

BOOK REVIEW

Polemics in Marxist Philosophy

BY GEORGE NOVACK

In this lively work George Novack, a self-described “radical intellectual of 1930s vintage who remains active as an unrepentant Marxist and full-time professional in the revolutionary movement” takes on the neo-Marxist revisionists—the Hegelian-existentialist Marxists who embrace dialectics but are less firm on materialism, and the materialist Marxists who abandon dialectics: Lukacs, Sartre, Kolakowski, Kosik, the Frankfurt School, et al., on the one hand, Colletti and Althusser on the other. Only Timpanaro receives (guarded) approval. Novack is a prominent Trotskyist intellectual whose numerous books, pamphlets, and articles reflect a fierce commitment to orthodox (albeit non-Stalinist) dialectical materialism. The 11 essays gathered here are not of uniform quality. (Novack is weak on existentialism, better in his defense of Engels; the autobiographical material is quite interesting.) But taken together, they present a good a case as can be made from the orthodox viewpoint against neo-Marxist perspectives. As such they merit a place in academic libraries. The book itself is lucidly written; it is provided with a short bibliography of Marxist and neo-Marxist philosophy and a lengthy glossary of philosophical terms and personalities—useful for those uninitiated in philosophy or Marxism.