



Book Reviews

Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990.

Insofar as the task that Terry Eagleton has undertaken is a critical analysis of *the aesthetic* as it figures in the work of the modern philosophers, this book is large, and contains multitudes. For one thing, 'the aesthetic' itself refers not, as some readers might expect, to that category of philosophy concerned exclusively with taste, or the apprehension of the beautiful, but rather 'to the whole region of human perception and sensation, in contrast to the more rarified domain of conceptual thought' (p.13). For another, Eagleton has chosen to deal at some length with no less, and no fewer, than Baumgarten, Shaftesbury, Hume, Burke, Kant, Schiller, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, Adorno, Foucault, Lyotard, and Habermas—with significant critical reflections along the way on a sub-pantheon composed of Hobbes, Berkeley, Kames, Price, Rousseau, Lacan, Husserl, Althusser, Lukacs, Brecht, Marcuse, Gramsci, Raymond Williams, Bakhtin, de Man, Derrida, and Rorty, not to mention fleeting, but informed reflections on many other thinkers and many other creative writers. That Eagleton can evolve meaningful generality at all from so many and such diverse thinkers is a tribute to 'the aesthetic' of his own commentary: 'For the mystery of the aesthetic object', he writes (paraphrasing Rousseau), 'is that each of its...parts, while appearing wholly autonomous, incarnates the 'law' of the totality' (p.25).

Certainly the separate 'parts' of Eagleton's ambitious 'narrative' (p.196)—the chapters or sections devoted exclusively to individual philosophers—show genuine insight into those aporetic cruxes that have become the prime object of post-structuralist critical investigation, as well as an impressive sensitivity to the intellectual and historico-political implications of both specious logic and discursive detail. (Those readers familiar with Eagleton's work will also recognize his characteristic command of a variety of languages—from fashionable theoretical jargon, through the technical, to the colloquial—and his prolific powers of wit and metaphor.) Regarding the *autonomy* of the parts, however, the operative word is 'appearing'; his interest in the total narrative necessitates considerable material as well as structural repetition. Were it not for Eagleton's semantic and rhetorical ingenuity—for his mastery of *interpretatio*—the repetitiveness, especially in the early chapters, would certainly pall (see, e.g., pp.42-43).

Indeed, insofar as the task that Eagleton has undertaken is to reveal *the ideology* of the aesthetic, his focus is curiously narrow, and unlikely to satisfy the 'professional philosopher' (a title which he cautiously disclaims—as, no doubt, would the professional philosopher (p.12)). The whole history of modern aesthetics is read as instigated by 'ruling class idealism's paranoid fear of the flesh' (pp.153-4) and is analysed within a dialectic which is adumbrated thus in the Introduction: if the aesthetic—and by 'the aesthetic' he means either an

artefact or an existential condition that is 'self-referring', 'self-regulating and self-determining'; if the aesthetic as the autonomous 'offers a generous utopian image of reconciliation between men and women at present divided from one another, it also blocks and mystifies the real political movement towards such historical community'; this is because (now reversing the dialectic) 'the aesthetic is at once...the very secret prototype of human subjectivity in early capitalist society, and a vision of human energies as radical ends in themselves which is the implacable enemy of all dominative and instrumentalist thought'(p.9). The 'great tide of aestheticizing thought' from the eighteenth century onwards is seen as manifesting itself in such diverse constructs as the Kantian aesthetic; Schiller's 'grace'; Hegel's 'Spirit'; Schopenhauer's 'Will'; Marx's 'communism'; Nietzsche's 'will-to-power'; and so on. Even ignoring the question of the validity of characterizing the aesthetic as autonomous and disinterested, the subsumption of such complex, central constructs under the general rubric of 'the aesthetic' suggests a lack of discrimination that Eagleton's account of the individual philosophies confirms with radical abbreviations that are informed by his partisan 'law' of totality.

If for 'partisan', the term 'interested' is substituted, few would deny that it is inevitable, even desirable. Eagleton's professed Marxist interest, however, involves distortions that threaten to subvert his ambitious enterprise. Some distortions are endemic to Marxist methodology and historiography themselves; some are peculiar to Eagleton's own application of its principles.

For example, the necessarily unilateral relationship that is assumed to obtain between historico-socially determined modes of production and consumption (as 'basic'), and cultural and intellectual forms and preoccupations (as 'superstructural'), invariably leads to the false isolation of the rapidly industrializing eighteenth century in just such intellectual histories as Eagleton's. It is simply not true that 'the birth of aesthetics as an intellectual discourse coincides with the period when cultural production is beginning to suffer the miseries and indignities of commodification'(p.64). One need only cite Plato's and Aristotle's consideration of the demands made upon the *logos* or rational discourse by the body—by the sensate and emotional life—in order seriously to qualify the idea of an historical and political crisis of authority as the origin of, and force behind, the aesthetic, as well as the idea of the aesthetic as the unifying object of the modern philosophers.

Like other arts and other disciplines, philosophy has a largely autonomous tradition of its own that disarticulates the central Marxist concepts of 'base' and 'superstructure'. Eagleton himself frequently introduces specific relations between the two as analogous—'as if'; 'like'—or suggests a partial and indeterminate relationship only: 'in the sense that...'. It is no doubt his commitment, rather than his understanding, that subsequently effects a swift transition from similarity to identity between the two orders. (When there is no homology between the structure or content of a philosophical argument or impasse on the one hand, and a specific power relation on the other, the inapposition can be accommodated as 'paradoxical'—see p.190, on Kierkegaard.)

And is not the busy concept, 'bourgeois ideology', invested with the mystical status of a 'Platonic Idea or essence' (the *bete noire* of post-modernist theory)?—variously and imperfectly manifest, as it is, in innumerable texts and contexts; so variously and imperfectly, in fact, as to throw into question its

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meaning and existence? Certainly, the concept is even more overextended in Eagleton's analyses than the comparable concept of the 'Manichean' in Elizabethan and Jacobean parlance. Eagleton works every possible variation on its blind determinism, from its rescuing a benighted Germany from Reason and the Junker, to its damning the West to Fascism, deconstruction, and a marketplace chaos of indiscriminate will-to-power. As a character in Eagleton's historical *psychomachia* it has more shapes than Archimago, functioning as a figurative index, or projection, of his own confusion. On a number of occasions—see, e.g., pp.94, 111—bourgeois ideology is identified as the aesthetic itself, thus becoming both the concept and the discourse that it creates, informs, and renders intelligible.

Ideology, or bourgeois ideology, determines the dialectic that structures the evolution of modern philosophy and hence, with and as the aesthetic, structures Eagleton's 'narrative'. Moreover, as in Marxist historiography, a degree of 'mutilation' has been necessary so that Eagleton may achieve his end (p.220), for the commentary has indeed a teleology, in spite of the reservations that Eagleton shares with the post-structuralists. This end is nothing other than a critique of post-structuralism itself.

The Ideology of the Aesthetic moves with deliberation—through analysis, digression, and repetition; through the major philosophers of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries—to a resounding, passionate denunciation of post-structuralism as an historically premature, politically and morally dubious realization of the aesthetic. Post-structuralism, as "'bad" utopianism' (p.229), has, it seems, pre-empted the advent of the final, Marxist paradise (communism), endeavouring to circumvent the contraries without which there is no progression. Not only is its timing bad, moreover, but post-structuralism is also wrongheaded in itself; along with the *logos*, it has jettisoned the concomitants, truth and value, which its precursors struggled to reconcile with their various aestheticizations. Against the systematic flippancy and nullity of post-structuralist theory, Eagleton protests with a passion, point, and purpose that is at once moving and persuasive.

If the conception and gestation of post-structuralism in nineteenth century philosophy legitimizes Eagleton's working towards it in his final, apocalyptic chapter, however, his own protest is less easy to justify, logically, from its pre-history. The post-modernist position that he establishes for himself indirectly throughout the book leaves him, strictly speaking, without the means to challenge its tendencies and conclusions. In articulating his commitment to a 'public sphere' of rational debate, and a political progress informed by love and trust, he has been obliged to make a leap of faith over the self-subverting orthodoxies of modern theory, many of which he shares. The *credo* with which the book closes is an impressive gesture, rhetorical rather than rational—a gesture with all the immediacy and palpability of Johnson's kicking the stone to refute and rebuke Berkeley; indeed, all the immediacy and palpability of an articulate form of the aesthetic itself.

William Christie

David E. Cooper, *Metaphor*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986.

This book undertakes an analytic and critical survey of the study of metaphor, briefly in the past (Aristotle, Hobbes, Vico, Pascal) and comprehensively in the case of contemporary theorists. The views of Black, Searle, Davidson, Ricoeur and others are subjected to full and rigorous scrutiny; but poets too are called to witness—most interestingly, Valéry. The evenhandedness and thoroughness of the discussion are impressive, if at times a little relentless. But the writing is lively and—so far as the matter allows—very clear.

Of the four sections the first, 'The Emergence of Metaphor', sketches origins and exposes problems. The second, 'Meaning and Metaphor', wrestles with the central semantic issues. Section three is entitled 'The Scope and Function of Metaphorical Talk'—the pervasiveness of metaphor and 'why we speak metaphorically at all'—in other words, its sociolinguistics. Section four, 'Metaphor and Truth', canvasses theories about metaphor's linguistic relation to the world, including the thoughts of Nietzsche and Heidegger. The case, however, for metaphors as bearers of ineffable truths is declared unproven, as are the arguments for their primacy to literal language.

In this rich book it is difficult to select a central theme. The most persistent perhaps is Cooper's argument that metaphor is 'meaningless'. For him, as for Davidson, specific metaphorical meaning does not exist, either in the language—the words or sentences (Traditional view), or in the speaker's intention (Standard view). That is, it resides neither in *langue* nor in *parole*. The metaphoric element, it is argued, enlivens and enhances an utterance but does not add to it in semantic terms. Metaphor is later described as semantically 'maverick' and as belonging to the category of songs, poems, and myths—that is, of art. Cooper here is particularly concerned to controvert the position of Max Black who holds that metaphor possesses independent cognitive value and is 'a distinct mode of achieving insight'.

Of the other topics discussed one should mention dead metaphor—very fully and thoroughly treated: the demarcation issue between metaphor and other non-literal utterances (tropes): and the important concept of 'intimacy' between the speaker and the recipient of a metaphor (for which see in particular Gerald Gleeson's paper in the present volume). One remembers too the virtuoso passage (Section 2C) in which Crusoe the linguist is imagined on his island isolating metaphor in the speech of his native visitors.

There are difficulties for the layman reader. In particular, the Robinson Crusoe episode calls for some acquaintance with the procedures of technical linguistics. Other portions too may be hard reading if one is unacquainted with any of the professional literature, though in a way the book could also be regarded as an introduction to that literature.

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