

Notes

This issue of Radical Philosophy appears in a situation where the interests of both its writers and readers are under threat. Not only is philosophy being threatened as a result of the economic crisis, but the philosophical frameworks used by radical groups over the last decade are directly under attack: the Open University is accused of 'Marxist bias'; the Gould report calls for a McCarthyite purge; the 'nouveaux philosophes' receive wide acclaim as the pall-bearers of socialism.

Now is the time for a radical journal to heighten our sense of urgency and encourage the production of relevant work. The News Section shows our attempt to bring Radical Philosophy closer to its readership, and make it more responsive to readers' needs; it implicitly argues for a closer connection between Radical Philosophy groups and the journal than the loose and almost coincidental alliance that has existed in the past.

The articles published in this issue are congruent with these moves. John Mepham's review in RP16 opened with a paragraph later re-printed in Spare Rib's regular column of sexist adverts etc, 'Tooth and Nail'. We publish a response to this paragraph by the Cambridge 'Women in Society' collective, Mepham's reply, and their rejoinder. Peter Dews' reply to Roy Edgley's article in RP15 defends Colletti's position that contradictions occur in thought, not in its objects. Rip Bulkeley's article on Mao, 'On On Practice', critically examines a text that has been used as a classic in the philosophic education of radicals. Andrew Collier's article again raises the question of the transformability of the analytic tradition; he uses concepts and methods from this tradition to produce a positive and critical notion of 'freedom'. This is especially timely as public debate comes to focus on 'individual rights' and 'human freedom'.

This issue also carries details of the next Radical Philosophy conference, to be held in Brighton 6-8 January 1978.

Sexism and metaphor: an exchange

Dear Radical Philosophy Group,

We object strongly to the opening paragraph of John Mepham's review, "Goodbye to all that?", in Radical Philosophy no. 16. His choice of metaphor - a woman being fucked (or is it rape?) by successive giants, and enjoying it - to convey his scorn for the British academic left, betrays his careless and uncritical participation in the worst sort of sexist ideology. Presumably this is his attempt to escape from the aridity he attributes to the left, if only in style! You may find it interesting that the National Front used just such imagery to convey their disgust of the Left, in a leaflet distributed in Cambridge last year.

The Women's Liberation Movement, in its struggle to combat such derogatory and all-pervasive ideas about women and about sexuality, expects more support from a Journal which purports to be critical and politically radical. Hopefully this letter will prompt some Editorial discussion on the issue - apparently you do take up issues related to women's oppression (at the abstract level only?)

Our bodies are our own, so get off our backs, Mr Mepham, and look elsewhere to titillate your readers intellectual senses!

Up yours,
'Women in Society' Course Collective
58 Kimberley Road, Cambridge

Dear RP comrades,

Something must have gone badly wrong with the writing of that first paragraph of my review of Perry Anderson's book, because the "Women in Society" collective are not the only ones to have read into it completely the opposite of what was intended. They are quite right that the image with which the review opens is a sexist image. It is so blatantly sexist that one would have thought that it was obvious that its rhetorical purposes was not to express or endorse a sexist attitude but to expose one. In other words these readers have misunderstood the point of the image, its function in the text. The point was inten-

ded in fact to be a critical one; the intended meaning was absolutely the opposite to that read into it by the Collective. Its purpose is not at all 'to convey scorn for the British academic left' but to criticise the political-cultural policy of the New Left Review. In other words this deliberately and manifestly sexist image was used in order to make an anti-sexist point.

As I tried to explain in the review the NLR diagnosis of the feebleness of British socialist culture led them to adopt a particular policy in an attempt to rectify the situation. They adopted the policy of exposing British socialist intellectuals to the major works of the 'Western Marxist Tradition'. This policy is open to all kinds of criticisms, some of which I made explicitly in the review and some of which the editor of the NLR seems now to accept himself (although he fails, characteristically, to do so in the manner of open self-criticism or political analysis of the history of the NLR). One particular criticism of that policy is that it is phallogocentric; it is this that that first paragraph was trying to express not directly, not via theoretical analysis, but rhetorically, by means of the disputed metaphor. This was meant to be read as saying: 'The manner of the NLR's cultural intervention has been phallogocentric because it has thought of its audience as being passively excited and grateful for being serviced by the Great Men of Europe, whose bodies of thought were being made available in translation'. I was saying that this is how they perceived us. Perhaps this makes the irony of the metaphor more clear. It was certainly used in a rather clumsy way.

Now, is this a fair accusation to throw at the NLR? I do myself think that the style of at least some of those 'great texts' is indeed phallogocentric. This is a function of their dogmatic, system-building method,

Note from the production group. We regret that part of John Mepham's review, column 2 on page 41 of RP16, was laid out back to front. The column should be read beginning from the words 'and the great intellectuals', 20 lines from the foot of the page. We apologise to John Mepham and to RP16 readers.