

## Co-ordinating Left-Wing Intellectuals

A number of editors of *Radical Philosophy* took part in a meeting in June to discuss the formation of a society to bring together the activities of the various left-wing intellectuals' groups in Britain and co-ordinate their activities politically. The society is provisionally known as the Socialist Society. Many questions about the form of organisation remain, but a steering committee has been formed and a conference towards the end of the year is being considered. Among the problems are how to operate both regionally and nationally through organisationally diverse groups; how not to become a society of intellectuals in the worst sense (though many of those taking part are already active in left political organisations); what sort of relationship to foster with the Labour Party's new theoretical journal *New Socialist*, which is about to be launched; and how to be a sort of Fabian Society to the left of the Fabian Society without reproducing the reformist tendencies inherent in Fabian Society organisation.

*Radical Philosophy* readers who would like to know more about the Socialist Society should write to Roy Edgley, Arts Building, University of Sussex, Falmer, Brighton, Sussex. Roy is a member of the steering committee.

Noël Parker/Roy Edgley

## Education and Oppression Day School

Only one thing is to be regretted about the day-school on Education and Oppression held in Manchester on 3 May, that so few people were there to take part in such an interesting discussion. (Unhappily, a break-up in our distribution meant that readers were not informed of the event in the magazine beforehand.) A philosopher, two sociologists of education and an historical sociologist each began a discussion centred on a theme which must be of concern to all those purveying or pursuing education; namely, the oppressive dimension of education and the other institutions surrounding young people, both in their day-to-day practice and in their global role. The discussion examined both the rationale and the evolution of these institutions. Across the different terminologies, the various approaches addressed the common problem in its many manifestations.

The day began with John Harris, a philosopher in the Department of Education at Manchester University, arguing against traditional justifications, both explicit and implicit, that licence the denial of a variety of rights to children and young people. In his view, these justifications are used prejudicially against children, for applied consistently they would justify the denial of rights to a large proportion of the adult population. The three types of justification he identified were the claim that children's incompetence makes them incapable of exercising rights

accorded to others; the related claim that children would cause danger to themselves or others if they were accorded the rights others enjoy; and the view that parents as such have rights over children which rule out children's having the same rights as others.

The claim of incompetence and consequent danger was to turn up again and again during the day as grounds for the treatment of young people. But John showed how doubtful it is that a sharp and obvious distinction exists between children and adults in these terms. Although we commonly imagine that adults are competent to have dealings with others which make them independent and entitle them to claim rights, no point can be shown where adults become capable of sustaining themselves independently, if indeed they ever do. If people's competences were to be investigated empirically, the most likely implication would be an infinite regress, in which the dependence and incompetence of each successive group justified their being limited by the next more competent group. Of course, it is common to formulate children's incompetence in terms of a supposed irrationality, implying that their behaviour is not properly adapted to their ends or is adapted to improper ends. In more common or garden terms this is often expressed in the fear that children would harm themselves or others if they were allowed greater freedom - although adults' behaviour is frequently harmful to themselves without our drawing any general inference about their rights. As means to an end, John argued, many aspects of children's behaviour are perfectly well adapted if we consider them fairly. Apparently the most obvious case of their incapacity, helplessness, for example, is not only often appropriate to obtaining the help they need, but is also to be found in different forms throughout the adult population. As regards the rational choice of ends, John argued that only paternalism, again liable to turn into an infinite regress, could justify the sweeping claim that children are unable to choose rational ends. In common terms, it is, for example, not unusual for people to say, where they disapprove of a decision by the young, that they will regret it later, even though this could equally be said of all manner of decisions made by adults. Or again, it is commonly said that children will be harmed or exploited by others (usually adults!) if they were allowed greater liberty. But John argued that the granting of liberty in no way implied that protection should be denied - and, indeed, the liberty of adults does not prevent their being protected in various ways.

More theoretically, John raised Dworkin's formulation of an 'argument from insult', according to which, though it is wrong to impose one's will so as to insult the status of plans of life that another individual has, children are not sensitive to this kind of insult. John saw every reason to suppose that many young people or children do have plans of life in the required sense, and are sensitive to the 'insult'.

Finally, John disposed of a view which he found formulated in Charles Fried, but which must underly many social attitudes to children, that children can be denied rights because of their place in the lives of others, especially parents, who must have a free choice of life-style. While it is true that children live in households with others, so that their life-styles affect those of others, he argued, the same could be said of any other member of the household

(notably the wife!) so that there was in this fact no justification for the blanket denial of rights.

John followed his attack on the grounds for denying rights to children with an alternative sketch of the sort of being qualifying for rights. Working from the supposition that we are in any case naturally responsive to beings who appear to value their own existences, he argued that self-awareness over time ought to be the key criterion. What this amounted to was that many children from the age of eight or nine could have sufficient ideas about controlling their lives, and planning and assessing their own activities to claim a range of rights presently denied them. Having rejected already the linking of rights and protection and the assumption that rationality would be the same for all ages, John now wished to define citizen statuses specific to different age-groups taking account of unequal needs for, say, medical care or education. For children he wanted to suggest a 'junior citizen status' analogous to the 'senior citizen status' of which there are already some signs.

Denis Gleeson's account, based largely upon his own studies of the perceptions of students in technical colleges near Keele, where he works, suggested how the role of technical education was different both from what it used to be and from what the left often thinks, and how it increasingly oppresses youth in ways not commonly recognised. Yet he also showed how this substantial sector of education could be a focus for initiatives to advance the status of young people.

By virtue of its traditional image, Denis argued, technical education was usually thought of as the passive hand-maiden of industry, preparing and screening personnel for it or supplementing the skills learned by its apprentices. Yet the run-down of the traditional manufacturing base with its characteristic level of technology founded on skills and of the general level of employment, together with the rise of large-company training schemes and internal labour markets, had produced a switch to two new functions from the 1960s on. First, in the absence of conscription (a form of which, it is interesting to note, is now being mooted again), further education is the only means the state has to relieve the problem of unemployment. Over half the students in further education are there under the auspices of the Manpower Services Commission. Secondly, with the drop in demand for technical skills, the technical college curriculum has shifted from teaching this kind of skill, to guidance, counselling and the provision of 'life skills'. These last are intended to prepare students not for a particular job but for employment in general. Denis argued that the new autonomy of the technical college curriculum vis-à-vis the technical practices of industry gave this sector of education a real opportunity for enhancing the students' understanding of social relations. Yet his own investigation of students' perceptions suggest that 'life skills' classes, and 'Unified Vocational Preparation' (UVP) were in fact vitiated by their very idea of social competence. For social competence was conceived as a prerequisite of employment, as technical skills were prerequisites of skilled work. But it is not a true skill that can be clearly seen and practised in the productive process. Yet, by defining social competence for the students in such terms, the UVP programme ends up justifying their anticipated place in the social or industrial hierarchy in terms of their possession of differing degrees of social 'competence'. They are thus locked into social relations of industry reproduced in the educational context, and their own life experience and culture is marginalised as 'incompetence'. The

concept of social competence comes to have the same labelling function as deprivation or disadvantage. There was more than a hint in this of the justification for the denial of rights by the supposed incompetence of children, which John had discussed earlier.

Hilary Dickinson works in the sociology of education in a college for technical teachers (Garnett College). She recounted her own observations of French technical schools, which suggested how the concept of competence in the control of the material world could also marginalise individuals in the process of education. Hilary's starting point had been Claude Grignon's *L'Ordre des choses: la fonction sociale de l'enseignement technique*, which she found substantially confirmed. French secondary technical education is divided between technical lycées, which train prospective engineers, and colleges of technical education, where technicians or skilled workers are educated. Grignon had seen a difference between technical and craft culture, and a social hierarchy mapped onto this educational hierarchy. Technical discourse which, unlike the more intuitive rule-of-thumb practices of craft culture, presupposed hard-and-fast regularities in physical objects and their relations, dominated the pedagogy of the technical education college (even though they are teaching craft), just as the technical lycée's superiority is impressed upon the staff and students of the technical education college. This domination is manifest in a range of attitudes: abstract understanding of reality, such as the educational élite is given, is experienced as something beyond the students' grasp; questioning the order of things, the social order and even its morality is rendered impossible; even the regulations regarding dress within the colleges are, according to Grignon, presented to the students in the same order of necessity.

John Clarke works in sociology at the Open University. His subject was the history of the foundation in England of public institutions to contain children, and the principles upon which those institutions operate. He used a three-part periodisation. In the years between 1850 and 1870 children first came to be perceived as a problem by the urban gentry, who found their streets invaded by urchins. The dominant social perception of this problem, against the background of that gentry's perception of the family, was, however, that the problem of street children arose from the failure of the children's parents to protect their innocence in the bosom of the family. The appropriately named reformatories (and specialised juvenile prisons) were established to cope with the precociously dangerous street urchins.

But the principle of securing a 'safer' environment to bring up children was extended across the board in the second period, from 1870, when compulsory education was introduced and a new level of supervision for children became accepted. Various humane-seeming institutions appearing about this time can be seen as agents of this movement: two-thirds of the NSPCC's prosecutions of parents, for example, were for keeping children away from school; and a number of laws passed at this time to protect children in public places were in fact directed against forms of leisure which established culture disapproved of, such as gambling in the street or nude bathing. The extent of the supervision over children deemed necessary in this context can be gauged from the notorious obsession of the medical profession and the writers of children's literature with the 'evils' of masturbation, or 'self-abuse' as it was sometimes scarily called.

An intriguing outcome of the development of public supervision of children was, John argued, the re-

location of the problem of delinquency. The re-location operated in various ways. The absorption of the vast majority of school-age children into the school system moved the age focus of delinquency to the teens. Being associated with a period of biological and psychological change, delinquency came to be thought of as a universal potential inherent in the 'dangerous age' of our bio/psychological natures, Adolescence. And the antipathy of one class to the children of another, which lay at the origin of society's perception of delinquency has been occluded in this bio/psychological generalisation.

It seemed to this reporter that this was evidence of a dialectic between socially defined competence and incompetence, which had been at issue throughout the discussion. John's account of the foundation of institutions, schools, for confining children resembled to a striking degree Foucault's account of how institutions for confining the insane and others arose with the influx of vagabonds into the cities in the late Middle Ages. Just as Foucault argues that these institutions gave rise to the socially constituted notion of rationality, which the insane represented by portraying its opposite, so the discussions of the day showed how legal and educational principles could institutionalise socially constituted ideas of competence and adulthood and foist upon the subjects of the educational process the negative corollaries of incompetence and childishness. Indeed, these two negative corollaries were classically conflated in the founder of modern political theory, Hobbes, in his remark (in his preface to *The Citizen*) that 'a wicked man is almost the same thing with a child grown strong and sturdy, or a man of childish disposition'. Much the same point could be made regarding socially constituted ideas of women's capacities. But between such diametrical opposites there can be no mediation, and the transition from one to the other is necessarily, in John's phrase, a 'dangerous age'.

The various ways in which our discussion had shown the notion of competence underwriting oppressive or patriarchal practices must pose a problem for those in education, particularly at a time when education is under attack, and is perhaps suffering the political consequences of patriarchal practices that have alienated working class support (see CCCS's *Unpopular Education: Schooling and Social Democracy*, Hutchinson, 1981). For it is hard to imagine an educational practice without some notion of competence, as that which those in the process acquire by virtue of it. The observation of socially constructed concepts of competence within oppressive practices does not show the hollowness of all notions of competence. There must be many ways in which the dialectic of competence and incompetence is manifest, from John's 'problem' of rough youth, to student resistance to established culture in the classroom, to - in my own field of counselling for adult students - students' anxiety about their own incompetence to undertake studies. If the idea of competence has to be present in any educational practice, then at the very least it has to be a de-mystified idea, shorn of its obscure ramifications in a social or even an ontological hierarchy. And it has to be de-mystified in the educational practice itself - not by the utterances of counsellors or philosophers. As one participant, I was left wondering how it might be possible to define competences that would not be mystifications and reinforcements of an unequal and oppressive social structure. Merely to define them honestly would be a start. By that means the competence of the student (child, teenager or adult) might be recognised or even confirmed in the competence set up as their educational goal, and education might

alleviate oppression more, and reinforce it less.

I hope this account of the Manchester day-school will prompt some interest amongst readers in the north of England, and I would be glad to hear (at the editorial address) from anyone interested in taking part in Radical Philosophy events in the north.

Noël Parker

## Literature Teaching Politics

LTP is an informal group of people from many different subject areas in higher and further education. The aims of LTP are best indicated by stressing that there is *no punctuation* between the words in the title: they therefore offer to release a plurality of meanings and a plurality of relationships between literature, teaching and politics. Some of the main concerns of LTP have been the ideological implications of literary and related practices, the politics of teaching, and the construction of new critical practices through developments in Marxism, feminism and psychoanalysis.

The main function of LTP is to hold an annual conference. The aim at the conference has been to avoid formal papers and instead to bring together all those interested in a series of productive workshops. The first conference, held at the Polytechnic of Wales in 1980, was attended by about 60 people; the second, at New Hall, Cambridge in 1981, by about 90. Both were very successful and brought together people from English, Modern Languages, Cultural Studies, Sociology, Communications, Philosophy and other areas. The next conference will be held at Easter 1982 at the University of Birmingham. The organiser is Tony Davies, Department of English, and anyone who would like further details should contact him.

There are also LTP regional groups which have the aim of maintaining contacts between conferences. Anyone who would like to be put in touch with a local group should contact Andrew Belsey, Department of Philosophy, University College, Cardiff.

Andrew Belsey

## Canadian Philosophical Association Radical Philosophy Group

The Radical Philosophy Group in the Canadian Philosophical Association owes part of its inspiration, as the name implies, to *Radical Philosophy* and its groups. That means it is largely confined to English-speaking Canadians even though, of the 'two solitudes' governed from Ottawa, the Quebec nation is certainly far and away the one that is more influenced today by all currents of left thought - in philosophy especially.

This May the Radical Philosophy Group's sessions were again listed on the official programme of the Canadian Philosophical Association Annual Congress in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Marxists, anarchists, feminists, phenomenologists, analysts - NOT all mutually exclusive, of course - once again hobnobbed, few in number, in the tolerated space so allotted. Canadian 'niceness' largely again prevailed. As usual, few students were present because only paper-readers and commentators could expect the necessary thousand-mile travel financing either from their institutions or from the governmentally funded coffers of the Canadian Philosophical Association.

The good news is that some real dialogue does take place in this forum between and among different philosophical schools and political persuasions, and even different national philosophical styles. It is not entirely 'a dialogue of the deaf'.

(Next year's meetings will be in Ottawa. Interested readers can contact Kai Nielsen at the Department of Philosophy, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2N 1N4.)

Danny Goldstick

## Books Received

- A. Apple, *Megasynthesis*, Megasynthesis Ltd, Edmonton, USA, no price
- R. Aronson, J.-P. Sartre: *Philosophy in the World*, NLB, £10 hc, £4 pb
- R. Atkin, *Multi-dimensional Man*, Penguin, £2.95 pb
- T. Bottomore (ed.), *Modern Interpretations of Marx*, Blackwell, £12 hc, £4.95 pb
- F. Brentano, *Sensory and Noetic Consciousness*, RKP, £8.50 hc
- Critical Social Policy*, Vol.1, No.1, 1981, £2.50
- S. Holtzmann and C. Leich (eds.), *Wittgenstein: To Follow a Rule*, RKP, £12.50 hc
- I. Illich, *Shadow Work*, Marion Boyars, £2.95 pb
- F. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, Cornell UP, \$19.50 hc.
- H. Kainz, *The Philosophy of Man*, University of Alabama Press, £11.40 hc, £5.40 pb
- D. Layder, *Structure, Interaction and Social Theory*, RKP, £9.50 hc
- G. Macdonald and P. Pettit, *Semantics and Social Science*, RKP, £8.95 hc
- N. Meyer, H. Petersen and V. Sorensen, *Revolt From the Centre*, Marion Boyars, £7.95 hc, £3.95 pb
- H. Meynell, *Freud, Marx and Morals*, Macmillan, £18 hc
- A. O'Hear, *Education Society and Human Nature*, RKP, £7.95 hc, £3.95 pb
- Praxis International*, Vol.1, No.1, 1981
- A. Rosenberg, *Sociobiology and the Preemption of Social Science*, Blackwell, £9.90 hc
- H. Ruthrof, *The Reader's Construction of Narrative*, RKP, £9.75 hc
- J. Sellars, *The Gathering of Reason*, Ohio State UP, £8.40 hc
- R. Scruton, *From Descartes to Wittgenstein*, RKP, £9.50 hc
- D. Simmons, *Ideals and Dogma: a Critique of Pure Marxism*, Third Avenue Press, £3.95 hc
- R. Taylor, *Beyond Art*, Harvester, £18.95 hc
- T. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, NLB, £7.50 hc
- R. Debray, *The Intellectuals of Modern France*, NLB, £11 hc, £4.50 pb
- V. Geoghegan, *Reason and Eros: The Social Theory of Herbert Marcuse*, Pluto, £2.95 pb
- L. Goldmann, *Method in the Sociology of Literature*, Blackwell, £8.50 hc £3.95 pb
- M. Haight, *A Study of Self-Deception*, Harvester, no price
- M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol.I, RKP, £11.50 hc
- D. Ingleby (ed.), *Critical Psychiatry: The Politics of Mental Health*, Penguin, £2.95 pb
- P. Lomas, *The Case for a Personal Psychotherapy*, OUP, £9.50 hc
- C. McCabe (ed.), *The Talking Cure*, RKP, £20 hc
- W. Nelson, *On Justifying Democracy*, RKP £9.75 hc
- H. Roberts (ed.), *Doing Feminist Research*, RKP £4.95 pb
- H. Skolimowski, *Eco-Philosophy*, Marion Boyars, £6.95 hc, £2.95 pb
- R. Waterhouse, *A Heidegger Critique*, Harvester, £18.95 hc

# CORRESPONDENCE

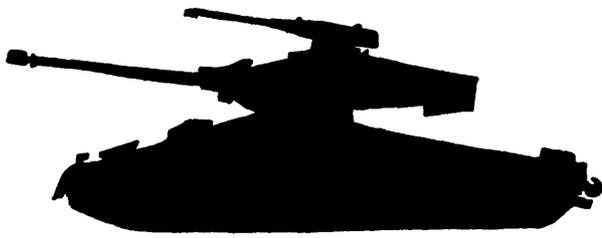
Dear Colleagues and Readers,

As the principal author of the editorial 'Cold War Thinking' in *Radical Philosophy* 25, I am writing to say that I agree with a great deal of Mike Shortland's letter in *RP* 27 criticising it. That may seem a strange thing to do. But I think that Mike's letter is in agreement with the editorial that I and others composed in important ways, even though he wrote it out of disagreement. But I also think that the mixture of agreement and disagreement between Mike and us is illustrative of the difficulties of editorial decisions, particularly on editorials, which are debated continually in the Collective, and upon which we could do with our readers' comments. Astute readers may indeed have already sensed those difficulties in the switch to the title 'Comment' in *RP* 27, and the complete absence (temporary, I hope) of an editorial in *RP* 28.

What does our editorial say? That it would be silly - grandiose - for *RP* to publish condemnations of the moves in the political manoeuvres of the big powers that aren't listening. It then passes smartly on to the presentation of the occupation of Afghanistan to the Western people. It was written just after Soviet troops had moved in. Afghanistan is far away and little known to us. It was not clear what of the Russian or Western versions of events was true, how many troops there were, what they were doing. It was impossible to say whether the occupation was right or wrong. But one thing was clear: the Western press, guided by their integration within the class relations and ideological structures of our societies and by Western governments with their customary skill in press relations, and not much better informed about Afghanistan than the rest of us, were sure as Hell not giving it to us straight. The press, the media, the Western ruling classes, the attitudes and institutional structures of Western academia, these things are, unlike events in Afghanistan at the time, quite well known to us; and we can make shrewd judgements on all that regardless of whether Afghanistan is or is not 'right'.

What does Mike's letter say? Amongst other things he says that imperialist states pre-suppose a simple opposition of them and us, that in the Afghan situation those who are being presented to us as nationalist heroes are actually religious reactionaries, that the situation is complex and that the left must begin its own analysis. There is nothing in that which the authors of the editorial (me anyway) would disagree with - particularly the first point, specifically referred to in the editorial as a source of intellectual impoverishment. With what Mike calls the 'cry ... in outright condemnation of the Russian presence' echoing around us, I sought an issue upon which *RP* could put an informed view at that time. With the passing of time, Mike has managed to draw out other issues (such as the status of national sovereignty and self-determination) which he was able to make informed comment about in *RP*.





For Mike, the Afghanistan situation has raised a different set of issues appropriate to *RP*. But Mike's letter is in agreement with our editorial in the profound congruence of his approach and ours. He looks at the scattered information available, expounds some general issues of ideas important to the left, and comes to a judgement on the ideas but not on the concrete situation that raises them. In doing this he recognises two important parameters of what we can sensibly write in *RP*: our limited resources for hard information; and our ability to identify, analyse with some degree of independence, and even make judgements upon the working of ideas in concrete political situations.

I am now getting to the heart of why I bothered to write this letter. It is not to defend myself from attack by ingeniously claiming that I am not under attack. Rather I am writing to explain what appear to me to be the limits and the dangers of *RP*'s political commitment. It was impossible when our editorial was written to say whether Soviet moves in Afghanistan were right. Mike, when he wrote his letter, was able to muster more material bearing on that question, but he does not say whether the Russians were 'right' either. Time and information alone will never equip us in *RP* to resolve such a question with any authority. In the editorial collective we are a group largely made up of philosophy teachers (all but nine of the collective, under one third that is, are full-time philosophy teachers, and of those only four - including Mike and I as it happens - are not full-time teachers of other subjects in higher education). We want to bring the knowledge and skills we have learned in studying philosophy and other related disciplines into the struggles of the left. Our skills and our resources do not equip us to say anything much worth saying on a whole range of matters; but they do equip us to say much in *RP* that is important (and, of course, leave us free to have plenty of more or less well-grounded opinions and strategies outside of our involvement in *RP*).

But our inability to pronounce on so many matters is not necessarily to be regretted. To say whether the Russians are 'right', for example, would be a paradigm case of the vacuous 'fundamentally liberal pronouncement' that in Mike's words 'functions better at pointing out what may be desirable than at offering a programme to achieve it'. I suppose that it is because Mike realises that, that he has not finished by judging the Russians' action. To force you into making universal pronouncements on simple dichotomies - Are you in favour of violence or not? You think we should all be like Soviet Russia, I suppose!\* - is a common debating ploy on the right (though not only there). But there is really no good reason why we should think that making judgements like that is particularly important, though one might have a hankering to get nearer to Kantian universal absolutes. The generality of such universal principles is in a way appealing, but that usually shows how in making them we have falsely abstracted ourselves from our real situation. It is our real situation that enables us, however, to take up as we do philosophical issues involved in the politics of the left, and left political issues in terms of philosophy.

Yet there are drawbacks about writing on politics

and philosophy in this way, which could I think be summed up as the risk of being taken to be doing more than that. What we write can be misunderstood. Mike thought that we were adding an (albeit Lilliputian) condemnation of Russian to the chorus: I thought we were discussing the dangers to left intellectual life in the present conjuncture. The approach itself can be easily attacked as either timid, or shilly-shallying, or arrogant. As to whether it is timid, it seems to me that it shows no less boldness than circumstances require. In other circumstances, who knows? As to whether it is shilly-shallying, I would say that in the complex of political and social life it is as important to recognise the limits of what we can say with assurance as it is to override those limits when necessary. (I am not, of course, trying to suggest that only philosophers are capable of recognising that, only that they have to recognise *their* limits.) As to whether it is arrogant, to view it as such is I suspect a reflex of platonic origin, according to which he who can grasp the 'essential' nature of things ought to boss everyone else around on the strength of that. Even though a more usual English paradigm is Locke's image of the underlabourer to science, there is a sense in which we have not forgotten that Plato thought philosophers should rule. In my view, however, the activity of the magazine perfectly well can, and should be, viewed like that of what Foucault calls 'specific intellectuals' (*RP* 17), that is of people put in specific locations in the social complex of institutionalised knowledge, yet able to struggle *from that position* for change in the whole. That view is not as arrogant, and may give us a worrying uncertainty about the knock-on effects of our efforts. But it is realistic.

Now what I have said about the drawbacks of discussing philosophy as we do sometimes inhibits the collective about publishing articles too. Does Burnheim's 'Statistical Democracy' treat Marxism too naively to be worthwhile? What will be the effect of repeatedly publishing translations or commentaries on Continental philosophers? These are questions the collective has debated in the context of particular articles, and they show the difficulty we have in defining the limits of our role. But we are more inhibited still when it comes to editorials expressing opinions found in the collective. Whereas we may agree on what is worth discussing, we are much less likely to agree on what is to be said; and whereas we may agree on what is to be said, we may well disagree over the possible implications of our statements for the politics of the left. And that is why we sometimes do and sometimes do not have editorials or comment columns. What do you think we should do? Letters, for publication or not, on this issue (or others) should be sent to me at the editorial address.

Fraternally,

Noël Parker

Secretary to the Editorial Collective

\*PS - Believe it or not, since writing this letter I actually heard that line of argument adopted by an eminent professor of philosophy at a gathering of professional philosophers. To their credit, most of the others present disapproved of it as a line of attack.

## News Items

If you attend or hear of events relevant to *Radical Philosophy*'s broad interests or aims, or belong to a group with goals in common with those of *Radical Philosophy* (whether or not the group is concerned with the narrowly philosophical), other readers may like to hear about it. Why not send us a short report for the News Section, at the editorial address?

Dear *Radical Philosophy*,

In *Radical Philosophy* 26, Bhaskar claims to have refuted Hume's celebrated claim that an 'ought' cannot be derived from an 'is'. I would suggest that the claim is unconvincing and that moral evaluation underlies his supposed factual derivation of an 'ought'.

According to Bhaskar:

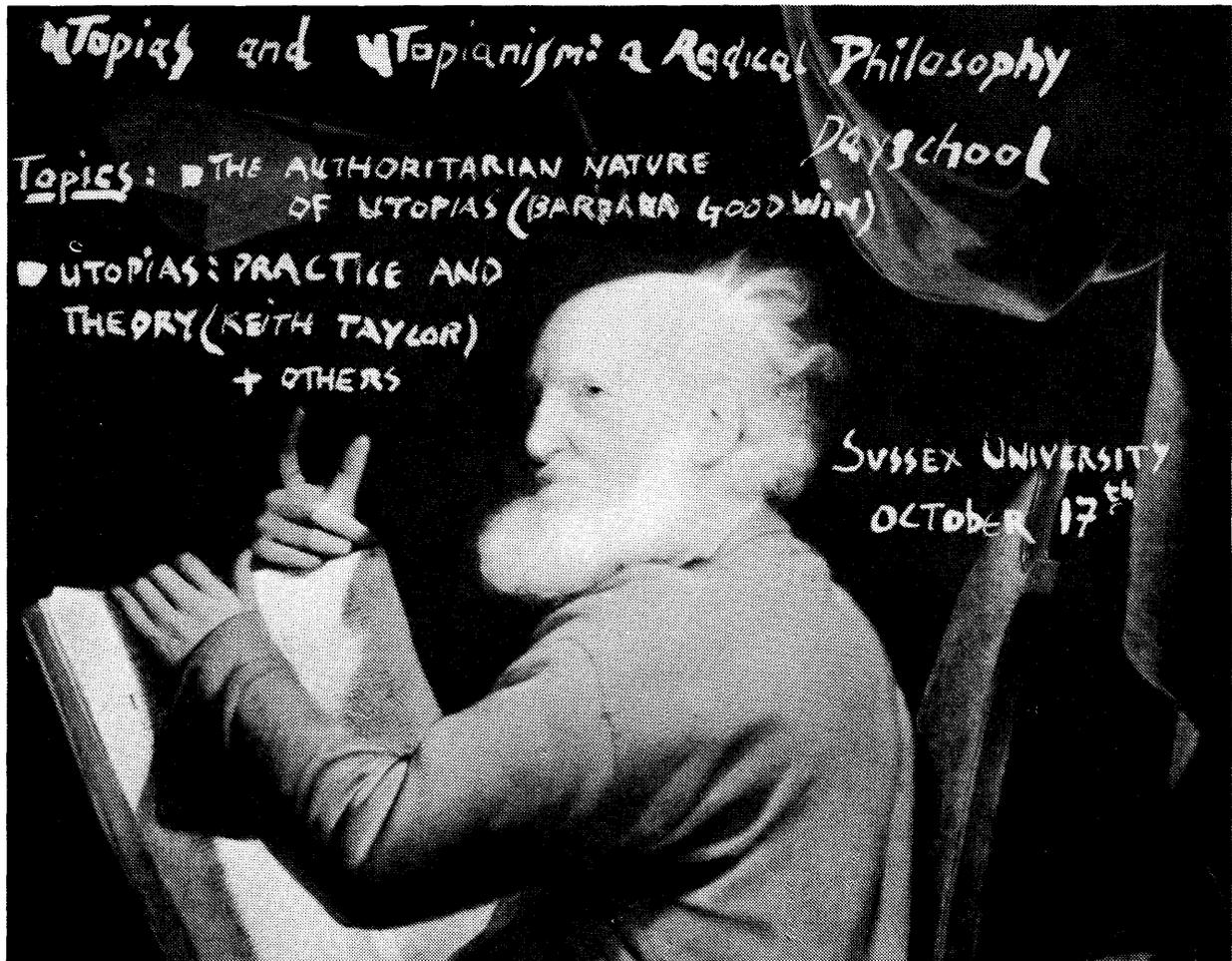
... if we have a consistent set of theories T which (i) shows some belief P to be false, and (ii) explains why that, or perhaps some such false (illusory, inadequate, misleading) belief is believed; then the inference to (iii) a negative evaluation of the object S (e.g. system of social relations) accounting for the falsity of the belief (i.e. mismatch in reality between the belief P and what it is about O) and (iv) a positive evaluation of action rationally directed at removing (disconnecting or transforming) that object, i.e. the source(s) of consciousness, appear mandatory CP (*ceteris paribus*) ... and we certainly seem to have derived value conclusions (CP) from purely factual premises.

If one knew or considered a particular belief to be false and also knew or considered some social circumstances to produce the belief then, *prima facie*, it might seem reasonable to adopt a particular attitude towards the circumstances and engage in action designed to effect their removal, but it would not be 'mandatory' in the sense that failure to do so would be illogical. To say that the belief is false and to say that its cause is such and such and yet to deny that either ought to be removed would not be contra-

dictory in the logical sense of involving the simultaneous assertion and denial of the same proposition. Of course, such a denial would be contradictory if one were to accept a premise such as 'One ought to try to eliminate false beliefs'. But this premise is not, in Bhaskar's terminology, a purely factual one.

Bhaskar's argument might be more convincing than it ought to be because of the particular example he uses. Consider another. Suppose that a group of capitalists pour money into an emergent third-world socialist society in the belief that they are financing a counter-revolution. Suppose that some social scientists discover both the falsity and the cause of this belief. Let us say that the capitalists are being duped by the government of the society involved. No moral or political prescription is entailed by these imagined social-scientific facts. Their acceptance does not logically commit one to any particular course of action. It would be absurd to say that it is 'mandatory' for the social scientists involved to try to dispel the false belief or to make a 'negative evaluation' of the activity of the third-world country. One might conclude, say, that the falsity of their belief in a projected counter-revolution ought to be concealed from the capitalists and that the social scientists involved ought not to publish their discovered facts. However, such moral prescription cannot be derived from such facts but from other non-empirical assertions.

Yours faithfully,  
Hugh V. McLachlan  
Glasgow College of Technology



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## This Issue

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## Erratum

Over-enthusiastic editing corrected not only any errors in Andrew Belsey's typescript for his article in the last issue of *RP*, but also an error in Roger Scruton's book which Andrew had quoted deliberately. Page 5, column 2 should have read: 'There is the reference to *soi-distant* conservatives (16) - presumably something to do with the alienation that the True Conservative is concerned about later in the book.' The correction of 'soi-distant' to 'soi-disant' killed Andrew's pun on the suggestion of distance from self. Our apologies to Andrew.

