Notes on New Books

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*Notes on New Books**

BECKER, LAWRENCE C. *Property Rights.*
London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977. Pp. viii+135. $8.95.

The publisher's advertisement for this book claims that the author "steers a middle course" between the libertarian and the socialist views of property rights. While this may not be outright false advertising, it is at least misleading. For though in policy terms Becker is a moderate, in philosophical terms he is much more nearly a libertarian than a socialist. He is a philosophical libertarian in that his arguments all converge upon the conclusion that, with some potential qualifications, a system of private property is morally justified. Becker's potential qualifications become important only when conjoined with certain beliefs about how in fact economic and political systems work. Thus the transformation of philosophical libertarianism into policy liberalism occurs because Becker accepts factual propositions that the thoroughgoing libertarian would reject.

After a preliminary chapter to define terms, Becker begins by rejecting what he calls 'the argument from first occupancy.' He then discusses three general types of proproperty arguments which each have at least one sound version. From his analysis he finally concludes that there are two sound arguments based on the labor theory of acquisition, one sound argument from utility, and one sound argument from political liberty. The first argument contends that if a person produces something new without harming others, then there is nothing wrong in his claiming property in it. The second argues that there is a moral principle of desert that gives men a right to the fruits of their labor, while the third claims that the effective pursuit of the general welfare requires a system of property rights. The final argument contends that the elimination of private property would be too costly because it would result in the loss of other political liberties. After identifying the four sound arguments, Becker engages in a mopping-up effort to forestall possible objections to his position. Finally, he claims that some limitations to property rights are justified because unfettered property would deplete natural resources and would endanger democracy. Up to the point of these two qualifications, many a libertarian would agree with the main thrust of the analysis. But, while disagreeing with the qualifications, the libertarian is not apt to be much concerned with them. For to both he has easy answers. To the first qualification the libertarian would respond by pointing out that a resource is merely what we know how to use. He would then claim that a system of unfettered property rights would increase such knowledge and thus not deplete but increase natural resources. To the second qualification the libertarian might note that historically the most successful democracies have also been the societies with the most unfettered property rights.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that Becker's book is clear and relatively brief. It contains little that is novel, but it is a useful attempt to organize, evaluate, and synthesize what has come before.

*The notes in this issue were written by Jeffrey Bedrick, Art Diamond, Burt Louden, and Philip Stoffregen.

Benton, Ted. *Philosophical Foundations of the Three Sociologies.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977. Pp. xi+225. $11.95.

Many of the problems of this occasionally interesting and useful book derive from a lack of clarity as to what the work is meant to achieve. The preface and the first paragraph of the introduction sound as if it were meant as an introductory text in the philosophy of the social sciences, and the broad scope of the work seems to confirm this intention. The "three sociologies"—positivist, humanist or neo-Kantian, and (antihumanist) Marxist—and their corresponding philosophical foundations are claimed to cover all of the varieties of sociology and epistemology. The end of the introduction, however, finds Benton saying that "it might seem that what I intend to write is simply a history of the relations between philosophy and sociology, albeit a philosophically informed one. But this is not so—my aim is to engage critically with the philosophical conceptions which I shall be describing but not from the standpoint of the classical philosophical legislator. Rather, an attempt will be made to develop an approach which embodies a recognition of the historical space which separates the texts from one another, and from the present, and also a recognition of the distinctive characteristics and requirements of each branch of knowledge." The end of the work finds him outlining what he conceives as a new theory of knowledge. A master of the fields involved, and of the language, might have perhaps been able to meet all of these goals in a text the length of this one. Benton seems well-informed, and his prose is serviceable, but a master he is not. Periodically one of these aims is sacrificed to another, with the result that none is completely achieved.

In order to cover the vast literature of the three sociologies and their related philosophical foundations, compression and simplification are necessary. One grants the necessity, for a book meant as an introductory text at any rate, but the manner in which it is carried out raises a number of questions. What is the point in doing an account of empiricism, to choose but one example, which deals with Berkeley in three sentences and only mentions Hume in passing? Even more seriously, one begins to wonder whether the account has merely been simplified for the sakes of space and the beginner or whether Benton does not actually see, or understand, the complexities of the issues and positions he investigates. These doubts increase whenever the work as introductory text is submerged by the work as critical account and polemic. In a text that is serving as an introduction, which invites it readers to go further in their study of the issues raised, simplification is acceptable. But in a text that purports to reach conclusive refutations of important and complex positions in philosophy, such oversimplification as we find here is not acceptable and merely casts doubt on the work itself. Even the last section, which attempts to develop a Marxist theory of knowledge, and which is the most interesting in the book, sometimes falls prey to such problems. One is much better off making the effort to work through such thinkers as Althusser and Colletti.

Those looking for an introduction to the philosophy of sociology should thus look elsewhere for a work that will truly open up this field and not immediately close it off. Those who do not need such an introduction will find much of the text useless, too much of it so to justify the remainder.

CLARK, JOHN P. *The Philosophical Anarchism of William Godwin.*
Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977. Pp. x+344. $16.50.

This book has two basic aims, first, to present a critical examination and evaluation of Godwin's thought, and second, and implicit in the first, to persuade the reader that Godwin deserves much more attention from philosophers than he presently receives. Clark succeeds admirably in his first aim—he gives a lucid and thorough examination of the whole of Godwin's philosophy. This examination is divided into three sections devoted, respectively, to Godwin's epistemology and theory of man, his ethics, and his anarchistic social and political philosophy. The Godwin that Clark presents is one whose writings were marred by inconsistencies. Clark is able throughout to find plausible reconciliations for apparent inconsistencies. He argues, persuasively, that Godwin's views on all ethical and social issues arise out of a strong commitment to Utilitarianism. But Clark seldom has much to say about whether Godwin's revised arguments are correct or whether they add anything to current disputes. This failure tends to undermine Clark's claims that Godwin has something of importance to say to contemporary thinkers. Clark makes the very strong claim that "It is important . . . that when social and political theorists attempt to deal with contemporary issues like worker self-management, neighborhood government, decentralized planning, administration, and decision making, open education and deschooling, that they see the relevance of Godwin's analysis of such topics as autonomy, private judgment, authority, and obligation" (p. 320). But this conclusion does not arise naturally out of the body of the book, which justifies, at best, a much more reserved appraisal of Godwin's significance for contemporary thinkers.

MCBRIDE, WILLIAM LEON. *The Philosophy of Marx.*
New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977. Pp. 175. $10.95.

How does one write a book about the philosophy of someone who claimed that the point is not to interpret the world but to change it? Or about someone who held that once things are conceived "as they really are and happened, every profound philosophical problem is resolved . . . quite simply into an empirical fact?" Marx's commitment to change the world, as well as his occasionally bizarre speculations as to what "postcapitalist philosophy" might look like, obviously place him outside the mainstream of academic philosophy. But what is Marxism if not a "theory of totality," and what is philosophy itself if not "the enterprise of delineating this totality and indicating, through a process of critical reflection, the relationships of major parts to major parts and of parts to whole?" (p. 8). The catch here is that many contemporary professional philosophers do not view their field in this holistic manner, but perhaps the burden is on them to justify their own definitions of philosophy and not on Marx or other "totalists."

After a very preliminary discussion of Marx's aims and subject matters, as well as of his philosophical influences, McBride moves on to discuss Marx's methodology, his description of the world and its parts, and the ideal element in his philosophy. Marx's two major standpoints—interconnected standpoints—were an active commitment to the advancement of worker's movements and a conviction that human society and culture are economically determined. As for philosophical influences, the expected discussions of Hegel and the young Hegelians form a large part of McBride's chapter on this topic. However, there is also a more novel

discussion of the Greek influence in Marx's work, particularly Aristotle's naturalism, which makes this chapter well worth reading.

The term "dialectic" plays the leading role in McBride's discussion of Marx's method, and he spends an entire chapter trying to salvage the notion from its critics. Several intriguing arguments are presented in this chapter, but McBride's success in rescuing the dialectic seems handicapped from the start. As he notes in the early stage of one of his arguments, the major difficulties surrounding the term were "at least partially unresolved by Marx himself" (p. 57). McBride next turns to what he calls Marx's "descriptions of the world." Three chapters are devoted to this topic, broken down as follows: (1) materialist metaphysics, (2) history and society, and (3) prediction. Interestingly, he argues that Marx "never leaned very heavily on the 'materialist' label" (p. 79). Aside from denoting his opposition to idealism, McBride claims that "the 'materialist' label has . . . little additional use for the philosophy of Marx" (p. 80). The chapter on history and society is mainly a qualified defense of Marx's emphasis on class struggle, his reliance on the labor theory of value, and his economism. But when we come to the topic of prediction, McBride seems surprisingly un-Marxist. He argues "both that the worth of Marx's philosophy is independent of whatever insight it may provide as to what future history will be like, and that an analysis of this philosophy's internal structure reveals no solid ground for enabling one to make assertions . . . about the future in any but a highly tentative, indefinite fashion" (p. 116). No orthodox Marxist would be pleased with either claim.

Chapter 7, "Vision of a Possible Future," concerns that aspect of Marx's thought which comes closest to what traditional philosophers call "ethics." McBride seems particularly dogmatic on this topic, arguing that what Marx proposed "is the elimination of moral philosophy, not the substitution of a new moral philosophy for the old ones. *There is no Marxian ethics in the traditional sense of cataloguing hierarchies of values and proscriptive rules of conduct of assertedly universal validity*" (p. 131). "In the traditional sense," no, but then on this account many other great moral theorists such as Hume and Dewey must also be denied a philosophical ethics. Agreed, Marx historicizes morality and subjects it to his materialist outlook, but his normative vision of human freedom ranks as one of the most famous exercises in what used to be called "ideal morality."

The final chapter, "Other Marxisms," is a rather patchwork affair, dealing very briefly with some of the twentieth-century heirs of Marxist theory—Lenin, Lukács, Sartre, Althusser, and the Yugoslavs. This is an admittedly sketchy chapter, and personal choice seems to dictate the subject matter.

At the very least, McBride's book forces philosophers to take Marx seriously. It is a subtle account of the major philosophical problems surrounding Marx's work, and while the book itself is quite compact, the range and depth of Marx's writings are clearly presented. There are numerous occasions where one may choose to disagree with McBride's conclusions, but it would be a mistake for anyone interested in Marx's philosophy to ignore them. Perhaps this means we are not yet through interpreting the world?

STROUD, BARRY. *Hume.*
London, Henley, and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977. Pp. xii+280. $15.00.

Hume is the latest addition to "The Arguments of the Philosophers" series, the main purpose of which is to provide "an essentially analytic and critical account of each of the considerable number of the great and the influential philosophers." Other series books on Plato, Santayana, Meinong, and Wittgenstein have already appeared.

Stroud argues against the popular Anglo-American misconception of Hume as the original *enfant terrible* of logical positivism who ran through libraries and made havoc by committing metaphysics and other brands of *Unsinn* to the flames. Hume of course shared an impatience and dislike for speculative *Unsinn* with the early-twentieth-century logical positivists, but his philosophical method and aim were entirely different from theirs. Whether we view philosophy as the a priori study of meanings or the logical relations among concepts, or whether we adopt the more recent advice to switch to the strategy of semantic ascent, it is clear, under both views, that Hume's project has been left out. As Stroud notes, "a purely a priori mode of philosophizing is precisely what he is trying to supplant in recommending the experimental method of reasoning for investigating the nature of man" (p. 7). (And even for those reformed empiricists who are allegedly immunized against dogma, it should still be clear that their project is not Hume's. For it was Hume's opinion that "[n]othing is more usual than for philosophers to encroach upon the province of grammarians; and to engage in disputes of words, while they imagine they are handling controversies of the deepest importance and concern" [*An Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, app. 4].)

Stroud presents Hume as the philosopher who attempted "to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects," and this is of course the way he should be presented. But as Stroud warns in his preface, little and sometimes nothing is said about Hume's work in religion, economics, politics, sociology, history, and the psychology of emotion. What does Hume's new science of man amount to without the empirical content of these disciplines? In excluding Hume's important and pioneering work in these areas, Stroud may perhaps be guilty of rendering Hume's program into a version of the "accurate and abstruse" philosophy which he detested, rather than the "easy and obvious" one which he felt would always have the preference of the generality of mankind. Nevertheless, Stroud has made good progress in clearing away, as he puts it, "some of the accumulated fog from several different windows into Hume's philosophy" (p. x), and his efforts should provide a good ground for those who wish to go on and do further work in Hume.