

EDITORIAL NOTES

DAY SCHOOLS AND SOCIOBIOLOGY

The main Radical Philosophy activity recently has been the holding of day schools. Two have been held so far this year, and a third is planned for the autumn. We see these as serving an important purpose. It has always been difficult, within the Radical Philosophy movement, to develop a real sense of collaborative work, despite constantly-reiterated intentions to do so. We hope that by having regular and frequent discussions of 'work in progress', we can begin to realise these intentions.

There are obvious advantages in the day-school format as compared with large-scale two- or three-day conferences. Most obviously, day schools are much easier to organise. Especially if they are held in London, we can avoid the need for complex arrangements for registration and accommodation, and advance publicity can therefore also be kept fairly simple. But there may also be disadvantages in the format. Although attendance at the day schools has so far been good, it has been noticeable that a large majority of the participants have come from the London area, and this suggests that the format perhaps has the effect of excluding people from further afield. It may be that people think it worth their while to travel a considerable distance for a three-day conference, but not for a one-day meeting. We would like to get people's views on this. We intend to go on holding conferences as well as day schools, and we would like to get the balance right. So please write to Radical Philosophy to say what your preferences are, and to suggest any other kinds of meeting or activity which you think would be useful.

The day school in November will be devoted to a single theme, that of sociobiology. Why sociobiology? There are many and good reasons, we think, for devoting time to this 'new' theory. It has been the subject of intense controversy, for critics have

charged it with racism (for a discussion of the issues here, see the article by Martin Barker in RP21). Without doubt, some particular pronouncements by sociobiologists have been racist. But how can a theory which quite clearly arose out of a controversy within evolutionary genetics be as ideological and as dangerous as its opponents argue? Similar questions arise about other political applications of sociobiology, such as its use to justify sex inequalities, and the use of earlier versions of 'biologism' (e.g. ethology) to legitimate forms of behaviour such as aggression and competition.

The theory of sociobiology is therefore important for a number of reasons. It challenges us to clarify our view of ideology, and of the intersections of science and politics. It raises, in a new form, many hoary old issues such as the fact-value distinction (which is the sociobiologists' standard defence against charges of political bias). But on the positive side, it presses on us the problem that philosophy has so much ignored: the importance of biology. For what is the use of a theory of mind which has not taken into account the significance of Darwinism? If we reject sociobiology, we need an alternative account of the relevance of human biology.

The morning session of the day school will be a discussion of a representative work of sociobiology, Richard Dawkins' book The Selfish Gene (Paladin paperback). It will be assumed that people have previously read the book, and the idea is that it should provide a general framework and common background for more particular discussions. In the first afternoon session we shall divide into small groups for discussion of specific topics (such as the relations between sociobiology and racism). The final session will be another plenary session in which we shall get reports back from the small groups and attempt to link them to one another and to the morning's general discussion.



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