

of Heidegger's position. It is often said that, if nothing else, Heidegger brought the phenomenon of death to the consciousness of the Western world. In fact, notes Adorno, [General] Ludendorff did that far more efficiently.(115) The unavoidability of death plays the teleological role once played by Fate; and the jargon glorifies the acceptance of Fate as the highest self-relation and hence the most ethical stance. But why accept this fate? Such acceptance is not unlike the military's "training" of its elite troops: the end-goal of the training is nothing but the death of the trainee; this end-goal gives meaning to the training, but simultaneously shows the absurdity of such training.(110) In contemporary commodity society, something is needed to give meaning to life. The task of the jargon is to provide this meaning. God is dead, but "death becomes God's substitute. . . . Because it, as the existential horizon of *Dasein*, is absolute, it becomes an absolute as something to be venerated. There is a regression to the cult of death. . . ." (115) Through this "cult," the adepts of the jargon hope to give meaning to the meaningless world of commodities; but this is a "fleeing into the same fatal circle as the exchange relation that was sublimated as the reation of 'One' [*das Man*]. As that which is most absolutely alien to the subject, death is the model of all reification." (126)

The jargon fails in its attempt to re-introduce meaning into the plastic world of exchange values. Adorno's critique, of which only the bare outlines have been indicated here, shows this in detail. It also indicates how this attempt to escape from bleak reality can lead to fascist behavior, whether the individual wills it or no. Fascism is seen, in other words, as an attempt to infuse value into the reified social relations of capitalism *in spite of* these relations. Its opposite is a dialectical position which takes as its task not the "infusion" of old values, but the generation of new ones *by means of a change in capitalist society*.

Methodologically, Adorno's critique is significant because it shows the way in which a non-dialectical analysis reifies or hypostatizes the empirical givens, eternalizing their significance. Though he doesn't mention it, his methodological point here is analogous to that of Marx in criticizing Hegel's Philosophy of the State. There is an idealism which consists in inverting subject and predicate, treating the empirical predicate as the meaning or truth of the subject, mankind as individual or collective. It is in this sense that, paradoxically perhaps, *positivism in fact an idealism*. The jargon absolutizes a formal behavior, and by neglecting the content of that behavior, justifies no matter what content. This is its basic methodological error, whose origins, in the case of Heidegger, lie in the very starting-point of his philosophy, as Adorno clearly shows. The attitude of the "non-partisan contemplation of essences" (82) is self-defeating. In Adorno's own *Negative Dialectic*, to which this book is a "propadeutic" (137), a counter-position is offered which, however, will have to be discussed at another time.

Dick Howard

Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York, Bantam, 1971).

The first two words of this book, "sex class," jar sensitive Marxists; they suggest an illicit relation and recall the "blood facts" Spengler advanced against Marx's abstract, superficial concepts. Historical class seems weak next to biological gender, which would abolish talk of change with the fact of an

invariant reality. The "class struggle" yields to the "battle of the sexes" allegedly as old as Adam and Eve: it is guaranteed to last. Unlike the mode of production, that of biological reproduction knows no historical vicissitudes. Firestone takes literally Marx's dictum that to be radical is to go to the root of things.

Yet the concept or fact of sex class is not intended to stabilize a bad reality but to transform it; Firestone seeks not to junk a historical dialectic but to go beyond it and found a "new dialectical materialism based on sex." Firestone wants not to forget Marx and Freud but to radicalize them. "There is a level of reality that does not stem directly from economics" (p. 5). These are hardly novel words; only what Firestone calls the "untried third alternative" between materialism and idealism is new. "Unlike economic class, sex class sprang directly from a biological reality" (p. 8). Patterning herself on an exposition of Engels but altering it, Firestone writes that historical materialism "seeks the ultimate cause and the great moving power of all historical events in the dialectic of sex: the division of society into two distinct biological classes for procreative reproduction, and the struggle of these classes with one another" (p. 12). In this "untried third alternative," not only juridical and political but also economic institutions are sloughed off to the superstructure. Social relations and capitalism itself are founded on biological relations.

Firestone's rendering of Engels' Marxism is a revision of a revision which proves fatal to the original. The attempt to re-examine a dogmatic concept of class in the light of the specifics of women's oppression deserves sympathetic reading; also, Firestone lacks the hostility towards men sometimes shown by radical feminists. But Firestone's thought is slurred: it comes in a rush which, although purposeful, is a blinding flash rather than solid content. Engels vulgarized Marx, but Firestone exterminates him. The result is gruel for the hungry only because official Marxism is pap for the satiated; a petrified orthodoxy that says nothing of women and children promotes revisions that say nothing at all. The "untried third alternative" is sustained by the phony first two. The blurb on the cover promises the "missing link" between Marx and Freud; but Marx and Freud are missing. Marx is reduced to biology and Freud to a "power psychology," one of the oldest toys in the bourgeois closet. The synthesis, crystallized in "sex class," is geometrically perfect and theoretically vacuous. To the extent that history is biology, it is not history. Biology, always the same, can explain historical change only by the ploy of evolution, which explains nothing.

Firestone skips through history with a psychedelic magic marker: since it is always the same, interpreting it is fun and games. On the one hand, she finds that Engels' restriction of the historical dialectic to non-primitive man is too confining. Her dialectic is found not only in primitive man but in the "animal kingdom itself." On the other hand, she makes such particular assertions as that "the fifties was the bleakest decade of all, perhaps in some centuries, for women" (p. 27). She careens through the history of culture, gossiping about a female Aesthetic Mode and a male Technological Mode which takes as god-given fact an infamous ideology that would have women wishful, dreamy, and emotional and men cold, logical, and objective. She hustles through modern art like the cab drivers who, she says, know real art from fake and performers from shirkers. Wielding reality like a sledgehammer to beat down anyone feeble enough to try to flee it, she confronts art with capitalist ideology as if it were the facts of life (themselves ideological). "The modern artist has got to begin to come to terms with the modern world. He is not too good at it: like an invalid shut away too long, he doesn't know anything about the world anymore, neither politics, nor science, nor even how to live or love" (p. 96). Firestone is out to

eliminate fancy myths; she promotes brutal reality as cheaper and better. She expounds on the sexuality and freedom of outcasts (here, ghetto children) as if it were her discovery and not a bourgeois fabrication. Exploding new myths, she revives the oldest ones. "Sexually, too, ghetto kids are freer. One fellow told me that he can't remember an age when he didn't have sexual intercourse with other kids as a natural thing; everyone was doing it. . ." (p. 101). She takes as the negation of bourgeois society its mutilated rejects: "Gangs are the only modern children's groups that are self-directed" (p. 101). She adds what is meant to be a commendation: "The term *gang* has an ominous sound for good political reasons." As if the gangster's ominous reality is that of self-directed liberation!

The biological level surfaces as obsolete remnants of bourgeois history to be eradicated in the name of Firestone's utopia, which is patterned not on the rejection but on the extension of a "social environment now found only in the best departments of the best colleges" (p. 237). She despises nature which resists synchronization: "Childhood is hell" (p. 103) and "Pregnancy is barbaric" (p. 198). Her hatred for biological reality is that of a liberated Puritan who looks forward to the fun of clean, healthy sex but balks at the messiness of childhood and birth. Pregnancy gives way to artificial reproduction and children to little adults. Her denunciation of the "insecure, and therefore aggressive/defensive, often obnoxious little person we call a child" (p. 103) tells the secret: she hopes for cool, calculating sophisticates who surpass biology by exterminating it. Her instrumental sexuality is more grease for the mechanism: childhood and pregnancy are obsolete, since they violate bourgeois canons of taste. She tempts bourgeois society with its own reality. She talks of love as a power-relation in which an equal division of power is to be sought, as if such a relationship was liberation and not administration.

The uncomprehended contradictions of the dialectic of sex drive it to regression. That women, pregnancy, and children are biological states of unfreedom means only that they must be engineered out of existence. Technology will do the trick. Childhood having been abolished, "childbearing would be taken over by technology" (p. 238). Pregnancy, now "clumsy, inefficient, and painful" would be only an archaism. If men and women still chose each other for sex, it would be only because of "sheer physical fit." Despite talk about the reintegration of love and sexuality, this is the stuff of late domination. The conquest of nature, the origin of domination, is ended by completing it. What is intolerable is nature's remnants, not its damaged state. A technology will drop from the sky to cleanse dirty nature to extinction.

The biological unfreedom Firestone finds in women, in the family, in birth, etc., is historical. "A Negro is a Negro. Only under certain circumstances does he become a slave."¹ Likewise with women, children, and even men. That the state of unfreedom has persisted as long as history itself testifies not to biology but to history. The suffering that inheres in the very substance of human history renders it identical in its difference. But this identity is not natural: it is established and perpetrated. "What Marx once called with sad hope, prehistory, is nothing less than the content of all hitherto known history, the realm of unfreedom."² To take this prehistory as biological is to capitulate to the victors who call the victims' misery "nature."³ What is natural in civilization, the natural Black as well as the natural woman, reeks of violence done to it by

1. K. Marx, *Wage-Labour and Capital* (New York, 1933), p. 28; *Capital*, Vol. I (Moscow, 1961), p. 766.

2. T. W. Adorno, *Gesellschaftstheorie und Methodologie* (Frankfurt, 1970), p. 81.

3. Max Horkheimer, T. W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Amsterdam, 1947), p. 219.

civilization. "The wench as an alleged natural being is the product of history that denatured her."⁴

Firestone knows nothing of this dialectic and thus she perpetrates it. The blind juxtaposition of technology and nature in which technology is to efface nature is the jinx of bourgeois progress itself; it allays its fears of nature's revenge by violating nature again. The hip Puritan fantasizes about the denatured men and women and sex and sexuality which have almost become reality. Firestone's thought is domination recycled. But it must be remembered that her purpose is otherwise; and that intent places her work within the project of rethinking Marxism. Firestone succumbs to the *Zeitgeist*, however, instead of resisting it. Her thoughts are the latest, but nothing in them is new. She writes with enthusiasm in a footnote that part of her book is already dated, "such is the speed of modern communications." Elsewhere, she hopes for a future of "instant communication." Her hopes are groundless: the future is here and it works, and her book falls prey to it: its instant thoughts are instantly read and forgotten.⁵

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G. H. von Wright, *Time, Change, and Contradiction* (London and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1969).

For years, analytical philosophers raised in the tradition of Russell, the early Wittgenstein, and the Vienna Circle, along with idealist or "western" Marxists, have ridiculed Engels' "dialectics of nature" and the concomitant idea that change involves contradiction. In rejecting the dialectics of nature, Sartre and the early Lukács surrendered nature to the positivists and neo-Kantians; Lichtheim and other pundits of English Marxology have attempted to totally separate the "Hegelian-positivist" Engels and his philosophy of nature from Marx's philosophy of man. Edmund Wilson's *To the Finland Station* pokes fun at Engels' dialectic in an even cruder fashion, and wrongly attributes Plekhanov's terminology to him. They all overlook Marx's claim in the *Parisian Manuscripts* that the science of man and the science of nature will become one science.

The time has now come for a re-evaluation of the whole issue of change and contradiction in light of recent works both in analytic philosophy and in the "new Marxism." Not all Marxists have rejected Engels. Marcuse does not dismiss

4. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

5. Lenin in 1894 had already castigated Firestone's contribution, as presented then by the critic of Marxism, Mikhailovsky. Mikhailovsky proposed: "There can be no doubt that gentle ties have lost their significance in the history of civilized countries, but this can hardly be said with the same assurance of directly sexual and family ties . . . With a certain amount of dialectical dexterity it might be shown that not only legal, but also economic relations themselves constitute a 'superstructure' on sexual and family relations." To Lenin it was a joke, that, for example, a social institution like inheritance is to be derived from a biological condition. "And so, the institution of inheritance is a superstructure on family and sexual relations, because inheritance is inconceivable without procreation! . . . Until now everybody believed that procreation can explain the institution of inheritance just as little as the necessity for taking food can explain the institution of property." Mikhailovsky, to Lenin, borrowed "his ideas on the history of society from the tales taught to school children," which instructed that the state evolved from the family: such banalities confused "the categories and superstructures of one historically definite social formation (that based on exchange) for categories as general and eternal as the upbringing of children and 'directly' sexual ties." Lenin, "What the 'Friends of the People' Are," in *Collected Works*, Vol. I (Moscow, 1963), pp. 151-155.