
BOOK REVIEW

The marxist theory of schooling: A study of epistemology and education, by Michael R. Matthews, Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980, 214p.

The Marxist Theory of Schooling is part of the burgeoning Australian school in the philosophy of education which has recently begun to attack, on epistemological grounds, the basis of the still dominant analytic paradigm characterized in the work of R. S. Peters and P. H. Hirst, whilst attempting to develop an epistemology in the Marxist tradition designed, in part, to underpin the radical critiques of schooling in capitalist society.

Michael Matthews' approach to the crucial epistemological issues at stake is to develop and elaborate the kernel of Marx's historical materialism by reference to contemporary philosophy of science. His work must be seen as a welcome addition to the Marxist literature on education, and it is impressive in its scope of interest, and in its attempt to marry ingredients of two major philosophical traditions. There is much else that deservedly requires comment but I will restrict myself mainly to the epistemological programme Matthews attempts to set up. He adopts a Lakatosian framework at the meta level; one he accepts as not only the "best and most sophisticated account of the rationality of science" (p. 75), but as also self-reflexively consistent (p. 109). In terms of this framework he attempts to argue "that analytic philosophy of education [A.P.E.] is a degenerating research programme whilst the Marxist research programme in education is progressive" (p. 75).

At the heart of his enterprise is the attempt to develop a marxist epistemology which relates an analysis of commodity production to epistemology, construing knowledge as the product of particular processes of intellectual production; "a model which will overcome many of the problems which plague standard epistemology" (p.97).

He prepares the ground for his account by tracking out the rationalist and empiricist traditions in epistemology and education, (Chapter 2 and 3)

In opposition to the various features of Plato's rationalism and Hume's empiricism Matthews begins to define his own epistemology. Thus he rejects, for instance, Plato's individualism, foundationalism, intellectualism and intuitionism whilst retaining his anti-empiricism and reinterpreting the doctrine of anamnesis in social terms. From Hume, Matthews extrapolates the guiding principles that epistemologies should be worked out in conjunction with "interpretations of good science" and that in the advent of conflict or clashes between them, the former should give way. At the same time he rejects flume's hard line empiricism and associated theory of mind.

Inevitably, given the scope of Matthews' interests, much of this discussion is sketchy; and he himself acknowledges that it does scant justice to the complexity of the arguments involved, (p. 11). Further the parcellation of the text and the enumeration of various points often disturbs the narrative and fragments the overall direction of his argument. One of the attractive features of Matthews' discussion, however, is that he makes reference to the contemporary adherents of the philosophical positions he examines, and relates his material in eclectic fashion to current issues in social and educational theory and practice.

Next Matthews turns to philosophy of science to survey and countenance the claims of inductivism and falsificationism as two potentially strong accounts of scientific rationality, (Chapter 4). This material has been worked and reworked in recent years, and although Matthews provides no fresh insights he presents the now stock arguments and counter-arguments clearly and

systematically. Both accounts are rejected in favour of Lakatos' Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes, which Matthews uses to provide the necessary criteria in theory-choice and ultimately to vindicate the selection of a Marxist research programme in education. But Lakatos' methodology is not accepted in toto for Matthews an "internalist" account of science can not successfully file into consideration those powers influences within society which fall under the broad rubric of ideology, and which are crucial to an approach based on historical-materialism. Lakatos' acceptance of the distinction between the contexts of discovery and justification, and his internalist. orientation, preclude him from taking seriously the relevance of the history of science to the philosophy of science. Matthews quotes both Kuhn and McMullin to the effect that Lakatos can re-create or re-describe history according to his own vested interests (p. 70).

"Further, Matthews criticises Lakatos on the grounds that his metatheory "does not give a satisfactory account of the place of metaphysical commitments in science, nor of their intellectual functioning in the maintenance or overthrow of research programmes" (p. 72).

One wonders here exactly what Matthews is up to. On the one hand he accepts Lakatos' account as "the best and most sophisticated account of rationality" and is dependent on Lakatos' criteria in order to distinguish a progressive Marxist research programme in education from a degenerating analytic one; and yet, on the other, amends, modifies and admits criticism of Lakatos' account exactly at those points which would make it compatible with a Marxist epistemology. There is, then, a vicious circularity apparent in his argument. What is more, his review of the criticisms made of Lakatos is somewhat incomplete. Although Matthews refers to Feyerabend he does not mention the latter's powerful argument adduced against Lakatos' criterion of relative progressiveness, nor the logical difficulties involved in the attempt to compare content between theories. (1) Other telling criticisms have been raised against Lakatos. For instance, Laudan has questioned whether Lakatos' model captures the nature of actual theory transition in science, and he points out that successor theories do not, in general, capture all the successes of their earlier siblings. (2) One would have thought, given the importance of Lakatos' account to Matthews' enterprise. that Matthews would have sought to look more carefully at these criticisms, and at whether Lakatos can be successfully defended against them. It is open to question whether the collapse of the discovery/justification distinction or the amendment of Lakatos' model in the way indicated by Matthews would leave Lakatos' programme intact as a methodology. In other words, Matthews does not follow through on his criticisms to demonstrate their ramifications for the model. Finally, it is a debatable point whether Lakatos' model is the "best and most sophisticated account of rationality" in science. Since Lakatos originally proposed his account the philosophy of science has moved on. Where once mainstream philosophers of science were sympathetic to the views of Lakatos, the diversity of ideas existing today resembles a Feyerabendian anarchy. Witness, for example, Toulmin's evolutionary orientation, Laudan's problem focus, the reconstituted views of Kuhn or the more recent sociology of knowledge position adopted by Mary Hesse. (3)

Given such diversity in philosophy of science what justification does Matthews have for adopting a Lakatosian perspective?

Lastly, in preparing the ground for his account of knowledge as intellection production, Matthews considers the early Marx - the 1844 Manuscripts and Theses on Feuerbach - and their relation to the educational importance of Paulo Freire's work and the pragmatism of John Dewey (Chapter 5).

There he emphasizes the importance of historicity of thought in historical materialism (itself an ahistorical principle?). and makes an attempt, in a self-consistent manner, to locate Marx's early work in the content of its own problems. He extracts the major Marxist theme that consciousness, essentially and necessarily social, "arises out of and is shaped by practice, and in turn is judged in and by practice" (p. 86) - a theme which is to serve as the basis of Marxist epistemology and of a theory of science. This leads Matthews to stress Marx's "pragmatic" account of truth, in opposition to the traditional correspondence version; though he is at pains to point out that such an account is

concerned with the determination of truth rather than its meaning: “efficaciousness is a criterion, not a definition of truth” (p. 82). The notion of practice, Matthews alleges, works to bridge the gap between subjectivism and objectivism by mediating between mind and matter, and thereby provides the basis of Marx’s account of how “subjects objectify and externalise themselves in material artefacts which stand independently of them, and through which subjects are both known and also through which they create and transform themselves” (p. 80).

With the ground work complete, Matthews embarks on the development of an epistemology as intellectual production which trades heavily on an analogy based on Marx’s analysis of commodity production in *Capital*, and at the same time incorporates those important elements gleaned from post-empiricist philosophy of science. He begins his account by applying Marx’s analysis of manual labour (based on Aristotle’s four-fold division of causality) to intellectual production; where “production” has now been substituted for the notion of practice. The application can best be appreciated in terms of the following schema:

Work, Labour, Practice, Production		
Cause	Manual	Intellectual
Material	raw materials, objects of labour	observations, experimental results, concepts, laws, problems
Efficient	technology, labour power	technologies, instruments, methods scientific labour - the problematic
Formal	commodities, use values	higher laws, new concepts, theories
Final	schemes, plans, designs	mastery of situations, fulfilment of needs, goals and plans of procedure

(compiled from pages 98 and 99)

Certain features of this analogy require further comment and examination. First, preserving the theory-laden thesis, Matthews introduces a distinction between the real object of science, and its theoretical object, that is, between objects and events in the world and formulae, descriptions, and observations. “Knowledge construction”, we are told, always “begins with the latter”, (for against empiricist assumptions there is no such thing as raw uninterpreted data), “and ends in the construction of a new theoretical object”, (p. 100). Not only does empiricism conflate this distinction, but guided by a correspondence version of truth, it wrongly construes the relationship, for according to Matthews’ interpretation, previously foreshadowed, science relates to the real world, not in terms of simple correspondence, but rather in terms of utility. He maintains the relationship is “one of control, effectivity, manipulation. The truth of the theoretical object is its power and instrumentality” (p. 103). These claims are illustrated by reference to a variety of examples taken from the history of science, including reference to Galileo, Milikan’s Oil Drop experiment, and avoidance behaviour theory.

Second, given the basis of his reading of the later Marx, Matthews proceeds further to shape and consolidate his epistemology. Thus, in a consideration of Marx on method, he sanctions the initial abstraction of “a small number of determinant, general relations” - the “basic theoretical objects” (p. 105) with which the construction of scientific theory begins - and points out (following Lakatos) that in order to be scientific a theory must specify conditions for actualisation, and that in order to be useful it must occasionally meet such conditions.

Borrowing the term “problematic” from Althusser, (a term which resembles a combination of Lakatos’ positive and negative heuristics, encompassing, among other things, basic metaphysical and ontological commitments as well as directions about method and methodology), Matthews elaborates the analogy by discussing the “machinery” needed for the creation of new concepts. The problematic is both objective in the sense that it is a social product predating the individual’s thinking, and determining in the sense that it conditions the selection and specification of the problem, and the kinds of raw materials and productive activities that can be used (p. 105). Further, unlike Lakatos’ internalist apparatus, the problematic allows for the recognition of the influence of external factors: those interests which can be analysed according to the patterns of ownership, authority and control entering into the “determination of what is processed, at what time and to what purpose” (p. 108).

It is unfortunate that Matthews has chosen here to construe theoretic production as being determined by the problematic. Such a reading of Marx, without further refinement, reduces Marxist epistemology to a crude determinism, rather than emphasising a dialectical relationship between scientific method and the problematic.

At a number of points Matthews’ argument comes close to Habermas’ notion of knowledge-constitutive interests (4), and although Habermas ultimately takes a linguistic turn (following a consensus theory of truth which clearly differentiates between those knowledge interests of natural as opposed to social science or critical theory) some discussion of Habermas, as one of the most influential contemporary critics and advocates of Marx, might well have been in order.

To complete his epistemology based on the later Marx it remains for Matthews merely to distinguish between questions to do with method, to do with methodology and to do with meta-methodology, to recapitulate on an instrumental version of truth versus correspondence; and to emphasise the fallibilist nature of knowledge as intellectual production.

To complement this picture Matthews, in Chapter 7, devotes himself to a discussion of ideology. As he says rather cryptically in his introduction: “Insight into insight gives us a theory of knowledge; insight into oversight gives us a theory of ideology” (p. 6). Limits on space do not permit one to work through the contents of this chapter systematically. Even so it is perhaps the Weakest chapter in the book. Although Matthews’ account of ideology mirrors his theory of knowledge, (locating ideological consciousness in the practices or features of the productive processes of society) and although Matthews has himself earlier canvassed his intention to preserve the science/ideology distinction whilst conceding its theoretical nature, he ultimately fails to provide clear and unequivocal criteria by which this distinction can be made. For instance, he acknowledges that it would be too simplistic to say that ideology does not impinge on the cognitive claims of science, (p. 130) but concludes only by offering a series of three features which might be used to explain or characterise its potential credibility: the reification, the emptiness and the selective application of certain ideas.

This is not to say that Matthews does not provide the basis for a theory of ideology, only that he does not develop it sufficiently clearly to demonstrate his own original intention in preserving the distinction. Given the vastness of both his enterprise, and the territory he traverses, he might be forgiven.

His discussion of the fetishism of commodities is suggestive but its application to ideology is mentioned only in passing.

Earlier he provides some promising leads for a theory of ideology, but does not seem to follow up on or attempt to systematise them. He writes

Some theoretical objects are scientific and others are ideological. The former characteristically break with commonsense rather than canonise it; they are constructed within theory as a result of determinate rules and procedural principles and are not just ad hoc, for the occasion, constructions; they correctly ‘latch’ on to causal processes in the real [world] and so can be

materialised or actualised. The theoretical objects of an ideology characteristically take up, in an uncritical way, the conceptualisations of common sense; they are mostly constructed in an ad hoc manner, being largely determined by external interest; they often lack the capacity to be materialised." (p. 104)

The epistemological package that Matthews offers us has its strengths and weaknesses. His account based on the later Marx is strongly developed, even though, as the core of his work, it is dealt with in a mere 16 pages. The analogy with commodity production is particularly sound. However, Matthews does not trace out the Marxist implications of adopting such a theory. Does it mean, for instance, that theoretic production, as with all forms of practice, can be seen to be determined by the mode of production? Does this imply that theoretic production conforms to Marx's four stages of the development of society, and, if so, what is its form and status under communism?

The remaining three chapters are given over to illustrating themes developed earlier in the context of the I.Q. debate, to substantiating Matthews' claims regarding analytic philosophy, and, finally, to elaborating a Marxist theory of education.

Matthews' discussion of the I.Q. debate is particularly illuminating. He rejects the notion of "intelligence" as an atheoretical term, and successfully situates and analyses the I.Q. argument in its political context.

The penultimate chapter attempts to demonstrate his original claim that analytic philosophy of education is a degenerating research programme through a consideration of the method and epistemology of A.P.E., (which he equates with Hirst's forms of knowledge thesis). His discussion here is somewhat devastating, especially that concerned with Hirstian science - although he seems unaware that in terms of Lakatos' criteria the relative progressiveness or degeneration of a research programme is difficult to determine, and has little practical force (so Feyerabend (5) reminds us), unless combined with a time limit. Certainly, a recent issue of *Educational Analysis* contains essays which indicate that what looks like a degenerating problem shift may possibly be seen as the beginning of a period of advance. (6)

Matthews, further, tends to dismiss APE as merely part of the ideology of liberalism, without a broader consideration of its basis, or of competing notions of ideology. (7)

His account of APE, although revealing, ultimately fails to entirely convince - partly because his adoption of Lakatosian criteria for theory choice is not adequately defended, and partly because his distinction between science and ideology is too "muddy".

The last chapter is a straightforward application of Marxist ideas developed in the text to education, and, more specifically, to the notion of schooling.

Matthews' work overall is impressive in its scope. His argument warrants close attention and provides a welcome challenge to the supremacy of analytic philosophy of education. Given the approaches of the Reagan and Thatcher administrations to curbing the problems of deficit financing, with concomitant high levels of unemployment and cuts in education, Matthews' book is a timely addition to the literature; one worthy of serious consideration.

Notes

1. Feyerabend, P. (1976) "Consolations for the Specialist", in (eds.) Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 25 and 277-8.
2. Laudan, L. (1976) "Two Dogmas of Methodology", *Philosophy of Science*, 43, 585-97.
3. For a recent discussion of historical methodologies see Laudan, L. (1979) "Historical Methodologies: An Overview and Manifesto"; and McMullin, E. (1979) "The Ambiguity of 'Historicism' ", both in (eds.) Peter D. Asquith and Henry E. Kyburg, Jr. *Current Research in Philosophy of Science*, (Michigan: Philosophy of Science Assoc. ,40-54 and 55 -83 respectively. See also Nickles, T., (1980) "Introductory

Essay: Scientific Discovery and the Future of Philosophy of Science", (ed.) Thomas Nickles, Scientific Discovery, Logic and Rationality, (Holland: Reidel), 56. Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science.

4. Habermas, J. (1971) Knowledge and Human Interests, trans. J. Shapiro, (Boston: Beacon Press); and (1975) "Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism", Theory and Society, 2, 287-300.
5. Feyerabend, Op. Cit., 215.
6. See, for example, Garrow, R. (1982) "Five Commandments for the Eighties", and Gilroy, D. P. (1982) "The Revolutions in English Philosophy and the Philosophy of Education", both in Educational Analysis, 4, 49-54 and 75-92 respectively.

N.B. This issue was published some two years after Matthews' book.

7. Matthews' nevertheless, is surely on the right track here. See, for instance, the parallels between the work of R. S. Peters and P. Hirst, and the ideology of liberalism as revealed by Manning, D. J. (1976) Liberalism, (London: Dent). See also (ed.) Manning D. J. (1980). The Form of Ideology, (London: George Allen and Unwin).

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