

LECOMTE DU NOÜY, PIERRE

increasingly complex and more fully conscious creatures stands in sharp contrast with the second law of thermodynamics, which depicts nonliving matter's drift towards increasing randomness and disorder. A full accounting of the course of evolution must involve purpose. Lecomte du Noüy proposes the "telefinalist" hypothesis to explain what can be meant by evolutionary purpose. Purpose, he holds, can not be found in the individual organism, as some scientists have believed. Nor can it be found in the particulars of mutation and adaptation. A global phenomenon, it must be seen in its long-term effects, its overall trend.

These ideas, he believes, have important implications. They imply that man is not a machine driven by quasi-mechanical forces but a being with free will, capable of contributing to his own and the world's future. That evolution has purpose and tends toward moral and spiritual ends supports human freedom and gives humankind the will to persevere. The ultimate goal for humankind is to bring about a more harmonious, less destructive, more spiritual humanity. Thus, though he arrived at his views largely independently, Lecomte du Noüy's thought expressed many of the ideas and fundamental inspirations of French spiritualism dating back to Victor Cousin and Félix Ravaissón.

Lecomte du Noüy's writings have had little effect on either philosophy or theology. Though his spirited retelling of the course of biological evolution has been a favorite with the reading public and with apologists for religious orthodoxy, he has been roundly criticized for misinterpretations of probability, of thermodynamics, and of evolutionary theory. Such criticisms have undoubtedly force, but *Human Destiny* is a popular book, written for a very wide audience. A more objective assessment of his abilities and arguments could be obtained by reading, for example, *Between Knowing and Believing* (1967), a group of essays written between 1929 and 1945.

PETE A. Y. GUNTER

See also Henri Bergson; Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Biography

Born in Paris in 1883, Lecomte du Noüy studied at the Lycée Carnot and then at the Sorbonne, where he received four degrees: B.S., 1900; Ph.B., 1901; Ph.D., 1905; and Sc.D., 1916. He was awarded an LL.B. at the Faculté de Droit in 1905. Descended from a long line of artists and authors (his mother was a successful novelist), he first tried his hand at drama, writing successful plays for the Paris stage and acting. During World War I, he served as lieutenant of infantry before being transferred to the laboratory of Alexis Carrel, where he worked on the problem of the healing of

wounds. In 1923 he married an American, Mary Bishop Harriman. Between 1920 and 1927 he worked at the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research (now Rockefeller University) in New York. In 1927 he established the first laboratory of molecular biophysics at the Pasteur Institute and in 1937 was named a director of the École des Hautes Études with a laboratory at the Sorbonne. During the German occupation, he escaped to the United States, returning briefly to France in 1946. He died in California in 1947.

Selected Works

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Le Temps et la vie, 1936; as *Biological Time*, 1936, 1937
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L'Avenir de l'esprit, 1942
L'Homme et son destiné, 1948; as *Human Destiny*, 1947
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LEFEBVRE, HENRI

Marxist Philosopher

Unlike Althusser, who emphasized the later writings of Marx, or Sartre, who found inspiration in the early writings, Lefebvre was always concerned with Marx's thought as a whole. Indeed, this attempt to view a mediating position between two extremes could be said to characterize Lefebvre's entire career. In central early works such as *La conscience mystifiée* (written with Norbert Guterman, 1936) and *La matérialisme dialectique* (1939), Lefebvre outlined a Hegelian Marxism that sought to challenge dogmatic, reductionist views of Marx and that aimed to capture the idealist elements retained in Marxist thought.

Central to Lefebvre's interest in Marx was the notion of alienation, which through his translations of the

1844 Manuscripts (again, with Guterman), in *Morceaux Choisis* (1934) de Karl Marx Lefebvre largely introduced to a French audience. For Lefebvre, the alienation resulting from capitalism needs to be taken beyond the economic sphere, as it can also be found in social and cultural interaction. The key event of the twentieth century, for Lefebvre, was the increased commodification of everyday life, as capitalism moved beyond the workplace, the domain of labor, in its domination of existence. The notion of everyday life, which Lefebvre himself believed to be his central contribution to Marxism, does not have the negative connotations of the term in Lukács and Heidegger. For Lefebvre, everyday life is worthy of celebration and is capable of being the site of resistance to capitalist appropriations. His analysis of everyday life can be usefully seen between the dominant strands of French thought in the period; it looks at the phenomenological subject, but within the structures of society. The concern with everyday life was central throughout Lefebvre's career, notably in the *Critique de la vie quotidienne* series (1947, 1958, 1961, 1981).

Lefebvre's writings on everyday life are studded with analyses of situations and places, from the French countryside of his birth to the new towns being built and the Paris he lived and worked in. This interest in the politics and sociology of the lived experience was found in numerous other works, including his detailed studies of *La vallée de Campan* (1963) and the *Pyrénées* (1965); but also particularly in a range of works concerned with the urban experience. Lefebvre felt that Marx, because of the time he was writing, had not taken into account the importance of the city or town. Lefebvre wrote widely on the politics and political economy of urban space, including *Le droit à la ville* (1968), *La révolution urbaine* (1970) and *La pensée marxiste et la ville* (1972). The works on the urban and rural were complemented by more general studies on the politics of location, including *Du rural à l'urbain* (1970), *Espace et politique* (1973), and especially *La production de l'espace* (1974).

This last work is probably the one for which he is best known today, at least in the English-speaking world. Lefebvre stresses the importance of the relation between the control of space and political struggles, the role of technology in producing spaces (the construction of buildings, town planning, the creation of tourist resorts, etc.) and the political economy of space. Rather than the oppositions of concrete material space or imagined mental space, Lefebvre outlines a theory of *l'espace vécu*, space as lived and experienced through the people who created, control, and live in it. Lefebvre's work moves beyond this initial position, however, demonstrating how understandings of space are historical and related to philosophical understand-

ings. Against the predominantly historical emphasis of much Marxism, with a tendency to concentrate on the temporal, Lefebvre provides a valuable counterbalance.

Lefebvre's wide-ranging interests were not confined to everyday life, the urban and the rural and the question of space, for which he is best known today. Lefebvre wrote almost seventy books in his long career, ranging from scholarly discussions of figures in French literature (*Diderot*, 1949; *Rabelais*, 1955) and German thought (*Nietzsche*, 1939; *Marx*, 1964) through critiques of other trends in thought (*L'existentialisme*, 1946; *Au-delà du structuralisme*, 1971) to polemics against fascism (*Hitler au pouvoir*, 1938), and the bestseller of the *Que sais-je?* series (*Le marxisme*, 1948). Lefebvre outlined his most substantial philosophical vision in *Métaphilosophie* (1965), a complicated and multifaceted work. His vision of metaphilosophy seeks to go beyond or overcome (*dépasser*) philosophy. It seeks to bring a range of philosophies together, to relate them to the world and subject them to a radical critique and project them toward the future.

Nor should Lefebvre be looked at as a theorist of space alone. In works such as *Le somme et la reste* (1959), *La fin de l'histoire* (1970), and *Éléments de rythmanalyse* (1992) and later volumes of *Critique de la vie quotidienne*, he provides a number of insights into the question of time. Issues such as the moment, the linearity and purpose of history and the rhythms of the body and everyday life are discussed in ways that complement his work on space. It also trades on his long-standing interest in music.

Politically, Lefebvre was constantly engaged. His early career was within the French communist party, for which he briefly played the role of party intellectual. The polemics directed against Sartre in the 1940s were largely politically motivated, for example. Lefebvre left the party in 1958 in the aftermath of Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin, but the difficulties between him and the party were apparent earlier, notably over the Lysenko affair and Zhdanovism. Lefebvre's principal political writing is the four-volume *De l'état* (1976–1978), in which he gives a historical overview of Marxist theories of the state, discusses the role of the state in the modern world, outlines a theory of the statist mode of production, and analyzes the relation between the state and society. Central among its themes is the analysis of the shift from nation-state to a world scale (*mondialisation*), with the extraction of surplus value not just from one class, but from one country to another. Here, earlier concerns such as alienation and the production of space are given more explicitly political readings. Equally, the notion of *autogestion*, a term usually translated as "self-management," but that has a sense of being "workers"

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control,” is outlined as a possibility for radical democracy, with a move beyond mere representation, without a state focus, and with the return of power to local communities.

Lefebvre’s interests thus range widely through sociology, philosophy, politics, and literary studies. In the Anglophone world, recent interest in his work has appeared in urban studies and geography. His writing style does not immediately endear him to readers, but the range of his ideas and their applicability beyond the constraints of their immediate context make likely a continued interest in his work.

STUART ELDEN

See also Louis Althusser; Jean-Paul Sartre

Biography

Henri Lefebvre was born in the Pyrenees in 1901 and was educated at the Sorbonne. In the early 1920s he was a member of a small group of left-wing students who founded the journal *Philosophies*, in which he published his first articles. Lefebvre associated with the Surrealists, drove a cab in Paris, and was involved in the Resistance. Although he taught in both lycées and Universities such as Nanterre and Strasbourg, he remained somewhat outside of the academic mainstream. His involvement with the Parti Communiste Français lasted from 1928 to 1958, and after leaving, he associated with Situationists, Maoists, and other leftist groups. Numbering Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Jean Baudrillard among his students, he had a profound effect on the events of May 1968, on which he wrote an important study. Writing until his death in 1991, Lefebvre produced almost seventy books and numerous articles.

Selected Works

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Critique de la vie quotidienne, 3 volumes, 1947, 2nd ed., 1958, 1961, 1981; as *Critique of Everyday Life*, translated by John Moore, 1991, 2002, 2003
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LEFORT, CLAUDE

Political Philosopher

Throughout his long, distinguished career, not only has Claude Lefort convincingly argued for a revival of political philosophy, but his writings have served as an exemplar of how to conduct political philosophy itself. His analyses of the great political events of his day have been informed by the great works of philosophy both past and present, whereas his more philosophical work has been informed by the lessons of contemporary political events. From his youth as a Trotskyite to his cofounding with Castoriadis of the review *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, to his debates with Sartre in *Les Temps Modernes*, to the problems associated with the liberation of Eastern Europe, Lefort has not shied away from political events. However, Lefort has tried to dig beneath the ideologies of his day, and “clear a passage within the agitated world of passions” to understand the political.

The subject of political philosophy is the political (*le politique*) itself, as opposed to politics (*la politique*) or political activity, which is the focus of political science. Political philosophers should study how societies are ordered, or “the constitution of the social space, of the form of society, of what was once termed the ‘city.’”

Lefort’s writings can be viewed as a phenomenology of the political space and how it is represented. A society, to create a sense of unity, seeks to represent itself to itself and others in a unified fashion. The representation and the power of a society is staged (*mise en scène*) in different ways through different ideologies and different institutions, but this unified representation will never adequately represent all aspects of society. Thus, there is a fundamental conflict in the polis, between the society and its representation.

In describing the events of May 1968, Lefort finds a second type of “fundamental conflict” in society, between different groups and their interests. This conflict was more fundamental than the class divisions of Marx’s philosophy: It was ubiquitous, against “oppressors” at all levels of society. Lefort finds a similar sentiment in Machiavelli’s writings, especially Book IX of *The Prince*, and becomes convinced that conflict between nobles and people is not because of means of production but, rather, because of original desires or humors, and these conflicts will not dissolve in some

communist utopia, they will always exist. In fact, Lefort sees the absence of struggle as one of the hallmarks of a totalitarian regime.

Lefort was one of the first left-wing intellectuals to criticize the Soviet regime as totalitarian. Totalitarianism, in his view, is characterized by its attempt to efface all social divisions. To do so, the regime must permeate all of society, and in a communist state the facilitator of the regime’s power is the party. However, the party will never be able to control all aspects of society; the discretion of the bureaucrat will always remain. Further, those who oppose the state or party can never be completely eliminated. On the one hand, these dissidents play a positive role for the party because they will be branded as enemies of the people or Other, and this distinction between an “us” and a “them” will further unify the people. However, the continued existence of dissidents betrays the illusion that the representation of power coincides with the society itself.

Democracy, on the other hand, according to Lefort, best represents the original conflicts found in society. In one of his most famous formulations, he characterizes democracy as a form of government where power is an empty place. The political is not embodied in an individual, institution, party, or even the people themselves. In addition, the modern liberal state is one that no longer relies on any type of transcendental for its legitimacy. Instead, democracy is based on an endless struggle or debate; even the founding principles of liberalism, reason, the state of nature, and inalienable rights are fair game in this debate. Thus, democracy is based on uncertainty. “In my view the important point is that democracy is instituted and sustained by the dissolution of the markers of certainty. It inaugurates a history in which people experience a fundamental indeterminacy as to the basis of power, law, and knowledge, and as to the basis of relations between self and other, at every level of social life.” Without any ultimate source of legitimacy, all “that remains is the legitimacy of debate or a conflict between separate interests.”

Not only does democracy risk falling into a government based on self-interest, it also creates so much uncertainty that it makes totalitarianism enticing. Individuals will desire a transcendent foundation to reinforce their sense of community; thus, democracy is not merely the opposite of totalitarianism, it is a breeding ground for totalitarianism with its unifying themes. Totalitarianism fills a gap created by democracy and is very seductive because it is based on the representation of the “People as One.” Oftentimes the place of power will be embodied in the person of the egocrat (Solzhenitsyn’s term), just as under the *Ancien Régime* the power was embodied in the king.