

such things as human motivation, human development and selfhood, and so on.

There is still, I think, an implicit tendency in Kathleen Wilkes' book to regard everyday explanations of behaviour as interesting, perhaps, and practically essential in the conduct of life, but otherwise as rather inferior and unsatisfactory if compared with anything that can be grounded in physical science. This is linked with an uncritical attitude towards the concept of 'explanation'. Wilkes seems just to assume (along with Smart, Armstrong and many others) that the concept of 'explanation' has the same meaning when applied to the physical world as it does when applied to human behaviour. I think that this assumption needs

questioning. Common sense explanations of human behaviour or development or motivation are often inadequate; but the route to a more adequate understanding of these things does not lie through neurophysiology. The psychophysiology envisaged by Wilkes would not be continuous with common sense; it would be raising different questions which, though legitimate, would not contribute towards an understanding of most of the questions about human behaviour that we want to ask. And these questions are not 'merely practical', in a deflationary sort of sense; they are concerned with our whole understanding of what it is to be human, and should not be displaced by any form of scientism, however muted.

Jean Grimshaw

NEWS

French Philosophers Fight Cuts

by Christian Descamps

On 16 and 17 June, a large, attentive and committed audience gathered at the Sorbonne in Paris to participate in a 'Philosophical Estates General'. Beneath the frescoes of Puvis de Chavannes, Jacques Derrida described how philosophy is being strangled in France, and Vladimir Jankelevitch spoke of the 'final solution'. Jeannette Colombel referred to the philosopher-peasants of Larzac, and Christine Buci-Glucksmann emphasised the contribution of women to philosophy... But what was this 'Estates General' for?

The purpose was to protest against the infamous 'Réforme Haby', which considerably reduces both timetable hours and the number of teaching posts in philosophy in secondary schools. Paradoxically, this blow coincides with a wave of popularity for philosophy amongst the general public. Obviously one should not lump together everything that's published under the prestigious title of 'philosophy'... But the attack on this subtly subversive discipline is far from being innocent. Liberalism is fine, but only up to a point. Régis Debray pointed out that 'the relation between the reduction of teaching posts and the proliferation of jobs in television, may not be a matter of cause and effect, but it is not a coincidence either... In reality the same strategy underlies them both.'

The discussions were remarkable: they affirmed that without philosophy there would never have been the miracle of ancient Greece, or democracy, or a Renaissance or a French Revolution. What is really under attack in the assault on this discipline is free thought itself.

Of course there were a number of incidents, and a little scuffling when the impresario of the Nouveaux Philosophes, Bernard-Henry Levy, got up to speak. But these very divisions only show that philosophy is alive and well. If it were dead - as the powers that be would like - it would of course be accorded all the funereal respect of those who so like dead thinkers. (Consider the fabulous turnabouts of the soviet officials who nowadays always have the name of Mayakowski on their lips!)

In fact - aside from the folklore that is always associated with the work of large meetings (and which made the Sorbonne reminiscent of the Odeon

in 1968) - these discussions really did produce a lot of new ideas. Various working groups looked at the relations between philosophy and the press, television and publishing. And, beneath all the rhetoric, the discipline of philosophy emerged as vigorous, critical and incisive; and the numerous secondary school philosophy teachers testified to a genuine desire for philosophy.

The one regrettable thing was the absence of students. For whilst it was emphasised that the desire for philosophy is independent of the imperatives of the Baccalaureat, it would have been nice to see more lycee students there - and especially to ask them what they think of the idea of starting philosophy in the first years of secondary school.

Convulsive, subversive and youthful, the ancient logos appealed to non-philosophers too - to all those who refuse to accept the suppression of thought. Roland Brunet, one of the organisers of these sessions, is already planning a second 'Philosophical Estates General'. This will be in a few months' time, and will take place somewhere in the provinces.

(Translated by Jonathan Rée from *La Quinzaine Littéraire* 305, July 1979)

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