

# NEWS

## Caring for Philosophy?

"Not to care for philosophy is to be a true philosopher." So said Pascal. The government and the UGC, it seems, agree. For philosophy departments in Britain's universities have suffered badly in recent years. Alarmed by these developments, representatives from philosophy departments at Britain's universities met at Leeds in February to found a "National Committee for Philosophy", which aims to represent the interests of philosophy and to defend it against further attack.

One of the first tasks for the Committee has been to gather information about the impact of recent cuts. The picture is a depressing one. Since 1980:

- \* There have been only 14 new appointments to full-time teaching posts in philosophy.
- \* The number of full-time teaching staff has declined by 18%. One department (Surrey) has been closed, and others are threatened.
- \* In 1983-84 (the last year for which figures are available), only 8.4% of philosophy teachers were younger than 35, compared with an average for all subjects of 17.4%. Only theology was worse off among non language based arts subjects.

How to defend a subject like philosophy in the brave new world of market forces has exercised the NCP. Traditional Oxford philosophy is not well equipped to do so, as NCP chairman George MacDonald Ross recognizes. "British philosophy went through a phase in which it was unduly modest about its role," he writes, "we fear that many decision-makers may be unaware of the extent to which philosophy has changed." Now, he claims, philosophy is more relevant, more engaged with practical issues.

The shortcomings of Oxford philosophy need no emphasis to readers of Radical Philosophy. Indeed, we may pride ourselves on having made such criticisms many years ago, and without the need of prompting from the likes of Sir Keith Joseph. Despite this, however, the sorts of interests reflected in the pages of Radical Philosophy are not adequately represented on the NCP. It is a curiously accidental body, composed of representatives of various journals and groups - including Mind, the Royal Institute of Philosophy, the Society for Applied Philosophy - but not Radical Philosophy. Nor is there any other representation of the impact of continental philosophies in recent years. In short, for all the talk of a new philosophical world, some of its most significant elements have still to be recognized.

The NCP started life as a defensive response by university philosophers to UGC policies. However, it aspires to a larger role. At the inaugural conference in February, the NCP declared itself to be "a fair representation of the philosophical profession as a whole", although it also acknowledged the need to "strengthen" the representation of public sector philosophy. Certainly, there is plenty of scope for this, since teachers from Polys, Techs, Teacher Training Colleges, etc., were hardly represented at the Leeds conference.

A further conference is planned for July in London, at which such issues will no doubt continue to be aired. Details of the NCP are obtainable from Mr G. N. Ross, Department of Philosophy, The University, Leeds LS2 9JT.

## Realism in the Human Sciences

On 17-18 December 1985 a small conference was held at the IDS at Sussex University, on the subject of realism in the human sciences. The aim was to draw together people working in philosophy and the human sciences who had been influenced by the new scientific realism which has been developed in the work of, among others, Roy Bhaskar, Ted Benton, Russell Keat and John Urry, all of whom were at the conference.

The majority of those present were committed socialists, and the value of realism in the politically relevant sciences was in the foreground. In addition to general methodological discussions, including critiques of realism, there were discussions of capitalism and the nation state, economic structure, Marxist historical explanation, ecology and the fact/value dichotomy in Marxism.

The exchange of ideas between people using similar approaches in different disciplines was generally felt to be worthwhile, and a lot of questions were raised which will require research and clarification. An exciting new programme of research could be opened up in realist social science and its political implications.

Andrew Collier

# P.L.A.T.O.

News has reached us of the formation of a new organisation, PLATO (Philosophy Lecturing and Teaching Opportunities), based at the University of Bristol, but with national aspirations, set up "to protect the interests of and materially to help the generation of philosophers who are un- or impermanently employed in academic work". The organisation describes itself as "a charitable scheme", and hopes to raise funds to provide a limited number of academic fellowships and small research grants. It also aims "to establish a centre where PLATO members can use other skills, e.g. in TEFL, translation or adult teaching, to earn some sort of remuneration while pursuing philosophical work". Membership is open to anyone with more than two years post-graduate experience in philosophy or "related disciplines", and currently stands at around 100. An appeal for funds is apparently being organised in the USA, and the organisation wishes to contact:

(a) British philosophy post-graduate students  
(b) Staff who hold limited tenure or part-time posts, or non-renewable or non-stipendiary fellowships  
(c) Philosophers who continue to write or publish despite being unemployed or holding non-academic positions, and who might benefit from any grants that might be made available.  
Donations, it also assures us, will be gratefully received, to offset word-processing and secretarial costs.

Anyone wishing to register with the scheme should write, enclosing S.A.E., to:  
The Secretary, PLATO  
University of Bristol  
Department of Philosophy  
9 Woodland Road, Bristol BS8 1TB

Is the era of the privatisation of graduate philosophy about to begin?

## Correction

A line was omitted in Joseph McCarney's "Comment: A New Marxist Paradigm" in *Radical Philosophy* 43. The last sentence on page 29 should read as follows: "It is understandable that someone writing at the present time should be oppressed by a sense that such an outcome is only to be won, if at all, by the travail of generations."

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