REVIEWS

SHEEHAN, Helena. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Science.* Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1985.

Though it cannot be said of philosophers of science that most of them have been interested in the Marxist tradition, Marxist thinkers have shown themselves to have been active contributors to a debate that is parcelled out today between philosophers, sociologists and historians of science – this, anyway, is the case that Sheehan wants to make. She believes that Marxism is a "formidable intellectual tradition in the philosophy of science which is virtually ignored by academic philosophy of science outside Eastern Europe" (p. 2). Issues like the relation between meaning and context, the role of social interests in knowledge, the theory-ladeness of observation etc., "turn out to be anticipated in these now dusty tomes on yellowed page after yellowed page" (p. 4).

In this work, she tries to substantiate this claim by looking at the first hundred years of the Marxist tradition, beginning with the founders till the dissolution of the Comintern. In a second, companion volume she intends to carry the story further by covering the post-war developments within the Marxist tradition.

The first chapter is devoted to a discussion mainly of Engels. His *Dialectics of Nature*, the contemporary controversy regarding the Engels-Marx relationship are briefly analyzed. The Marxists of the second international, Kautsky, Plekhanov, Hilferding etc., and their Marxisms is the theme of the second chapter. This was also the period of neo-Kantianismn and its reverberations were also to be felt in the Marxist movement. The "shift eastward", the title of the third chapter, is the journey of Marxism to Russia and its beginning there: Bogdanov, Axelrod, Plekhanov and Lenin occupy the center stage here. The aftermath of the October revolution, the second biggest chapter of the book, is the subject of the fourth: an attempt is made to describe the intellectual life in the turbulent period of civil war that followed the revolution, the contributions of Trotsky and Bukharin, the 'bolshevization' under Stalin, Lysenkoism constitute the backbone of this part which also sets the scene for the ultimate chapter of the book. It is while discussing the "Comintern period" that the Marxism of the Western world is outlined: from Lukàcs to Gramsci, from Korsch through Lefebre to Caudwell.

The canvas is huge, thus the brush strokes are mere outlines, filled with a detail here and a detail there. This is inevitable perhaps, but so is the question: Apart from the pure intellectual curiosity of wanting to know what the Marxists debated and discussed about, why want to make a case for Marxism as a Pilosophy of science? Sheehan motivates the intellectual value of the project thus: "Given the tensions wracking contemporary philosophy of science, it could well be of value to look back on a tradition that has proceeded with the same crucial matters, but in such a different way" (p. 5). But, in what does the value of these discussions lie? The answer, however, is not very clear to me. Let me explain.

The main ambition of this volume is apparently to *show* that issues of relevance to contemporary philosophy of sciences were debated within the Marxist tradition long before. While she does succeed in this, to the extent such an attempt can be successful within the confines of a single book at all, the larger and the more ambitious aim of wanting to make a case for Marxism as a philosophy of science is not realized. The priority dispute with respect to who debated which issues first is not what matters as much as solutions to the questions that vex us. We could appreciate Marxist contributions to the philosophy of sciences if and when it is possible to show *in detail* just exactly what these are, and why they are heuristically (at least) useful. Short of such a massive undertaking, I do not quite see how one could make a serious case for Marxism as a philosophy of science.

That Sheehan has not made such a case is no criticism of a book that is almost first of its kind. If anything, it shoul be seen as an initiator of a kind of project that has been neglected far too long by Marxist thinkers. As a book, *Marxism and Philosophy of Science* recommends itself to anyone who takes either Marxism or philosophy seriously. It is well-researched and is written with an engagement and commitment characteristic of the tradition which she represents. If it does stimulate the kind of research that I believe we need today, Sheehan's book will have achieved its purpose. There is not much more that one could ask for, nor is there much else to say except to look forward to the second volume and for further writings from the pen of Helena Sheehan.

Balu.