

Readers Meeting

A second RP readers' and editors' meeting to discuss articles appearing in this issue will be held on 20 June at 8 pm in the upstairs room of the Lamb and Flag, Rose Street, London WC2 (off Long Acre, between Covent Garden and Leicester Square tube stations).

Letter from France

(The authors came with a party from GREPH (Groupe de recherches sur l'enseignement philosophique), who visited us in February.)

France and England are such old military allies that it perhaps shouldn't be surprising that two militant philosophical groups - Radical Philosophy and Greph - should get together and discuss the similarities and differences between them as well as the possibilities of exchange and common action. The gesture (and we wish to mark the sense of artificiality contained in that word) assumes a certain displacement as well as an emplacement, a recognition of alterity as well as of insularity.

What emerged during the weekend of discussions was a contradiction. On the one hand, we recognized that the different situations of the two countries make impossible any immediate, spontaneous identification of the two movements, either in terms of origins, means, or ends. The most striking difference is that for RP it is a question of changing the content of philosophical teaching, whereas for Greph, the problem is more one of redoing the existing teaching system, its structure and ideology, while keeping at bay regressive reform measures. On the other hand, despite the recognition of difference, both sides seemed to share a desire to join efforts in what might be the positive lever of each group's deconstruction-in-progress. If the negative lever consists of a subversive criticism of the institutions in place in each country, then the positive would consist of a comparative, transformational analysis of those institutions with the end of re-placing them. From such a confrontation, England would benefit by being shown the example of a country which allows a great deal of latitude in the content of philosophical teaching, one where even those *betes noires* of the logical tradition - Hegel and Nietzsche - are very much *à la mode*. France would benefit from the English example of a decentralized educational system within which philosophy seems to be treated as a subject among others of equal value rather than as either a dispensable delicacy or a sacred cow ('LA Philosophie' - both the black cow at midnight and the multi-coloured one at noon).

Beyond the simple confrontation of things as they are, we, for our part,

would suggest the following as possible nodes of common investigation:

- 1 the implicit sexism of philosophy
- 2 the possibility of philosophical teaching elsewhere than in the academy and of the open university...
- 3 the content of philosophy in relation to the form of its teaching, to the modes of its production and preservation, to the pedagogical machinery of the academic institution...
- 4 the history of philosophical teaching and how that informs and determines the givens of our own individual situations...
- 5 the dominant ideologies or implicit philosophies of each country as they emerge in the classroom...

Given the difference of situations, any joint effort on the part of the two groups would have to recognize its artificiality. But artificiality might not be all that bad - or, at least, not as bad as the history of philosophy has given it out to be. The distrust of artificiality goes hand in hand with a conception of philosophy as something pure, ideal, neutral, ultimately liberal, which should never dirty its hands by entering into, for instance, the partisan brawl of politics, or, for that matter, the back-biting and in-fighting of any healthy academic department. Such a conception would never admit that philosophies might be conditioned by the countries and languages in which they develop, and hence, its telos would be an 'International Philosophy Association' which would efface all specific differences and elevate them into a generality suitable to the philosophical Idea in all its universality and transcendentalité (Ce sont de tres beaux mots, n'est-ce pas?). But what if philosophy is itself, in its entire history, nothing but a partisan brawl, politics, in the lowest sense of that word, at its most refined? Are we not ourselves living examples - in our striving to make our ideas succeed those of our predecessors, in our campaign to make our work gain acceptance, in our desire to be, in a sense, for our own term, the elect? Hasn't the blindness to this aspect (this constitution, one might say) of philosophy been responsible for the failure up until now to take stock of the teaching or of the politics of philosophy, since teaching and politics are considered to be rather unelevated enterprises in comparison with the delights of unmediated meditation? And the same could be said of woman, that ever excluded other of philosophy, the goddess of artificiality for Nietzsche. Philosophy (in its most ideal, 'real', non-political, neutral forms from Plato to Hegel to ... your own professors?) has been the search for truth as the exclusion of artifice, in all its versions - woman, writing,

teaching, politics etc. At the same time, philosophy, at its most sublime, has been nothing but the purest artifice, as useless as a metaphor, so, metaphorically, one might say that it has been a dirtying of hands, intellectual masturbation, a man's game (with himself). We shouldn't fear the artifice of our political gestures, therefore, just as we shouldn't fear vulgarity. The lowest, the excluded of philosophy, has always returned to haunt it at its highest moments - so a psychoanalysis of philosophy is not unjustified. We merely do what our predecessors have done without admitting it to themselves. One cannot politicize philosophy; it already is political. How else would one describe the exclusion by the English logical tradition of an entire age of continental philosophy? or the exclusion, except for a short period of permissiveness at the end of the 18th century, of woman from French philosophy? When we decide to dirty our hands by entering into the politics of philosophy, by making political gestures with other movements against certain traditions or by putting our hands into the machinery of producing and memorializing ideas in teaching, we do not so much leave the 'realm of philosophical ideas' as uncover the workings of that realm. The philosopher who first washed his hands of politics, of political teaching, of artifice in general, of vulgarity, has had to repeat the operation throughout each succeeding generation of philosophy, and it is this repetition which reveals at once the compulsive nature and the futility of neutrality.

A *quoi nous menent-ils alors, nos efforts communs?* It is also a problem of translation. Our specificities become most evident at the moment of translation. The difference in the two languages figures the difference in our two systems of teaching. Thinking of the first, one gets a better notion of the second. One senses the fatality of natural limitation and the necessity of an artificial effort to overcome it. *Nous ne pouvons pas rester où nous sommes.* And yet, we can only stay where we are. This is the paradox we impose upon each other as two different groups doing (almost) the same thing. The border between the two countries (the English Channel, if you will, *la Manche*) acts as a limit which forces us to realize that we only work with what we have at hand - *bricolage*. At the same time, being fluid, like all limits, it invites transgression, crossing over, pretending (strategically and provisionally, that is, artificially and politically) that the border is not there. *Il s'agit d'une invitation à venir - to come to speak of what is to come - dans une autre langue, d'une autre langue. A la prochaine ...*

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