

THE BODY AS LANGUAGE, by Terry Eagleton. *Sheed & Ward*, London, 1970. 115 pp. 30s.

Terry Eagleton's prose is certainly not as opaque as the title of this new offering from the 'new left' might suggest. However, since the title does not immediately present the prospective reader with a clear expectation of its contents (unlike, say, the *New English Bible*, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* or even *Capital*), a brief statement of the theme of the book seems in order.

The Body as Language is possibly best treated as a volume of essays which cohere around a theme, rather than as a single statement. That theme is the contradictory character of human nature. The poles of this contradiction are human physiology (man's capacities as an animal) and his linguistic consciousness.

Man, unlike the other animals, is not passively trapped within the determining limits of his 'species-life': language, by distancing and objectifying man's animal nature, allows him to enter into transformative relationship with it. With the rise of linguistic consciousness, human history and freedom are born. (p. 3.)

But the development of this capacity for language is not an uncomplicated blessing.

Language is the matrix of individual self-achievement, but thus of human division; it provides the basis for man's transformation of his world, but opens also the potential of abstraction and alienation; it allows man freely to transcend his own biological limits, but so leads him to violate the creative constraints of his sensuous life. In all of these senses, human 'fallenness' and human transcendence are aspects of a single condition: 'From the same mouth come blessing and cursing.' (James 3, 10.) (p. 24.)

Language lifts man above the status of a 'mere' animal: but by this same device he spins the web of deceit and mystification, inauthenticity and exploitation. It is the means of human sociality; and at the same time the principal agent of that loss of community which Eagleton identifies as the 'fall'.

This diagnosis is the starting point for a number of excursions into theology: 'The Real Presence', 'The Eucharist and Death', 'The Fall', 'Politics and the Sacred' and 'The Priesthood and Leninism'.

Taken together, these essays constitute a positive advance in the development of a theology of the left. Taken separately they

vary in their impact and character. The chapter dealing with the 'real presence' is a model of lucidity; and to the present writer (as a non-Catholic) it comes as an unusually intelligible and thoroughly convincing statement of that doctrine. The discussion of the priesthood is a stringent corrective to the woolliness of the 'non-Church' advocates, and other opponents of structure in the Church. The clergy have long stood in need of a contemporary understanding of their position which can effectively combat the prevailing professionalism, which tends to relegate their role to that of rather dedicated social workers. Eagleton's attempt to integrate anthropological notions of 'the sacred' into theology is a bold one, which invites further investigation. Within the relatively narrow limits imposed by his selection of literature, however, his attempt remains a suggestive starting point. (To do more, it must be admitted, would be a forbidding task in view of the formidable scope of the anthropological literature on the subject.)

General interest in the philosophical significance of language has been increasing in this country in the past few years. The work of Chomsky in the United States has attracted a great deal of attention among social scientists. There has been something of a revival of interest in de Saussure. The study of language is also (though in a different way) central to the work of his fellow-countryman, Lévi-Strauss (who is, I suppose, as fashionable now as such an extraordinarily difficult writer can ever become). The active involvement of Marxists in this field of interest is curious, since Marx himself, in common with all the classic writers of Marxism, had very little to say on the subject of language. A work like *The Body as Language* is therefore of interest, not only for its theology, but also as an attempt to develop a Marxist interpretation of language. In this respect Eagleton's selection of authorities on which to base his perspective is puzzling. One might ask why he places so much emphasis on the structuralists, whose spiritual descent from Durkheim is traced in a view of the nature of the structure of society which is very much opposed to the dialectical perspective of Marx? Why is it that Marxist theoreticians have shown themselves to be so little aware of other major strains in the

philosophy of language—the pragmatist traditions, for example, based on Pierce's theory of semiotics? It would seem that, at least on first acquaintance, there might be in pragmatist thought, emphasizing as it does man as an *active* being, whose knowledge is intimately bound up with *praxis*, a rather better philosophical partner for Eagleton's Marxism.

Often the participants in the dialogue between Christianity and Marxism are suspected by each side of being a kind of fifth column within their own camp. The average churchgoer (if he is aware of the dialogue) can never convince himself that his fellow who takes seriously the Marxist position is still fully a Christian. (Indeed, it is instructive that this highly significant feature of twentieth-century thought has been depicted as a *dialogue*—since this designation assumes that we are witnessing an interaction between two distinct and even opposed positions, thus tending to exclude the possibility of one's being a party to *both* sides of the argument at once.) Eagleton demonstrates that it is possible to be consciously and honestly *both* a Christian and a Marxist at the same time.

Having said this, and in spite of the thoroughness of Eagleton's *commitment* to both Christianity and Marxism, there is evident throughout the book a considerable intellectual tension between the two. He insists throughout the book on the thoroughly historical character of human nature: a position which is central to Marxian thought. In Marx's work, the climactic development of this historical process is the overcoming of alienation. His attempt to accommodate Marx's expectation to a

Christian eschatology appears to present him with difficulties.

By their faith in Christ, the eternal word made animal, Christians subscribe to a belief that this absurd vision is the future reality of man: that the opaqueness of our present bodies will be transfigured into pure transparency by the power of God. (p. 55.)

Does Eagleton resort, at this point, to a 'leap out of history' of a kind to which Marx could never have subscribed?

The replacement of Marx's *proletariat* by the biblical *anawim* also presents us with signs of this tension. The weight which Eagleton gives to Christ's saying, 'the poor are always with you', as a starting point for a Christian politics, seems to fly in the face of orthodox Marxist thinking about the nature and historical role of the proletariat. He may be substantially *correct* in his understanding of the need to make the 'unclean', the weak, the rejected—the 'dirt which falls outside the carefully wrought political structures of society'—the linchpin of a Christian politics, but to most Marxists his position is likely to appear merely reformist, rather than revolutionary. (The same tension and ambivalence which Eagleton finds in Raymond Williams' theory of tragedy is thus in many ways reflected in his own writing.)

But no exploratory work, such as *The Body as Language*, is without tensions of this kind between the various elements of its attempted synthesis. Indeed, it is this tension which makes the book such an excellent example of this particular growing edge of theological thought.

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MARX BEFORE MARXISM, by David McLellan. *Macmillan*, London, 1970. 233 pp. 65s.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF LUDWIG FEUERBACH, by Eugene Kamenka. *Routledge & Kegan Paul*, London, 1970. 190 pp. 40s.

FEUERBACH ET LA THEOLOGIE DE LA SECULARISATION, by Marcel Xhauffaire. *Les Editions du Cerf*, Paris, 1970. 397 pp. N.P.

The contemporary Marxist debate is slowly seeping into English: in the last year or so, Adorno, Kolakowski, Althusser, Benjamin have been translated; this year Bloch, Lukacs and Habermas are promised. Slowly, too, the Marx canon itself is becoming available—since 1961, four versions of the early writings have appeared; the crucial *Grundrisse* remains, however, untranslated. But the context in which those early writings originally appeared is still largely undiscovered territory in the English-speaking world—though, for example,

Weitling has at last been translated and some of the early English 'Marxist' journals are being reprinted (*Red Republican; Democratic Review*). Even secondary work in English on the crucial 1840s is meagre; Karl Löwith's *From Hegel to Nietzsche* is still, perhaps, the only overall survey of any standing.

David McLellan's *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx* (1967) gave a useful account of the thinkers who provided the categories in friction with which Marx's own contribution developed. His *Marx before Marxism* parallels and supple-