

But even given this and many other preconditions - of which the careful reading of one another's texts must be the most important - it may be that there is a limit soon reached where nothing more can be yielded, and nothing more defined; and it would be plausible to conjecture that those very reasons that made the ICA's event a pleasure and a commodity are not independent from those that set the boundaries to metaphilosophy. Of the attempt at metaphilosophy, it must be asked whether it is not misguided to attempt to produce a perspective from which both analytic and Continental philosophy can be reviewed, and what kind of will to adjudication might be disguised in it. Pluralism must also defend itself against the charge of failing to be dialectical.

However, 'Philosophie et Pratique' gave some small but heartening indication that the absence hitherto of metaphilosophical discussion between French and English would not necessarily be continued out of professional self-confinement, and if it is not, it can avoid taking certain forms that stultify it in the process of providing its appeal.

THE ASTROLOGICAL SCENE

During the 20th century there has been a resurgence of astrology in the West. Popularisation in the media is one factor here, but there are also now several thousand practising astrologers (full or part time) who distance themselves from 'pop' astrology. This 'serious' astrology still follows traditional principles with the addition of several recent techniques. Astrologers today often use astrology in the context of counselling, linking it with Jungian or humanistic psychotherapies. There has also been a great deal of empirical - usually empiricist - research following the work of the Gauquelins.

The existence of various types of astrological activity, coupled with the lack of a clear and agreed definition of the discipline compared to others, means that it can be put into a number of diverse categories convenient to various discourses: 'scientific phenomenon'; 'pseudo-science'; 'model of the psyche'; 'entertainment'; 'system of personality description'; 'stupefying ideology'; etc. In each case the discourse maintains its own mythical 'astrology', each with many unexamined assumptions. With the lack of clearly formulated alternatives from the world of astrologers, non-astrologers approaching the subject tend to pick upon only these mythical definitions. Thus the few writings by radical thinkers, while correct in their critiques of astrology's

ideological role in media discourse, paradoxically accept the discourse of scientism in rejecting all astrology as 'pseudo-science'.

A study or practice of astrology brings one to the classic issues of philosophy: free will, causation, time, mind, knowledge, human subjectivity ...; and these have been focal points in the debates between astrology and rival systems of thought. But astrology today lacks a comprehensive and developing theoretical side of its own which would help astrologers think out these issues, defend and define their practice, and lead to more productive interaction with other fields.

The Radical Astrology Group

Through our publications, meetings and lectures, we have tried to introduce recent developments in theory and philosophy, including those of structuralism, post-structuralism, semiotics, and feminism, to the rather insular world of astrologers, and provoke discussion on them. We do not hold any unified position but we share a belief that a critical approach and more awareness of these developments are needed.

Astrology itself, conceived in such theoretical terms, has much to say to those in other disciplines, particularly those studying philosophy or systems of thought in a social context. Even if one sets aside the question of validity, astrology is a field where diverse discourses come into play and can be comparatively observed, both now and at key points in its history, such as the late 17th century. Much of modern astrological practice would appear to offer a direct challenge to notions of empiricism, universal causation, and the distinctions subject/object, science/art.

Our first main project was writing our book: Discussion Papers: Astrology and Theory. This summarised the relevant theoretical developments such as semiotics and presented some new contexts for thinking about astrology. It also examined the implicit philosophies of the various astrological groups in Britain, and included an outline of astrological methods for the benefit of non-astrological readers.

We are now reworking the Discussion Papers with a view to republishing them as two books: one on theory/philosophy; the second on astrology, semiotics and interpretation. In addition we are publishing a book of interviews with astrologers which will have a wider appeal than the academic content of the others.

We hold regular meetings in London, plus occasional workshops, and are interested in hearing from anyone with ideas/feelings on the above topics. To obtain more details and be added to our mailing list, please write to Radical Astrology Group, 17 Granville Road, London SW18 5SB

A NOTE ON 'ORTHODOX LINGUISTICS'

BoL Borsley

In her contribution to the recent debate on sexist language, Deborah Cameron makes the quite reasonable point that the way speech is understood is dependent on context and hence that sexist interpretations are likely in a sexist culture. However, she embeds this point in a tirade against prevailing ideas about language, and, in particular, against mainstream linguistics, or 'orthodox linguistics', as she prefers to call it. It would be unfortunate if this were allowed to pass without comment. In this note, therefore, I will take up the main points that Cameron appears to be making and try to set the record straight <1>.

Cameron presents a string of assertions whose precise meaning is often far from clear. It seems, however, that her main claim is that linguists assume a conception of communication which leads them to a view of language

which precludes any dependence of meaning on context. She suggests that linguists assume that communication is a matter of 'telementation', the transfer of ideas from one mind to another, and that perfect communication is the norm. This conception of communication leads them to view language as a fixed code of form-meaning correspondences and this is incompatible with any dependence of meaning on context.

Do mainstream linguists in fact hold these views? It would, I think, be quite hard to show that they subscribe to the crucial conception of communication for the simple reason that they say very little about communication. If one looks at the recent writings of Noam Chomsky, who remains the dominant figure in mainstream linguistics, one finds that the only references to communication are where he takes issue with the idea that communication is the purpose of language and the key to an understanding of its structure <2>. It may well be that many linguists think that communication is in part a matter of the transfer of ideas from one mind to another. (It's hard to see what's wrong

with this. After all, isn't Cameron attempting to transfer certain ideas from her mind to the minds of her readers?) On the other hand, it seems unlikely that many linguists think perfect communication is the norm. The frequency with which linguists' ideas are misunderstood provides rather compelling evidence against such a position. The fact is, however, that considerations about the nature of communication have played no significant role in the thinking of mainstream linguists. Hence, if their view of language is unsatisfactory, it is not because they subscribe to an unsatisfactory conception of communication.

What, then, of the crucial view of language? Here, Cameron is in part right and in part wrong. Mainstream linguists do believe in a fixed code but this does not preclude dependence of meaning on context. Most mainstream linguists would agree with Chomsky when he remarks that 'The person who has acquired knowledge of a language has internalized a system of rules that relate sound and meaning in a particular way' but goes on to say that the internalized system of rules 'is only one of the many factors that determine how an utterance will be used or understood in a particular situation' <3>. The internalized system of rules can be said to embody a fixed code but since these rules are only one of the factors involved in the ordinary use of language, there is no implication that context plays no role. It is quite obvious that meaning is in part dependent on context. For example, it is the context which determines whether Could you lift that weight? is a question or a request and whether He's a fine friend is a literal statement or a piece of sarcasm. Such facts have received little attention in Chomsky's own work but they are quite compatible with Chomsky's ideas and have been seriously studied by other linguists within the mainstream <4>.

It is also clear, however, that there are aspects of meaning that are independent of context. For example, whatever the context, John almost missed the train implies that John caught the train whereas John just missed the train implies that he did not. Similarly, in any context, himself is understood as Bill and not as John in John persuaded Bill to wash himself but as John and not as Bill in John promised Bill to wash himself. Such facts show that Cameron's claim that 'all meaning is in the end contextual' is untenable unless she is using 'contextual' in some special sense of her own.

Facts like these also support the view that a language is essentially a fixed code. A variety of facts are relevant here. There are phonetic facts such as the fact that the p of pit is aspirated, i.e. followed by a short puff of air, whereas the p of spit is not; there are morphological facts such as the fact that all but a handful of English nouns have plurals formed by adding -s or -es; there are syntactic facts such as the fact that sentences like John believes himself to be clever are perfectly acceptable whereas sentences like John believes himself is clever are very odd; but there are semantic facts such as those mentioned above. In the light of such facts, Cameron's assertion that 'Determinacy of either form or of meaning is a myth' is rather bizarre.

One might have doubts about the existence of internalized systems of rules if no progress had been made in the attempt to characterize them. It looks as if Cameron may be suggesting this when she remarks that 'linguists, particularly those working on the data of conversation, have found it impossible ... to crack the fixed code'. (The reference here to linguists working on the data of conversation is rather puzzling since the organization of conversation has been a peripheral concern for mainstream linguists.) If Cameron is suggesting that no progress has been made, I would simply say that she is wrong. Anyone who wants to make such a claim would have to show that there is no more insight into language in current approaches than in the earliest work in generative grammar. It would be rather difficult to show this. It may be, however, that Cameron is simply suggesting that linguists have not come up with any final answers. If so, she is right, but this is of no import-

ance since the same could be said of physicists, biologists, geologists, etc.

Another criticism is embodied in Cameron's reference to 'langue/parole distinctions, which allow the analyst to posit an underlying set of correspondences even if people's behaviour offers little empirical support for them' <5>. I assume she is thinking here of the distinction between the internalized system of rules and the ordinary use of language, and suggesting that in taking the former as their main focus of interest, linguists are giving themselves a licence to set aside problematic facts, thus shielding their proposals from falsification. If this is her suggestion, it is quite unjustified. Linguists only set aside particular facts if there are reasons for thinking that they are a reflection not of the internalized linguistic rules but of some other cognitive system. Consequently, their proposals remain responsible to a wide range of facts and are quite frequently falsified.

A final feature of Cameron's discussion is some obscure remarks about 'authoritarian, prescriptive institutions that regulate our use and our understanding of language'. One wonders if she thinks that mainstream linguistics is such an institution. If so, she would have to explain why linguists have spent a great deal of time in recent years discussing the syntactic conditions under which speakers use contractions like wanna and gonna instead of want to and going to <6>. Any prescriptivist would simply say that one should never use such forms. She in fact cites dictionaries as an example of a prescriptive institution. She observes that they are ruling-class sponsored as if this made further discussion superfluous. It is perhaps worth noting, therefore, that ruling-class sponsored institutions can have their uses. Marx made rather good use of the British Museum, which is hardly a working-class institution. Cameron concludes her remarks about prescriptivism with the assertion that 'except insofar as languages are institutionalized, they cannot be said to exist outside their individual users'. She seems to be completely unaware that this is a proposition that Chomsky would completely agree with <7>.

I have now considered the main points that Cameron seems to be making about mainstream linguistics. I think it should be clear that her remarks cannot be regarded as a serious critique. However, as I noted at the outset, the central point of her article is not unreasonable. It is unfortunate, therefore, that she chose to air her prejudices about linguistics and not to explore the implications of this point more fully.

LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS: REPLY TO BOB BORSLEY AND DEBORAH CAMERON

Trevor Pateman

I don't think Bob Borsley succeeds in his attempt to put Deborah Cameron in her place. Though I would defend orthodox or mainstream linguistics against some (not all) of the criticisms advanced by Cameron and the writers to whom she refers (notably Roy Harris and V.N. Volosinov), I do think Borsley's response is naive in its acceptance of positions in linguistics which won't withstand philosophical scrutiny.

In particular, consider his defence of the fixed code position: the idea that languages are systems of form-meaning correspondences, and his related defence of the position that there are aspects of meaning that are independent of context. He writes in defence of the latter that 'in any context himself is understood as Bill and not as John in John persuaded Bill to wash himself' and in relation to the former that, 'There are phonetic facts such as the fact that the p of pit is aspirated ... whereas the p of spit is not.' Neither claim is true. In some contexts himself may be understood as referring to John, and in some contexts

the p of spit may be aspirated - for example, contexts where English is being spoken to, or by, non-native speakers with an imperfect command of the language. It is not (just) an empirical fact that the p of spit is (normally) unaspirated. It is not an empirical fact at all; it is a normative claim about the rules of English, and only in that normative context do Borsley's claims hold. The arguments for this position are exhaustively discussed in Itkonen 1978.

However, what is the normative context of English is extremely hard to define, and I don't for example accept Itkonen's account (see Pateman 1983; Itkonen 1984 is a response). And in relation to the Cameron-Borsley exchange, Cameron is clearly right to take the view that what empirically happens in speech is not exhaustively defined or constituted by the (normative) rules of a (public) language. There is clearly space for non-normative but regular idiosyncrasy, for negotiation about meanings, and for misunderstanding. What goes on in actual communication is clearly more than the deployment in speech production and understanding of the rules of a public language. How it is possible for this more to go on is clearly a question to which the post-Fregean and post-Saussurean traditions have not addressed themselves, since they have in effect denied that very possibility. Frege, for example, is explicit that identity of meanings (senses) is a necessary condition of the possibility of communication between people. The doubts about this Fregean position expressed in different ways by Bakhtin (who claimed to have written Volosinov's book), Wittgenstein and ethnomethodologists of the ad hoc-ing persuasion are not addressed by those who distinguish sense and force, meaning and significance, sentence meaning and utterance meaning, semantics and pragmatics. Those distinctions are, in my view, indispensable and invaluable (see Pateman 1981), but they do not touch the rather deeper question about the flux of speech which I believe Cameron

(and Harris) are addressing and which Borsley hasn't appreciated.

Where I disagree with Cameron is in her dismissal of the 'pointless abstractions of structural linguistics', a dismissal she motivates by reference to the critiques of Volosinov and Kristeva. Elsewhere I have criticised Volosinov's hopelessly 'empiricist' notion of abstraction and of science (see Pateman 1982). Here the point to make is that precisely insofar as actual speech is governed by or constituted in either normative systems of public rules (Saussure's langue) or a rule-structured mental-representation (Chomsky's competence), then we do need a science of those virtual or abstract structures in which speech is (partially) constituted. What we must not do is confuse this part for the whole, nor assume that the role it plays is everywhere the same. For example, it is true that much of my speech is recoverable as deployment of the normative public system of standard English. But it is not true that much of every-one's speech is recoverable as deployment of some normative public system: this is not the case, for example, for speakers of pidgin or for young creoles (see Bickerton 1981).

On the question of sexist language, Whorfianism has little going for it since the work of Eleanor Rosch (see Johnson-Laird and Wason 1977, Part VI), and its Whorfianism is a serious defect of Dale Spender's Man-Made Language. In this I agree with Cameron. I disagree with her over the question of context-independent meanings. From the fact that next-door neighbour can be used to mean male next-door neighbour it does not follow that next door neighbour is (in English ...) either marked (+ male) or does not have a context-independent meaning. If this did follow all those good feminist trip-ups like: 'I saw my heart specialist yesterday' - 'What did he say?' - 'She, actually', or 'The doctor did not try to help the nurse because he needed the practice' would be impossible.

LETTERS

Dear Radical Philosophy,

Just one word about Chris Arthur's interesting piece ('Nove and Frankel on unproductive labour' - Spring 1985) in which he asks for a reference for my claim that Rubin disagrees with Marx on this question. I agree that 'the best review of Marx's discussion is by I. I. Rubin'. Yes, Rubin does indeed 'stoutly defend the cogency of Marx's distinction against Bazarov and Bogdanov', but he ends his chapter as follows in the Russian edition I have before me: 'To avoid misunderstandings we must stress that our account of productive labour in Marx has as its sole object the reproduction of the exact meaning of Marx's teaching.... We do not say that Marx's distinction, abstracting from the content of labour expended, is better than that customarily used, only that it is different.... In particular, we do not agree with Marx that labour hired by capital in the sphere of circulation does not create value and surplus value' (Ocherko po teorii stoimosti Marksa, Moscow/Petrograd, 1923, p. 125. My translation, my emphasis).

Yours sincerely,
Alec Nove

Reply:

I was working with a translation from the third edition of 1928. Here Rubin is much more circumspect. It would be interesting to know if he changed his mind as a result of discussion or if he felt it more politic to tone down his remarks. At all events, the statement underlined by Nove does not appear; instead we get the following:

'We do not ask whether or not Marx's definition of productive labour based on the analysis of the social form of labour is correct, or whether

the conventional definitions in treatises on political economy, which are based on 'indispensability', 'usefulness', the 'material' character of labour or its role in personal and productive consumption, are correct.... We only hold that Marx's view is different from these conventional views.... We may in fact regret that Marx chose the term 'productive' for his treatment of the differences between labour hired by capital in the phase of production and labour hired by capital in the phase of circulation. The term 'productive' had a different meaning in economic science. (Perhaps a more suitable term would have been 'production labour').

Chris Arthur

Dear Radical Philosophy,

I seem to have missed the closing date for entries to your first competition, so here is an idea for your next competition:

Which philosophy journal claims to 'nearly return to schedule' in an issue dated (like the previous issue) Summer 1984, which was available (in my part of the world anyway) only in February 1985 and which has a competition closing date of 5 January 1985?

Yours sincerely, Andrew Belsey

PS - I now see that the back of the issue referred to above is dated Spring 1984. Are you making some radical point about time?

Reply:

As is conventional every 38th issue we refer to the Australian summer. Apologies for any confusion caused.