slower and less differentiated than that of the West, the sharp dichotomies that marked Western philosophy do not stand out there. Matter and mind, nature and culture, body and soul, sensation and reason, facts and values, science and morals (as in ethical codes and religion)—such dualisms have permeated Western thought from the Neo-Platonists and the Christian theologians to Descartes, Kant, and twentieth-century positivism. Though wrenched by strenuous contests between conservatives and radicals, between materialists and religious believers, and in the late nineteenth century between liberals and revolutionaries, Russian philosophers believed they spoke for Mother Russia and had rightful claims on her destiny. Oriented to the national questions, their thought was social and unitary, undiverted by the technical problems of philosophy as a conceptual exercise. Russian philosophy was “an integral . . . component of the whole social and cultural life of Russia” (398). The centuries-long conflict between the (theocratic) Church and the (bourgeois-

democratic) state, so decisive in the class conflict in the West between landed feudalism and commercial capitalism, did not occur in Russia. Peter the Great's ruthless and omniscient centralism and his subjection of Orthodoxy—and of the landholding nobility and merchant and manufacturing classes—precluded that possibility. And the liberal impulses of individualism and democracy—the political currents let loose under capitalism—did not surge in Russia to challenge feudal autocracy and its “patriarchal-communal structure” until after the abolition of serfdom in 1861 (570).

At this point the tectonic tremors of class division began to stir in both society and philosophical debate. Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov, the leaders of the radical intelligentsia, both sons of priests (as D. S. Mirsky has observed), deified the scientific reason of the Enlightenment and called for a strict, puritanical, single-minded morality dedicated to socialist revolution. They abjured all tradition, sentiment, romance, and “art for art's sake” represented among the gentry from which they sprang, setting themselves against all nonrevolutionaries—state functionaries, landowners, bourgeoisie, liberals, and circles of the “esthetic” and “cultured.” Plekhanov and Lenin and the Bolsheviks followed in this line of scientific and revolutionary socialism linked to a militant people's struggle against all opposition in the spheres of politics and culture.

The final outcome of the social division reflected in this philosophical conflict was social revolution—three revolutions. The Bolshevik leaders of the 1917 October revolution were resolved to make an absolute break with the past of Russia and with all of the classes and much of the culture associated with it. In time a wide fault opened separating “Soviet philosophical science” (in the Chernyshevsky mode) from “a Russian philosophical diaspora” whose members abroad, steeped in the richness of Russian culture, systematized “the initial intuitions of the Russian cultural renaissance of the early twentieth century” (16). Some of this diaspora literature has been known heretofore in the West, but these volumes bring forward and elaborate its meaning in the milieu and evolution of Russia.

This separation was the climax of a series of rising tensions

between those reformers who emphasized the uniquely Russian elements in their concept of social change (both religious thinkers and materialists) and those who interpreted Marxism as a Western science of society the adoption of which was required for Russia to enter the modern world. Yet many of the intelligentsia were drawn to Marxism because of its firm sense of historic destiny for the people and its messianic proclamation of final triumph. They and many peasants and workers resonated to that sense. "The ideas of Marxism and socialism," Kuvakin writes, "had penetrated so deeply into the consciousness of the philosophizing intelligentsia that all its representatives, with rare exceptions, either went through a Marxist (or atheistic and socialist) period . . . or considered Marx's theory as a phenomenon to which one almost inevitably had to record an attitude" (537–38). One need not agree with Karl Löwith that Marx's thought was a secular heresy of Christianity, but in Russian thought its utopian vision of history was for decades a close kin and rival to the eschatological dream of Russian Orthodoxy whose mood had shaped the mentality of the masses for a thousand years.

What moved virtually all of these nineteenth-century philosophers was their ardor for practical truth-justice. In the 1850s Nikolai Dobrolyubov, a young student, perturbed by the overwhelming evils of autocracy and serfdom, cried out: "Why is everybody suffering like this?" And he answered: "I seem to be called by fate to the great cause of revolution" (249). This moral sensitivity and prophetic indignation erupted not only among secular thinkers. Some of the Slavophiles urged peasant reform, and the ultrareactionary Orthodox Church could not accept Khomyakov's reconstructed theology or permit publication of his work. According to Kuvakin, "the most eminent religious philosophers" of the early nineteenth century originated a secular reformism in both theology and philosophy; it extended from Chaadayev and the Slavophiles through Berdayev, Shestov, Frank, and Lossky to the religious visionary N. F. Feodorov (397). The latter, an active, practical apocalyptic, proposed that to defeat the death-dealing powers of nature, people must make use of their reason and technology to control the sun's energy, cultivate the earth's crops, and colonize the planets. This of course

was far from the passive and backward attitude of Orthodoxy and anticipated the social Prometheanism of communism.

So, as the sparks of social conflict flew upward, as hungry crowds clashed with police, most of these philosophers were not meditating in ivory towers or conducting graduate seminars. Large numbers were jobless, banned by the czar from the academy. Many were in and out of jail, or exiled to remote and desolate regions. The revolutionaries lived on the run, exhorting and agitating. They philosophized with pen and broadside, in the invisible ink of prison and the black print of the underground, with speech and rally, among workers and peasants, with the rhetoric of rage and overthrow.

Lenin—not treated here—identified with this tradition and perfected it, while renouncing the tactics of terrorism. The contributors to this book describe the subject of Russian intellectuals as “understanding of the universe, history, and the sense of human existence and conceptions of the individual and society, including Russian ideas of true knowledge and the ideals of a worthy life” (13). But studies in cosmology, ontology, theory of knowledge, methodology, logic, philosophy of science, and language analysis do not figure prominently in these two volumes. When they do appear, they are usually stated and pursued as instrumental to the understanding and realization of human values, whether conceived as secular or religious, serving the betterment of person and society.

The refined and specialized examination of particular problems of philosophy, and the division of humanistic and scientific interests, which by the mid-1800s were already under way in the West, advanced less rapidly in Russia. While in the West, “the age of analysis” arose as a reflex of both the progress of industrialized society, accompanied by the spread of science and technology, and the decline of religious monism and idealism, which had reinforced the synoptic vocation of philosophy, no such fragmentation was evident in Russian intellectual life. It is true that scientists like Sechenov the physiologist, Mendeleev the chemist, Tsiolkovsky the physicist, and Varnadsky the earth scientist and pioneer ecologist—“the Russian encyclopedist of our century” (522)—each one a brilliant scientist in more than one

field, stretched their conceptualizing to broad and philosophical generalizations about the natural, human, and moral worlds. But their philosophies of science were grounded in observations; they built their speculative systems on empirical and analytic data. In Great Britain, France, Germany, and Austria, by contrast, the main trend among philosophers of science was narrow, skeptical, and positivistic (as in Comte, Mill, Moleschott, Haeckel, Mach, Pearson, Poincaré, and others). Lenin's attack on Mach and Avenarius, besides being political, was in the Russian tradition of belief in a central and embracing concept of reality. (At the same time Lenin was tenaciously empirical—an astute and experienced strategist and tactician in politics, forced to face, understand, and foresee the social world in its concrete, specific features. Like these Russian philosophers of science, therefore, he was saved from the empty generalizations that poured out from so many Soviet philosophers in the period of Stalinist consolidation.)

Not until the Soviet time of massive and swift industrialization did specialization in both the sciences and philosophy develop on a large scale. Under the general principles of Marxism-Leninism the Soviets continued the holistic tradition of Russian philosophy, subordinating specializations to overall social ends. What was distinctive about Marx, Engels, and Lenin was their retention of the classical view of philosophy as comprehensive understanding of the world and general guidance in practice for creating humanity's place and activity in it, formulating these in the context of particular sciences. They avoided the extremes of abstract idealistic synthesis and isolated naturalistic analysis that have characterized much of Western philosophy for more than a century.

In Russia the transformations of the capitalist economy aroused questions about the existing social arrangements and morals. Such questions in the second half of the nineteenth century added fuel to the fires of growing social discontent. But the spirit of systematic social criticism, protest, and revolution, when its ardent hopes are repeatedly dashed—as they were throughout the century—is bound in time to lead among some to a mood of despondency, anger, and anarchism. Lenin was aware of this; in 1901 he wrote, “Anarchism is a product of *despair*.” It is devoid

of an understanding of the causes of exploitation, the development of society, class struggle, and “the creative force for the realization of socialism.” Anarchism as attitude is the sense that there can be no source or foundation for society either in government or in other social institutions. We can see this attitude deepening through the history of nineteenth-century Russian thought—from the outright political anarchism of Bakunin as early as the 1840s, through Tkachev’s theory of revolution—“The people of a real revolution is a tempestuous element which annihilates everything in its path, which always acts instinctively and unconsciously” (323)—to the antistatist and antisocial moralism of Tolstoy, the “freedom” of Dostoyevsky, Leontyev’s presentiment of social doom for Russia, Kropotkin’s ideal commune, Rozanov’s “mystery of sex” (cf. Henry Miller), Shestov’s existential “absurd,” the *Urgrund* of Berdayev, the “faith” of religious and mystical philosophers, and the feeling of decadence and morbidity in late nineteenth-century philosophical idealism.

The hopelessness at the base of anarchism is a mood of society suffering from the anxiety and confusion of transition; it became epidemic at the end of the European Middle Ages, and it deepened in the nineteenth-century Western transition into industrial, urban capitalism. It is of course the antipode of the aspiration for fulfillment, which is the postmedieval, modern idea running from the Age of Enlightenment forward. But it was a strong element in Russian history preceding the modern period; it was the dark underside of extreme utopianism, hidden beneath Russia’s coercive systems of thought and of social organization. Scholars like James Lawler have written about the “nihilistic” socialism that came to power during the Stalin years; it expressed in modern form the autocratic nihilism extending through the long course of czarist rule.

No doubt the scholarship that distinguishes this work was in progress before the start of perestroika and glasnost in 1985—a testimony, we must note, that the Soviet system could mobilize merit in the scientific community on a large scale. In spite of Yeltsin’s recrudescence of coercions, catastrophic economic policies, and collusion with the Mafia and the West, perestroika’s spirit continues to stimulate “the radical renewal of public and

intellectual life in Russia.” Economic shock and ideological crisis have driven many people, scholars among them, to search for the roots of their personal and rational identity; this has led them to examine anew their social and intellectual history. The authors state that the “national schools of thought” of Russian philosophy, whose works (along with critiques of those works) are now being published for the first time in large numbers, “were deformed and distorted during the time of Stalinism and stagnation.” Consideration of this plurality of views, they believe, will give people access to their full legacy and appreciation of “the thematic originality of Russian philosophy.” They will be freed to choose their own personal philosophy of life, distinct from an official philosophy imposed by social authority. This freedom will facilitate “the search for inner perfection and elevation of spirit, expressed most intensely in Russian philosophy” (729).

The authors thus signal a swing toward the private and personal away from the social, a movement that puts into question and threatens both the philosophy and the practical achievements of socialism. Further, while the authors aim to exhibit the specific national nature of Russian philosophy, unblemished by special pleading, they make it clear that it is not class struggle but openness between national cultures, “mutual understanding and friendship,” and the joint solution of global problems that concern them (17). But class struggle is a brute fact of our present epoch. To solve these problems we must engage in the struggle, which is the source and test for our own understanding and mutual understanding. At the moment many Russian philosophers are in a state of shock resulting from the shattering of Soviet philosophy. When like those here they recover their sense of identification with their national past and integrate it into their consciousness, they will be more prepared to take in hand the international struggle for the future. Meanwhile, this book is a needed step in that direction, both for them and for us.

We can conceive some possible reasons why this study omits consideration of Plekhanov, Lenin, and prominent Marxist philosophers of the Soviet period: their work is well known; among Russians now there is little interest in their work—even a satiation with and distaste for it—and a growing demand for the products of

other philosophers; their writings represent an unqualified break with much of the history of Russian philosophy; it is difficult at this juncture in history to disentangle the philosophy of Marxism-Leninism from its application and misapplication to Russian conditions; and it is too hazardous now to offer a definitive estimate of the place of Marxism in that history. Yet surely the authors hold one or more points of view on the philosophies of these seventy years of Russian history, and from a book with the subtitle, "From the Tenth through the Twentieth Centuries," one expects the writers to present and expound these philosophies. Commenting on their failure to analyze the contradictory split in Russian philosophy in the early twentieth century between the "renaissance" and Marxism, they say that "Soviet philosophical science" is now the subject of other fields of research (16).

Nevertheless, this research stands out for the writers' freedom from tendentious categories and standards, their sympathetic and often affectionate attention to the character and thought of the philosophers, the editor's explanation of recurrent themes in varied views that on the surface seem so disparate, and the details of social life and individual thought that were often absent from the conventional Cold War stereotypes, encyclopedic abstracts, or textbook summaries. As the philosophies are focused and magnified, we can appreciate them in their complexity and judge them more realistically; and we must ask if there are clearer and fairer expositions in English. Thus the "white-black contrast between Russia and the West" (719) cannot be sustained; Radishchev was not a sentimental, abstract moralizer but a "revolutionary enlightener" (721); the Russian enlighteners were as acute in their criticism of politics and religion as were their Western counterparts; Herzen, for all his hopeful activism, had a sense of the irrational and tragic in his story (229); though Russian philosophy has had its own ecological and cultural history, it is not an utterly alien species, has grappled with the universal problems of philosophy, and has developed in its own way through interaction with ideas of other nationalities; the thinking within the Orthodox Church in the nineteenth century was not uniform but complicated, with a division among conservatives (the hopeful and the

skeptical) and a rising censure of the “soullessness, violence, amoralism, and economic exploitation” of a state sanctioned by the Church (398).

For those in the West who perceive Russian philosophy as a bleak gray expanse or who are familiar with only a few figures in the landscape, these volumes hold surprises, disclosing—like radar photos of earth objects taken from space—colorful figures whose writings have not been publicly known even in Russia. Besides the thick texture of Berdayev’s original works (“tormented” by Marxism), we come face to face with the offbeat, Zen-like wisdom of Shestov turning ordinary categories upside down and exulting with his whole being in all that seems to negate being—the inconsistent, absurd, paradoxical, irrational, fortuitous, and tragic. “Crisis perception of the world,” Kuvakin observes (571), as a reflection of both the socioeconomic and the personal crisis, surfaced as early as Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Solovyov, Leontyev, and others, was carried further in the next generation by Rozanov and Merezhkovsky, and reached full blossom in Berdayev and Shestov. This was “existentialism before existentialism”—i.e., Western-European existentialism, for Kierkegaard and Nietzsche had already broken the essentialist mold and had proclaimed their manifestos of freedom. The incredibly fecund and fresh Shestov—more playful than the stern inquisitor of the world, Wittgenstein—wrote a work on Kierkegaard, and during his long stay in France influenced Camus and other existentialists (595).

We learn that the best of the “democratic-liberal elements” in that turbulent and stormy time from 1861 to 1917 found expression in Berdayev and Solovyov—in their moral idealism and “faith in the sovereignty and power of the spiritual in all man’s affairs—from the personal choice and deed of social practice” (591). The idea of human freedom was spreading like burning fever among all intellectuals who could discern that czarism was in irredeemable decay. As a Marxist propagandist, Berdayev put his moral ideal into political practice, and for that he spent three years in exile. But we are not informed here of how the moral idealism of the various other democrats and revolutionaries of the time paralleled and diverged from that of Berdayev, nor *why*

—though the editor does describe the shifting pattern of his kaleidoscopic mind: radical, individualistic, socialistic, anarchistic, liberal, aristocratic, theocratic, iconoclastic. Over his career, Berdayev epitomized the ambiguities of a mixed and strife-torn Russia. In times of peace such a mix, were it unified, might become a richness. But a revolution in the making is designed precisely to overcome ambiguity, both individual and social, and first of all the conflict of classes at the base. It customarily cannot tolerate within its ranks a wide variety of views.

Not all the representatives of this romantic maelstrom, this Russian “renaissance” during which the autonomy of the lone individual was suddenly revealed, as by a white flash of lightning on a dark plain—not all affirmed the responsibility of the person for the social and natural world. It was a time of wild adolescence, the intoxication of newly liberated youth, the unabashed coming of age of Russian creators of culture. Promethean mastery of earth and cosmos, Dionysian abandonment and sensual ecstasy, morbid preoccupation with the diabolical and death, the themes of chaos and destruction alongside apocalyptic hope and resurrection; these were amply explored and played out in the arts—Scriabin, Diaghilev, Kandinsky, and many others. The writers of this book do not sketch this whole background for us, nor do they trace how its unchecked experimentation endured into the early Soviet period, found opportunities within socialism, and then died out.

During these years superstitions among the masses were already manifold. Decades of deepening misery nurtured fantasies and visions; wild conjectures and extravagant panaceas abounded. The tides of social change were sweeping away the old topography and landmarks from family to state, clearing the way for free exploration for both individuals and groups, among the people and among the intelligentsia. Russia would never be the same as it was in the past, but what would it be in the future? Artists, writers, religious believers, and philosophers, as well as political reformers, rose to address the chaos and the questions. The strains to which mentalities are subjected under such conditions, and the extremes of their responses, are illustrated by the very different conceptions of the nature and destiny of

personality. Mikhailovsky the materialist argued for the freedom of the person in the “struggle for individuality” and “social solidarity.” Feodorov, looking both backward and forward, preached “the resurrection of the dead” (the revival of corpses) and the extension of father-son brotherhood into the future and other planets. And Rozanov, who rejoiced in the thoughtless wisdom of the body and the unborn baby, wished to withdraw from the cold world into the warmth of God, the cosy home, and the blissful night of sexuality and the womb. Egregiously aware of the oppositions within him, Rozanov wrote that his nature “was woven of filth, tenderness, and sorrow” (556), his little turbid whirlpool a microcosm of the swirling social tide around him. Like Yeats he sought the source of meaning, the light of life, in the dark and dirt of his own lower depths:

I must lie down where all the ladders start,  
In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.

Can those committed to the methods of the sciences and the use of reason in philosophy—and in daily living—learn anything from the strange aphorisms and incoherent discourse of these existentialists, both Russian and Western? Can Marxists draw a lesson from them? At least one: All science and all philosophies, abstract and systematic, bear a built-in burden and limitation: they do not as such face, describe, or control very well the rich complexity of concrete human existence with its processes, events, changes, relations, and qualities—mysterious, individuated, plural, diverse, contradictory, dynamic, emotional, accidental, disordered, catastrophic, tragic, and annihilating. Yet we need abstract concepts of small and large scale to guide us through problematic concrete situations, and science and philosophy are necessary for such wise and effective guidance. But they alone are not sufficient for the satisfactory realization of a lived existence; and when they deny or derail the fulfilling process of that concrete, changing, complex, dialectical process of existence, they lose touch with its sustaining and creative movement. When with hard and dogmatic plan they dominate it, they become tyrannous and destructive.

In reaction against abstract and static idealist philosophy,

Marxism made a start in an effort to interpret and change such a world. It described nature and history as dialectical, marked by oppositions, transformations, qualitative leaps, zigzag progress, reversals, blind alleys, and unpredictable outcomes. The world “works” according to regular laws. but it also “plays,” innovates, revises, and varies its own rules, introduces different rules, and moves to new levels of order. Of course to survive and advance our human dominion in nature, we want to maximize our understanding and control and to minimize our impotence. So we bring our working habits to it, and it responds and generally corresponds, so that we attain a working relation with it. Thus modern science, like its partner modern industry, bears the stamp of the medieval-Protestant ethic of work (Max Weber). There is a continuity between medieval agricultural practice and our own—as well as between the heresy-hunting of the twelfth century, the Inquisition, the burning and hanging of witches, colonial systems of exploitation of people and lands, ecological pollution, and the manufacture and use of nuclear weapons. If nature is read as order, and we believe we have grasped its order—what is to bar us from believing we can become the supreme Orderer? In *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels wrote: “Let us not, however, flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human conquests over nature. For each such conquest takes its revenge on us.” The reason lies in our *hubris* and our ignorance of nature’s complexity. J. B. S. Haldane, a natural scientist and a Marxist, said: “The Universe is not only queerer than we imagine. It is queerer than we *can* imagine.” At present our physical and biological knowledge, comparatively speaking, seems surer than our knowledge of human nature and society. In addition, as only one of nature’s finite creations, we are imprisoned in our own special complexity and cannot look at ourselves as detached observers. Still, this gives us no warrant for stepping off the narrow cliff of our knowledge into the unknown mists of mysticism.

The project of Marxism, to know and master the course of nature and society for the sake of human fulfillment on our planet, is historically young and far from finished, in both theory and practice. Because of its false starts and failures, short-sighted and faint-hearted critics have given up on it. In its stead, the

asystematic perspective has attracted and will attract many in the West as well as in Russia; it highlights real human living and history that intellectual and social systems do not deal with postmodernism, deconstructionism, New Age religious movements in the West, worldwide fundamentalism, and the cynicism of the literati exemplify this protest against rational system. To be more fully true and of effective, Marxism must become more concrete, flexible, and human; and such in fact was the aim of Marx, Engels, and Lenin.

Marxists in various countries today can also learn lessons from analysis of the inability of the Bolshevik Marxists to find a broader common ground with other left forces and allies without the sacrifice of essential revolutionary principles. Perhaps that was impossible at the time. But the long cooperation of the South African Communist Party with progressive and anti-imperialist groups illustrates one way of successful political action.

On this question, many underestimate the gravity of the crisis in Russia from the start of World War I up to 1926; physical exhaustion; twenty-seven million casualties and vast impoverishment from a devastating international war, drought, famine, and epidemic; a bloody civil war and the intervention of foreign armies; blockade, encirclement, and subversion; backward industry and agriculture; the breakdown of transport and public services; widespread social unrest; and excessive emigration. In 1917 the Provisional Government proved too weak to cope with the disarray. To survive, the Communist government, under siege on two fronts, domestic and foreign, chose its only alternative, "war communism," a military centralization of the economy. To secure law and order, the Communist Party from the beginning had controlled the economic and political order in every factory, military unit, and soviet. And though Lenin's brief New Economic Policy was successful, it was clear that a central administrative structure—a bureaucracy, in cooperation with the Party—was essential to coordinate and plan a socialist economy. The country simply did not have the highly skilled specialized and experienced workforce in industry and agriculture to carry out a people's democratic socialism. The Five-Year Plans put this structure firmly into place. Under siege it took on the

characteristics of a military machine, which during the 1930s became necessary for survival in the face of the expansionist fascist powers in Japan and Germany.

To what extent can a society organized like an army foster a variety of values in the economy, politics, the sciences, education, the arts, philosophy, and religion? Can hierarchy accommodate the diversities and disorder of democracy? In this case the consequence was a severe constriction of the expression of variety in all domains; and this entailed the suppression of a considerable part, but not the whole, of the heritage of Russian philosophy.

Capitalist states excluded the Soviet Union from integration into the world economy. Enforced international isolation retarded the influx of variety from abroad. Thus while the Soviet socialist system achieved unprecedented gains, it could not adapt indefinitely to the obstructions of a hostile world environment—military beleaguerment and invasion, the nuclear arms race, the scientific-technological revolution, the spread of consumerism, the power of the new information media, the globalization of the democratic idea, and the demand for freedom and diversity in individual lifestyles. The irony in this history is that the very social system that bore far more than its share of the load in defeating the fascist threat to the life of the “democracies” of capitalism (and to its own life) became a victim of the system it helped to save.

The ideological situation in prerevolutionary Russia was volatile. The ruling groups in Russia and those dependent on them, confused and fearful of the coming deluge, desperately cast about for any straw of salvation. Such a crisis was a ready-made opportunity for charlatans or sincere self-anointed messiahs who offered to a believing world their message of deliverance. (In Russia this was the time of the theosophy of Madame Blavatsky, the teacher of the older brother of the eminent spiritual philosopher Solovyov.)

The key player in the drama in the czar’s court was Rasputin, who, sponsored in his rise by reactionaries, gained free access to the imperial palace and the homes of aristocrats. The ruling class, already decadent in both sentiment and habit, willingly yielded to

his doctrine of debauchery and absolute submission: "Sin in order that you may obtain forgiveness; only through me can you hope to be saved." We might dismiss this as trivial and demagogic idolatry. But it is a warning of the role that ideology can play in the dissolution of societies.

While the contributors to this book refer in various degrees to the economic, social, political, and historical changes in society and the interactive relation between the philosophers and these changes, we need a more detailed account of trends in Russian history. Most of the themes in Russian philosophy have had long careers. Utopianism, for example, has been a motif in Russian culture since its Christianized beginnings in Kievan Rus in 988. In the 1700s Lomonosov and Radishchev took up the Enlightenment's secular version of "the heavenly city," and from then on the vision grew steadily among the radical socialists. Marxism, a Western heir of the utopian tradition, which replaced utopian socialism with "scientific socialism," flowed into the Russian socialist current. In the contest between Marxist and Christian utopianism, three parties emerged in opposition to one another: the God-Seekers (Berdayev, Merezhkovsky), who argued that the way to realize the presence of God in humanity was to organize society by religious ideals known through faith and revelation; God-Builders (Lunacharsky, Bogdanov, Gorky), who, wishing under the new socialist order to provide a substitute for the God of old forms of religion, took the supreme value of human life to be the collectivity of the working class, and who worshipped the people, glorifying their power to master the earth and to include distant cosmic regions in their realm; and Lenin and Plekhanov, who rejected both as supporting reaction. During the early days of the Bolshevik Revolution, in 1918–1921, a cosmist movement grew out of the God-Builders, proclaiming the conquest and rearrangement of the stars and the settlement of free earthlings on Mars. This too was a manifestation of the mood of utopianism among the cultured classes.

Cosmism as a serious philosophical outlook and practical alternative for society found a voice not only among artists and eccentric philosophers like Feodorov. It was worked out by leading scientists like Konstantin Tsiolkovsky and Vladimir

Vernadsky, both of whom are represented here. Tsiolkovsky, one of the founders of Russian rocketry and cosmonautics, created the basic theories of space exploration: reactive rocket propulsion by the use of liquid fuel, multistage rockets, a man-made earth satellite, orbital stages, and interplanetary travel. He advanced the view that the ultimate cosmic unit is a material atom, which, since it “possesses the capacity to feel and live,” is a spirit or “ideal atom” (514). The cosmos as one harmonious whole or “universal organism” is evolving through levels of complex systems toward perfection, ranging from the microlevel of “many inhabited worlds” (516). This evolution occurs as atom-spirits interact and coordinate their individual feelings and actions, as in the parts of the brain, the parts of the unitary personality, the personalities that form communities and states, and the states that make up humankind. This process or coordination is the immanent moral activity of the universe. Therefore “cosmic ethics” obliges the members of humanity to work as a unit to form cosmic social systems. Inspired by Feodorov, the religious seer, Tsiolkovsky foresaw the coming space age and the need for international cooperation in space exploration as well as cooperation with alien civilizations.

Contemporaneous with these views, philosophers in the West were elaborating similar notions—emergent evolution (C. Lloyd Morgan, Samuel Alexander); the panpsychism of Fechner, Lotze, Peirce, and others; the creative evolution of Bergson; and the philosophy of organism of Whitehead. But Tsiolkovsky’s cosmology was a distinctive Russian creation that bore the unique birthmarks of a Russian history. It combined intense individual science, bold fantasy, moral idealism, utopianism, apocalypticism, the unity of thought and practice, and burning desire for progress as a movement toward the perfection of the seeds of goodness in the material universe. His world hypothesis also expressed the humanistic optimism shared by many thinkers, among them Marx, in nineteenth-century industrializing societies.

The second half of the nineteenth century in Russia was a period of dramatic economic development and social change. Freed from serfdom, the peasants eventually owned their own

farms and won the right to elect their representatives in the zemstvo councils. Agricultural production increased and population rapidly grew, stimulated by industrialization in textiles, metals, mining, lumber, oil, and railroads, bringing a new laboring class with its demands. The new wealth generated by the transformation of privatized agriculture and capitalist industry and trade lifted the level of education and culture. In consequence, increasing numbers were liberated from poverty, grueling work, apathy, and ignorance into an existence that permitted reflection on life and the future. They now had the time and energy for critical evaluation of what had been and what might be for the individual and society. Such reflection, carried far and deep enough, was bound to lead to the contemplation of possibilities not yet realized, to areas of radical social change, to thoughts of revolution on the earth and in the heavens.

It was an era of class conflicts, of convulsive social changes, favorable to the germination and growth of new ideas among individuals and coteries in the arts, sciences, religion, and politics. Among the multitude of seeds of thought—dreams, ideals, fantasies, hypotheses—conceived, scattered, and sown in this hurricane of change, only a few took root, survived, thrived under cultivation, and came to fruition. Most died out, transient mutations. Certain scientific ideas survived and grew, like those of Mendeleyev and Vernadsky, tested in the laboratories of technical and social practice. The idea of socialism survived, in spite of failures of understanding and cultivation. The reason for survival is clear. The struggle for existence is ruthlessly selective. Ideas of science live on insofar as they meet the test of successful practice in the conditions of the natural and social world, insofar as prediction and control of that world are effective and useful for the lives of individuals and society.

Science is prescience—insight and foresight. Mendeleyev's periodic table of chemical elements described the periodic dependence of the properties of atoms on their weights; it also correctly predicted the presence of hitherto unknown elements. Likewise Vernadsky's ideas of the biosphere and noosphere anticipated some vital problems of humanity in the coming century—the management of natural resources, the growth of

planet-wide culture as a common possession and responsibility, the use of atomic energy, and the menace of self-destruction. The biosphere—as an envelope of living, active organisms (among them human beings) that encloses the geochemical planet—has profoundly transformed it; so has the noosphere, “the energy of human culture,” the domain of the human mind, meanings, and culture. And this global, geochemical activity—which carries within itself an ethics that proscribes war and inequality and requires the unity of the human species with itself and with the environment—“cannot be limited to the size of our planet,” wrote Vernadsky in 1944. It tends to expand into outer space. So Vernadsky’s views are here taken as representative of Russian cosmism (533).

These philosophical scientists were thinking holistically and humanistically. But they had a special quality. They matured before the nearsightedness of compartmentalized science could blind them to the big picture of the cosmos and of planetary humanity within it. Of note in this respect is a general difference between Russian and Western philosophy. In his seventeenth-century break with scholastic rationalism, Descartes turned to empirical and mathematical study of the physical world, setting aside the mental world as distinct and independent. The result was a definite dualism, *res extensa* and *res cogitans*; and the history of much subsequent Western philosophy became a history of endeavors to deal with this dualism. If matter and mind are essentially different, how are they related? If they are not so, what is their unitary underlying principle? While some Russian philosophers (Lomonosov, Chernyshevsky) addressed this problem, most of them considered it as secondary or passed over it. Their concern was social emancipation and welfare, and under the influence of Hegel, or Marx, or Orthodoxy, or idealism, or the synoptic spirit of science, they started from and aimed toward a coherent, unitary view of personality, society, history, and nature. When, at the end of the nineteenth century, scientists began to philosophize, therefore, many took the broad perspective. They “tackled problems that lay on the boundaries between science and philosophy, between science and social needs” and “combined the advances of the natural sciences with the ideas of

the social and humanitarian sciences” (489). In this way it was an intellectual history different from that of Western bourgeois society; and in some respects it corresponded to the scientific, social, and humanistic outlook of Marxism in the West with its Hegelian and holistic outlook. (Positivism found a voice in Russian philosophy—as in Bogdanov and Yushkevich—but it never commanded a wide following.) The earlier Russian Marxists thought in this spirit, but the concrete demands of the new socialist state produced a split of Marxist philosophy into two parts: the universal, general, and theoretical; and the political, particular, and practical.

Mendeleyev and Vernadsky were realists with concepts grounded in the conditions, laws, and evolution of nature and society’s interpenetration with it. They could foresee the global problems and opportunities for humanity in the coming century. Their theories of the development of nature complemented the theories of Marx concerning social history, although for various reasons the two—the political and the ecological—have yet to be integrated in thought and practice. Moreover, the philosophical generalizations of these scientists—from nature to society and morality, and from past and present to future—were signals that reliable theoretical guidance for the moral and political course of human history as swiftly passing from religious thinkers—at best intuitive, sometimes insightful, but not practical—to thinkers who were firmly rooted in the sciences, both natural and social. The issue for the coming century was how this new scientific vision of human liberation could be developed and put into political practice and social reality. The USSR was the first country to take up that task, in the conviction that the unity of humanity with itself and nature requires the elimination of class society.

We return finally to the question of the role and value of Marxist-Leninist (Soviet) philosophy in the history of Russian philosophy. In a discussion of Berdayev’s notion that Russian Marxism became “religious” and “ideological,” “infected” by the “messianism” and “fanaticism” of “Orthodox consciousness,” Kuvakin comments:

We shall have to state with regret and bitterness that in the development of socialism in the USSR deformations

occurred, in no small measure conditioned by the cultural lack of the country. The emergence of Stalinism meant a monstrous perversion of scientific socialism and the practice of Marxism in the spirit of extreme dogmatism, sectarianism, and fanatic intolerance. Stalin's idea of transforming Marxism as a sociopolitical movement into a "fortress," an "order of the sword-bearers," cost the lives of millions of innocent people. (503)

The "cultural lack" was not only a cause but also an effect of Stalinist rule, a regime that in turn had its roots in centuries of czarist autocracy, Byzantine religious authoritarianism, the estrangement of the intelligentsia from the state and its false religious culture, the nineteenth-century spirit of anarchism driven to expunge the whole of a poverty-stricken and oppressive past, and the ethos of nationalism in a spacious country repeatedly threatened and overrun by foreign powers from both east and west. The authors succinctly summarize some of these factors (13–14). No doubt for the great majority of people, the history of Russian philosophies did not seem relevant to their present or future. Yet the course of Soviet history demonstrates how a philosophical view of the world (its inclusions and exclusions) can be a decisive element, though often unconscious and not explicit, in shaping the lives and destinies of hundreds of millions of people.

Like masses of people throughout the world committed to Marxism, the authors of this work have yet to assimilate—or exorcise—the trauma of Stalinism and to assess that period thoroughly. Yet they have here appropriated the riches of their prerevolutionary philosophical legacy; and if not now, then at some future time, Russian scholars will be compelled to give an account of the liabilities and lasting assets of Marxism for Russian and world history.

In the present work the writers have laid open for the English-reading world the pages of a portion of that large and variegated heritage. They open up a perspective onto their national culture, one too long unappreciated. They have done so in the conviction "that openness can lead to mutual understanding and friendship between nations and provide the basis for creating a universal

culture of mankind free from hostility and estrangement, ready to tackle the global problems of the third millennium of our era” (17). It is a step in a journey that all humanisms can share, including philosophical Marxism.

Howard L. Parsons  
*Department of Philosophy, Emeritus*  
*University of Bridgeport*

*Das geistige Erbe Europas* [The Spiritual Heritage of Europe]. Edited by Manfred Buhr. Naples: Vivarium (with Istituto Italiano per gli studi filosofici), 1994. 910 pages, DM 120.

This collection of sixty-one essays (all but one published for the first time) by eminent philosophers from twenty countries is a remarkable organizational and intellectual accomplishment. The book is sponsored by universities and research institutes in nine Western and Eastern European countries. The international network of Fichte scholars, in which Manfred Buhr has long been active, is well represented, but a wide range of philosophical orientations is present. Their interaction constitutes the theoretical interest of the book. As outlined in the introductory article by Antonio Gargano, the central theme is the idea of the good, the determination of individual and collective values.

The book originated in 1986–88 in Buhr's discussions of the East-West split with French and Italian colleagues. The publication project itself dates from 1990, as a response to European integration, the collapse of the Communist regimes, and the increasing penetration of market forces into every aspect of life. The preservation and development of the intellectual heritage of Europe become critically important if the processes of unification are not to be propelled blindly by economic forces. Buhr's own essay, "Europa und sein geistiges Erbe," explains the unifying concerns of the collection. Philosophy is immanent in the historical process. Repudiating the thesis of the end of history, Buhr argues that philosophy is the repository of unfulfilled possibilities, which become available for new application as the old social and intellectual structures crumble.

To discuss these prospects, Buhr has arranged a dialogue in six parts. If the categories overlap, and particular essays might have appeared under several heads, this is not due to any lack of editorial rigor, but is the result of the open dialogue to which Buhr invited the individual authors. The first section, the origin, present, and future prospects of Europe, contains essays by Xavier Tilliette and Hans-Georg Gadamer recalling Husserl's thesis of the crisis of rationality in the ages of fascism. Agnes

Heller, one of the regrettably few women contributors, argues for the potentiality of postmodernism as the self-consciousness of modernity, because it accords a central place to contingency and difference. Her argument is sharply at odds with characterizations of postmodernism elsewhere in the volume by Jacques D'Hondt and András Gedo~"~.

The second section describes conflicts of universalism and particularism in the European identity. The third section, on traditions and values, includes diverse reflections on what Hegel called the forms of absolute spirit: art, religion, and philosophy. The fourth, on conceptions of rights, discusses doctrines of property in the German Enlightenment, Kant, Fichte, and Proudhon. It contains a fine account of constitutionalism by Carla De Pascale. Notable for its erudition and scope is the essay by Gedo~"~ in the fifth section, on science. His argument regarding modern subjectivity, as a relation to nature mediated by labor, offers interesting points of convergence with a text written from a quite different theoretical perspective, that of J. C. Horn on transcendental philosophy from Leibniz to Hegel. The final section, the critique and self-criticism of Europe, contains Domenico Losurdo's indictment of the ideology of colonial expansion from Smith to Hayek and Popper, and Georges Labica's account of the stillborn socialism of the Soviet regime.

The reflection on the good, the heart of this collection, entails a unity of theoretical and practical reason. Buhr defines this project as a practical humanism, seeking to realize the untapped potentialities of history in respect to freedom and equality. While the authors differ in their economic analyses and their specific political prescriptions, they share a common vision of the possibility of an enlarged rationality, against the foreshortening of instrumental reason and possessive-individualist calculation. This dialogue is an important contribution to an alternative rational critique of contemporary society, an achievement to be celebrated. Further publications are expected under the auspices of the Konvent für europäishche Philosophie und Ideengeschichte.

Douglas Moggach

*Departments of Political Science and Philosophy*  
*University of Ottawa*

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*Aging Political Activists: Personal Narratives from the Old Left.*  
By David P. Shuldiner. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1995. 293  
pages, cloth \$55.00.

David Shuldiner interviewed four “aging political activists” with the view of determining how each dealt with “issues related to self-identity in late life from a life-span perspective.” He undertook this heroic task because he hoped to “stimulate discussion about the nature of self-identity, in particular, political ‘identity, from a life-span perspective.” He would also “challenge current assumptions, particularly in the fields of social psychology and gerontology, about the character of self, ideology and personal development.” And, as if that were not enough, he wants “to broaden the scope of the discourse about current theoretical models and research methods employed in investigating ideology as a driving force in human development.”

The book is divided into three sections. In the first, an exposition of the author’s views on self-identity, he emphasizes that the dialectical method, as he envisions it, differentiates him from other researchers. The second section is the record of seven interviews with four individuals. These interviews become the testing ground for his hypothesis. The last section is an analysis of the interviews and an attempt at a general confirmation of his hypothesis.

I feel that the author does not fully succeed because of several problems.

First, the language of the book presents obstacles to the full comprehension of its arguments. Shuldiner is dealing in a field that has perhaps as many perspectives as practitioners. They may all share a common vocabulary, but the specific words more often than not have a different meaning to each practitioner. The concept of “identity” is central to this work, but the author neither defines it, nor explains how he uses the concept. Does he view it as continuous or discontinuous? His analysis of the interviews at the end of the books leads me to suspect that it can be both. A clear statement of definitions would have helped the reader. To make matters even more difficult, there is a measure of imprecision when Shuldiner slips from “core identity” to “core political

identity” to “political identity” to “occupational identity” Are these all part of core identity or are they separate from it? And what is the difference between “core identity” and “self-identity”? Definitions are in order. Furthermore, does he use the term in the same sense that Erik Erikson, or Gilligan, leaders in this field, do?

Second, Shuldiner wants to “broaden the scope of discourse about current theoretical models,” but nowhere does he set up the currently accepted models and compare those to his. He refers only once to Erik Erikson (28), and in such an offhand manner that Erikson’s name does not even appear in the index. Since the author is challenging received wisdom, it is incumbent that he compare his model with the models of the leading figures in this field and tell the reader how, where, and why he differs. He does, of course, comment on many writers, but nowhere is there a well-rounded exposition of how he connects or disconnects with the thinking of his peers.

All disciplines adopt a language of their own with shorthand words and phrases. All too often arcane language circumscribes discourse and only the select few who are familiar with the mysteries of that language can engage in discussion. Cannot important and even profound ideas be expressed in simple language without resorting to *academese*? Could not the author have written the following so that the reader does not have to struggle with it? “The recognition of interpenetrating aspects of observed phenomena extends to the experimental/research environment, where the social effects of design, context and practice must be acknowledged as influencing outcomes.” And this is not an extreme example.

Shuldiner’s study is based on a sample of four Jewish long-time friends who, despite differences, have much in common. This narrowly constructed base makes it very difficult, if at all possible, to draw valid conclusions, although the interviews themselves are interesting. While the population of “aging political activists,” and particularly left-wing aging political activists, is small, their political and personal history is of interest to many. All scholars I know who have done oral histories of older radicals are primarily interested in their past political activity. Shuldiner

does us all a service by reminding us that they have a present also.

All four subjects are thoughtful, committed people who, despite their organizational separation from the Communist Party, have maintained a connection with it. The three men see their lives, different as they are from their life in the Party, as a continuum. Ms. Lillian Dimow was not involved in Party activities to the degree her husband was. For her, the continuum is based on her years of teaching arts and crafts. But for all, their ideals and goals are basically the same ones they have held all through the years.

This book is flawed by poor editing and academic writing bordering on the pretentious that make it difficult for the reader, however empathetic, to work through the text. An example of such editing follows.

At least one work (Gornick 1977) presents excerpts of interviews with a number of aging activists reflecting on what their membership (former in most cases) in the Communist Party meant to them during the time they were active. Several of the interview subjects reveal something of their own personal development (mostly how they “grew out” of the Party). However the principle aim of the author-as-interviewer was not to document personal development; rather it was to elicit subjects’ recollections about what drew them to the Party. In this book, as in most of the personal accounts of aging activists, life-span development is at best a secondary or incidental concern.

Life-span development is at best a secondary or incidental concern? It was only after struggling through several more pages that I realized that “this book” refers, not to this book, but to Gornick’s.

What keeps such an activist going? That is as complex as is the individual. Life-span activity is motivated by much more than political ideology. And here the interviews falter. More and deeper examination of family relationships, as well as individual needs and behavior, is required. Is it possible to understand an individual’s identity without at least knowing about those others

in whose presence that identity is experienced? Unfortunately, few of us are capable of that kind of investigation. But even so, the author could have done more. Where there were opportunities to probe more deeply, he turned aside. For example, he asked Joseph Dimow, "I was wondering, though, if you ever felt (and you certainly did allude to it) that there was something special or unique that informed your political outlook, because you, in fact, had been a worker" (61). Dimow responded in a way that opened wide the door for further probing on that important point, but Shuldiner let it pass. Too bad! Aware that Dimow exhibits a "depth of introspection unusual among activists that I have interviewed over the years" (245), Shuldiner fails to dig deeply into this potentially lucrative lode.

The sad truth is that the author is not a particularly good interviewer for the purposes of his study. Too many questions are leading, manipulative, and too speech-like. In the section entitled "In Search of a Method: The Interactive Interview," he wants us to know that he aims for a "collaborative process in which questions and response of both the interviewer and subject are examined *by each* (emphasis E.C.P.) in the course of tape recorded conversations. . . . It is an attempt to implement a model for 'praxis'—the integration of theory and practice—by applying the dialectic method to both investigation and analysis of self-narratives and identity" (9). What high-sounding stuff!

Shuldiner forgets that there is a power relationship in the interviews. He asks the questions. He has the recorder. He is the one who is going to publish a book. He is the one who thinks of his collaborator as a "subject." He may want a "collaborative process," but his actions have prevented it. This book is valuable, nevertheless, for the comments of the four aging political activists.

Edward C. Pintzuk  
*West Bloomfield, Michigan*

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- “(Un)Belonging? *Geschlecht, Klasse, Rasse und Ethnizität in der britischen Gegenwartsliteratur: Joan Rileys Romane*, by Jana Gohrlich: Book Review,” by Stephan Lieske, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 369–74

## ABSTRACTS OF ARTICLES

**Victor N. Paananen, “Oscar Wilde’s London: Human Identity and the Bourgeois Illusion in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*”**—In the thought of Walter Pater, the inward quest of the romantic discovers an isolated self that knows only the pleasures of its own sensations, an outcome that is the final and extreme version of the bourgeois illusion that human identity is independent of social relations. Dorian in Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* attempts to form, as Wilde himself did, an identity based only on the encounter of the self with beautiful sensations; but his portrait reveals true identity to be socially created. Dorian’s “beautiful” sins must have their real victims, and in this novel the poor East End of London creates human identity for a “gentleman” in the West End. In his own life, Wilde could not break away from the pursuit of sensation encouraged by Pater; but this novel offers Wilde’s critique of Pater’s mistaken understanding of identity and reveals Wilde’s awareness of a self-deception that he nonetheless continued to practice.

**Danny Goldstick, “Out of Engels’s Wastebasket, etc.”**—Like Darwin, Engels accepted the inheritance of acquired characteristics and applied the idea to some intellectual concepts humans possess. But this epistemological innatism arguably did not conflict with Engels’s strong anti-“apriorism” because he traced all the “inborn” concepts causally to our ancestors’ sensory encounters with external reality, contrary to the idealistic philosophizing it was his essential object to combat. An alternative, “natural selection” explanation of any innate thoughtways could equally well root them causally in objective reality. The relevant innate ways of thinking might very possibly include a predisposition to favor “simpler” over more complex causal explanations of observed phenomena (as being likely to be truer). Lenin, though, opposed Mach’s “economy of thought” as idealistically denying

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such theoretical preferability to correlate with any enhanced aptness to *correspond to objective reality*. In his later *Philosophical Notebooks*, Lenin implicitly faulted his own earlier critiques of Machism for overlooking what was really positive in it, notwithstanding its idealism.

**Doris Grieser Marquit, The Uses of a Contemporary Materialist-Feminist Literary Criticism**—In literary theory's tumultuous debates in the eighties, materialist-feminist criticism did not receive appropriate attention as a methodology with serious truth claims and practical uses. Explicitly materialist in analysis, this criticism emphasizes the historical circumstances of cultural production and the social relativity of aesthetic standards, and provides socialist feminists a literary theory consistent with our politics. Contemporary materialist-feminist literary criticism is neither naive empiricism nor simple sociohistorical criticism. As a sophisticated counter to postmodernism's exclusive concentration on the text, it keeps history at the center of our engagement with literature.

**Richard Levins, "Defend Science, Criticize Science"**—The defense of science against irrationalism must begin with the criticism of science. A growing contradiction has arisen between the exquisite scientific sophistication in the small and the irrationality in the overall organization of scientific enterprise that is rooted in the social and philosophical biases shared by capitalism and modern science as they grew up together from the seventeenth century on.

**Georg Polikeit, "Confrontation Between Reformism and Class Struggle in the Party of Democratic Socialism of Germany"**—The author presents a critical analysis of the ideology and political strategy of the Party of Democratic Socialism of Germany. Included in the discussion are the activities of Communist and Marxist caucuses in the PDS, the attempts of the Social Democrats both to isolate the PDS on the one hand and to coopt part of its parliamentary delegation on the other. Also discussed is the relationship between the German Communist Party (DKP) and the PDS.

**ABREGES D'ARTICLES**

**Victor N. Paananen, «Le Londres d'Oscar Wilde: l'identité humaine et l'illusion bourgeoise dans *Le Portrait de Dorian Gray*»**—Pour Walter Pater la quête introspective du romantique révèle un moi isolé qui ne connaît que les plaisirs de ses propres sensations, un aboutissement qui est une résultante extrême et finale découlant de l'illusion bourgeoise qui stipule que l'identité humaine est indépendante des relations sociales. Dorian dans *Le Portrait de Dorian Gray* de Wilde, essaie de concevoir, comme l'a fait Wilde lui-même, une identité uniquement basée sur un moi qui ne se confronte qu'à de belles sensations. Mais son portrait montre que la véritable identité ne se crée qu'à travers des contacts sociaux. Les «beaux péchés» de Dorian doivent avoir leurs vraies victimes, et dans ce roman, le quartier pauvre de East End de Londres crée une identité humaine à un «gentilhomme» du quartier de West End. Sa vie durant, Wilde ne put délaissier la poursuite des sensations préconisée par Pater; mais ce roman offre la critique de Wilde envers l'interprétation erronée sur l'identité émise par Pater, et il révèle également que Wilde avait conscience qu'il s'aveuglait lui-même, tout en gardant cette attitude.

**Danny Goldstick, «Hors de la corbeille d'Engels, etc.»**—Comme Darwin, Engels acceptait l'héritage des traits acquis et appliquait cette idée à quelques concepts intellectuels que possèdent les êtres humains. Toutefois, il semble que cet innatisme épistémologique ne s'est pas opposé à l'anti-«apriorisme» d'Engels parce que ce dernier a défini tous les concepts «innés» d'une manière causale en les reliant avec les rencontres sensuelles de nos ancêtres avec la réalité extérieure. Cette démarche était contraire aux philosophies idéalistes qu'il s'efforçait essentiellement de combattre. Une explication alternative—la «sélection» naturelle—s'appliquant à n'importe laquelle des façons innées de penser, pouvait également la situer d'une manière causale dans la réalité objective. Il se pourrait que les façons innées de penser aient une prédisposition inhérente qui tend à favoriser des explications causales plus «simples», et non plus complexes, des phénomènes observés (elles sont supposées

plus exactes). Lénine, cependant, s'opposa à «l'économie de pensée» de Mach, parce qu'il la considérait comme une préférence théorique à rehausser la correspondance de la pensée à la réalité objective. Dans ses *Cahiers Philosophiques* subséquents, Lénine prend implicitement en défaut ses propres critiques antérieures sur le Machisme car il reconnaît avoir ignoré ce qui y était positif, en dépit de son idéalisme.

**Doris Grieser Marquit, «Les Fonctions d'une critique littéraire matérialiste féministe et contemporaine»**—Dans les années quatre-vingts, lors des débats tumultueux concernant la théorie littéraire, la critique matérialiste féministe ne fut pas considérée assez sérieusement comme une méthodologie avec des revendications sérieuses et des fonctions pratiques. Cette critique, explicitement matérialiste dans son analyse, souligne les circonstances historiques de la production culturelle et la relativité sociale des standards esthétiques. Elle offre ainsi aux féministes socialistes une théorie littéraire compatible avec notre politique. La critique littéraire matérialiste féministe contemporaine ne relève ni d'un empirisme naïf, ni d'une simple critique sociohistorique. En s'opposant finement à la concentration exclusive du postmodernisme sur le texte, cette critique garde l'histoire au centre de notre engagement dans la littérature.

**Richard Levins, «Défendre la science, critiquer la science»**—La défense de la science contre l'irrationalisme doit commencer par la critique de la science. Une contradiction grandissante s'est dressée entre un affinement scientifique exacerbé très minutieux, et l'irrationnel dans l'organisation globale de l'entreprise scientifique. Cette contradiction est enracinée aussi bien dans les partis pris sociaux et philosophiques du capitalisme que dans ceux de la science moderne, comme tous les deux se sont développés ensemble depuis le dix-septième siècle.

**Georg Polikeit, «La Confrontation entre le réformisme et la lutte des classes dans le parti du socialisme démocratique d'Allemagne»**—L'auteur offre une analyse critique sur l'idéologie et sur la stratégie politique du parti du socialisme démocratique d'Allemagne (PDS). Cette discussion comprend:

les activités des comités électoraux communistes et marxistes dans le PDS, ainsi que les tentatives des sociaux-démocrates qui visent à la fois une isolation du PDS et une cooptation d'une partie de sa délégation parlementaire. Elle relate également les rapports entre le parti communiste allemand (DKP) et le PDS.