

COMMENDABLES

Ideology and Culture

Lee Congdon: *The Young Lukács*; University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill.

Georg Lukács (1885-1981), the Hungarian Marxist critic and philosopher, is not one of our favorite people. His was a skillful, powerful mind; his influence was great, pernicious. A common approach taken by some in conservative circles is to excoriate Lukács and others of his genus with a string of abusive epithets. Certainly no quarter should be given, but such tactics ultimately fail. After all, Lukács and his methodology have been embraced by many at American institutions such as Yale; a number of the man's books carry the imprint of the M.I.T. Press; and, as Lee Congdon points out in his detailed account of Lukács's intellectual development, Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* is "the single most influential Marxist work of the twentieth century." Simple sneering rejection essentially bespeaks an inability to come to terms with the ideas, as if Lukács is unassailable. Young people who are trying to strengthen themselves intellectually might be—probably would be—inclined to follow Lukács and his epigones, who would appear more appealing than those brandishing brickbats. Battle with minds like Lukács's must take place at the intellectual level. This may seem like a rather banal observation, but it is one that is rarely considered.

Congdon does a number of fine things in this book. For example, he structures his text

around some of the women in Lukács's life and thus shows the importance of interpersonal relationships to the formation of ideas: thinkers are not simply ruled by the functions of synapses in their brains; if that were so, then we might as well turn to a Cray computer as the oracle of knowledge.

One passage written by Congdon can be used to show that the purpose of *Chronicles of Culture* is, indeed, a vital one. That is, whereas many of our brethren mount the barricades brandishing socioeconomic theories and political campaign placards, we happen to think that such gestures are little more than holding actions, that the real key is what Marx and his followers dismissed as the "superstructure": what people read, watch, listen to. These things are ultimately of more importance to the state of civilized society than whether the people in that society invest the gain from tax cuts or whom they vote for. The passage written by Congdon is in reference to Dostoevski's novels, which had a signal effect on Lukács when



he was in his early 30's. About Alyosha Karamazov, Prince Myshkin, and Sonia, Congdon remarks, "It was his misunderstanding of these famous characters that led Lukács from Christianity to heresy and from Christian love to hatred of his fellowmen." Lukács wasn't born a Marxist. While he did read philosophy, he also turned to novels. Fiction, as Congdon explains, had a profound effect on Lukács's Weltanschauung. By examining products of culture—novels, films, periodicals, TV presentations—one can come to a better understanding of the seedbeds of new ideas. Thus *Chronicles*.

Certainly there are others who examine the same objects. With regard to the arts, however, a preponderant number of the examiners tend to be liberal. They tout the books and films that legitimize themselves; they prevent the promulgation of contrary

Walk, Don't Run

Stanislaw Lem: *His Master's Voice*; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; San Diego.

In the early 1730's Alexander Pope observed that "The proper study of mankind is Man." Pope wrote those words when the Royal Society was some 70 years old, when man was challenging (he thought) God and Nature with the scientific methodologies that he *knew* would make him be one like a god. In 1855 Robert Browning wrote, "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp/Or what's a heaven for?" Browning is today more heeded than Pope. Those who in Pope's day thought that they could become masters of the world now envision the possibility of becoming masters of the universe—not through physical domination, but through understanding. On 13 June 1983 the first man-made object ever

presentations, and should some slip through the net, then they are defeated with silence. However, damage is also done by some groups that espouse conservative formulations. Remember, Dostoevski's Sonia was a whore: assuming that some modern Dostoevski were to emerge, one wonders if his books wouldn't be promptly consigned to the flames by some well-intentioned guardians.

As Shakespeare wrote in *Coriolanus*, "One fire drives out one fire; one nail, one nail." Our ideological foes have long taken culture seriously. Unless more of our comrades (a good word that shouldn't be given up without a fight) do the same, then the seedbeds from which other young Lukácses will spring will continue to be laden with manure from New York publishing houses, Hollywood screening rooms, and TV networks' headquarters. □

to do so, Pioneer 10, left our solar system. In addition to scientific equipment, Pioneer 10 carries a 6' x 9' gold-anodized aluminum plaque. The plaque has a number of illustrations engraved on it, including a man and a woman, Earth's position in this solar system, the solar system's position in relation to 14 pulsars, and a measuring scale based on hydrogen atoms.

Later, Voyager spacecrafts will zoom or whoosh or otherwise go out of this solar system. Wrote Carl Sagan in *Murmurs of Earth* (Random House: New York, 1978), "Each Voyager spacecraft has a golden phonograph record. . . . Instructions for playing the record, written in scientific language, are etched on the [record's] cover. A cartridge and a stylus, illustrated on the cover, are tucked into the spacecraft nearby." Assuming that the flying jukebox is waylaid and that the instructions are followed (though one

wonders: "scientific language" is not universal), then Whatever will be treated to music ranging from Solomon Islands panpipes to Louis Armstrong's horn, a message from Jimmy Carter and one from whales, 118 pictures of life on Earth, and more. Eight of the pictures (all of the data are digitized, of course) are of particular interest. They are of the human anatomy; they are taken from encyclopedia overlays. As such, they are peppered with numerals that refer to a key. The scientists putting together the package didn't have time to delete the numerals. The key (e.g., "1. The heart") is missing. What will the Whatevers make of such oddly formed beings?

Stanislaw Lem, in a book written five years before Pioneer 10 blasted off (i.e., 1967), reversed the situation. In *His Master's*

Voice Lem posits that humans who are monitoring the galaxy pick up a stream of subatomic particles that, when processed through a computer, seem to indicate that there is a message there. So the American government establishes a gargantuan scientific team. The objective: to crack the code. Lem convincingly shows that the physicists, astronomers, linguists, biologists, sociologists, mathematicians, and various other scientists are, ultimately, at a loss to "explain" the message—they can't even prove that it *is* a message. It becomes painfully obvious that man need not go grasping about for faraway heavens as what he knows about himself is so limited that even a slightly better grip on what he *is* would in itself be a remarkable accomplishment, truly a giant step for mankind. □



trust in temporal man. The dangers of this are twofold. If this trust is equally applicable to all men, moral anarchy ensues. "Liberated" from every standard of truth larger than the individual ego, society, family, and community disintegrate into millions of appetite-ridden selves, subhuman beasts enslaved by pornography, drugs, and amorphous sex. On the other hand, any secularist attempt to secure social order by focusing faith on a single man or party of men must be as arbitrary as Carlyle's hero-worship, since no supramundane values can be permitted to adjudicate between, say, a Machiavellian leader and a Jeffersonian one. Totalitarianism is the likely result.

Apparently determined to impale America on both horns of this dilemma, many unelected government bureaucrats and Federal judges—encouraged by pop psychologists, mass entertainers, trendy intellectuals, and liberal theologians—have sought over the last 25 years to expand the power both of the state and of selected groups of amoral individuals at the expense of religion. Thus Marxists, atheists, and hedonists may evangelize in state schools and libraries, but orthodox Christian and Jews must be kept under house arrest. Scripture and devotion are locked in the closet, even as homosexuals are invited out. The crime and social instability fostered by such a strategy do not seem to disturb its champions, nor do its logical inconsistencies. What would greatly disturb them is the wide

circulation of books like Dr. Hitchcock's compelling but judiciously restrained and even-handed study. The shapers of prevailing culture prefer that their antireligious prejudice be hidden in the fogs of public ignorance, not outlined in the glare of Dr. Hitchcock's incisive scrutiny. That is probably why this superb little book is offered not by a major publishing house in New York, but rather by a small concern in Ann Arbor. Nevertheless, as a Christian Dr. Hitchcock must know that eventually even truths whispered in secret will be shouted from the housetops. (BC) □

Laying Siege to the Castle

Richard Helgerson: *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton, and the Literary System*; University of California Press; Berkeley.

Achieving literary fame, prominence, or even notice isn't easy. It never has been. In the modern world, numerous people are vying for ranking. One of the consequences of increased leisure time and government transfer payments is a proliferation of manuscripts. One of the consequences of an increase in disposable income is a wider assortment of salable options, including numerous publications. Given these two consequences—more written manuscripts and more published manuscripts—it would seem that talent would out: it would become evident who is good, mediocre, lousy. But that isn't so, and not simply because individuals are "accidentally overlooked" due to the acres of print. After all, there is a cadre employed by publishing houses, journals, magazines, newspapers, etc. Its charge is to read available

Light in Dark Places

James Hitchcock: *What Is Secular Humanism? Why Humanism Became Secular and How It Is Changing Our World*; Servant Books; Ann Arbor, MI.

Obscurantism is a charge often leveled against religionists by unbelievers. With respect to some past ecclesiastical actions, such as the persecution of Galileo, such an indictment may seem warranted. In the late 20th century, however, those most guilty of protecting their cosmic views by deliberately shrouding them in impenetrable mystery are not the orthodox faithful but rather those enemies of religion who typically refer to themselves as "enlightened" and "rational." Indeed, as these adherents to a distinctively anthropocentric and terrestrial gospel proselytize in the schools, courts, and even churches, they slyly feign a posture of open-minded neutrality. Those who see through this pose and do not

share their doctrinal preconceptions accurately designate their philosophy "secular humanism." But because the national media are dominated by those engaged in the covert war against religion, they dismiss this label as nonsensical, applicable nowhere but in the nightmares of neurotic believers. Readers of James Hitchcock's *What Is Secular Humanism?* must conclude, despite the media smoke screen, that secular humanism is as real as the sunspots Galileo discovered with his telescope, and far more threatening.

Dr. Hitchcock's work, written for an intelligent layman, illuminates with an impressive breadth of scholarship and a penetrating rigor of analysis how various historical forces coalesced in this alluring but destructive contemporary "ism." Preaching against God and eternity, secular humanists urge men to find fulfillment on earth by placing their ultimate