

NEWS

THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR PHILOSOPHY

Some issues ago we noted, with interest, the formation of the 'National Committee for Philosophy' (*RP* 44, News, 'Caring for Philosophy?'). Since then, the Committee has organised itself into a more formal body. We recently received the following statement regarding the Committee's structure and current aims from its 'Chair', George MacDonald Ross:

The National Committee for Philosophy was founded in December 1985, as a joint initiative of the main philosophical societies in the UK. It immediately sought ratification from a conference in February 1986, to which delegates were invited from all university and public-sector philosophy departments, and from various other constituencies. At a subsequent conference in July 1987, a constitution was agreed, whereby members of the NCP would in future be elected by a Standing Conference of Philosophers, which philosophy departments, societies, and other interested groups would be eligible to join.

The NCP has two main purposes. The first and most immediate is purely defensive. By the time the NCP had managed to gather accurate statistics (in the middle of 1986), it emerged that philosophy in the university sector had lost 25% of its staffing since the peak level of the 1970s, and six departments were due to close. In the hope of establishing a base line below which there would be no further cuts, the NCP succeeded in persuading the UGC to institute a review of philosophy. This is now under way, and a national conference which met at Leeds on 8 June 1988 agreed a submission to the UGC Working Party.

Our policy is that there ought to be a philosophical presence in every institution providing a degree-level education. While we are not going to obstruct the desire of certain beleaguered members of staff to transfer elsewhere, we are campaigning for the retention of philosophy as widely as is consistent with the need to maintain centres of strength with international standing.

So far, the NCP has been less active in the defence of public-sector philosophy, and areas such as the philosophy of education. This is partly because there has been less of an obvious threat to philosophy as such, and partly because of the difficulty of identifying and establishing communication with philosophers in institutions which do not enjoy/suffer from the rigid departmental structure common to most universities. We have already made representations to the NAB, and we are preparing to make a submission to the forthcoming CNA review of philosophy provision in the public sector.

Our second main purpose is to increase interest in a philosophical education, both at pre-degree level, and among potential employers. Quite apart from our support for the recently established A- and AS-levels in philosophy, we are involved in setting up an Institute for Philosophy in Education, which will promote the more widespread introduction of a philosophical element in the school curriculum. We have yet to finalise plans for making employers more aware of the value of philosophy, but in the first instance we intend to organise a conference with this as its theme.

There is, however, an important corollary of our defence of philosophy. If we are to be taken seriously by our paymasters/paymistresses, by our potential students, and by the potential

employers of our students, it is essential that there should not be too much of a gap between theory and practice. If practitioners of philosophy acquiesce in the claims we make on their behalf, it is their duty to ensure that they live up to these claims; and if not, they should argue for an alternative policy. We hope that the NCP will provide a suitable forum for discussing how philosophers can best put into practice their agreed ideals in the circumstances of today.

Requests for further details and other enquiries should be addressed to: Mr G. M. Ross, Department of Philosophy, the University, Leeds LS2 9JT.

NATIONAL SOCIETY OF PHILOSOPHY STUDENTS

National Committees/Societies are, in fact springing up all around us. We recently received news of a 'National Society of Philosophy Students'. We re-print their statement below:

Minority Arts subjects have suffered enormously during the recent cutbacks in Higher Education and with the replacement of the University Grants Committee by the industry-biased University Funding Council later on this year the future of such subjects looks bleak. Philosophy has suffered particularly badly: philosophy departments have been closed at Bangor, Leicester, Exeter, Newcastle and Aberystwyth Universities and other departments are currently facing closure. At Manchester University there has been a 30% reduction in the number of philosophy staff since 1978, and we have the worst departmental staff-to-student ratio in the Arts Faculty.

The above is by way of a preamble to an informal announcement of the formation of a society which aims to combat the cuts in philosophy and in other Minority Arts subjects. This society shall go under the provisional name of the National Society of Philosophy Students, will be based in Manchester, and has four principal aims.

First, to promote communication between philosophy students and philosophical societies throughout the country.

Second, to negotiate guarantees that no further academic places will be cut on philosophy or other Minority Arts subject courses, and if possible to encourage the creation of additional academic places.

Third, to re-vamp philosophy courses via critical student participation in decisions concerning the form and content of philosophy courses.

Fourth, to encourage the study of philosophy by the general public.

In order to realize these aims we need information, co-operation and support from students in departments all over the country. Many departments should receive a copy of our manifesto and a questionnaire concerning the academic wellbeing of the department; we urge students to complete the questionnaire and supply, if necessary, any amendments to the manifesto along with any other ideas they may have about possible strategies for realizing the society's aims.

Anyone wishing to support the society can contact us via the following address: NSPS, Philosophy Department, Manchester University, Manchester M13 9PL.

Regular readers of *Radical Philosophy* will remember an earlier item explaining the introduction of AS levels including AS Philosophy. The main intention behind this new curriculum initiative is to broaden the curriculum of A level students. The only board offering AS Philosophy at present is the JMB. Their syllabus is detailed below.

Part I—Epistemology

(i) Appearance and Reality

Is there a reality behind the affairs of ordinary life? Does it make sense to suppose that in reality the world is not at all as it appears to us? Are there truths of which our senses cannot inform us? Why should anyone suppose that our ordinary beliefs do not constitute knowledge? An examination of these fundamental questions as formulated by Plato.

Prescribed text:

Plato, *The Republic*, Bk. V 474c-Bk. VII 521b.

(ii) Rationalism, Empiricism and the Moderns

What can be known for certain? How can propositions be known to be true? Are the senses reliable sources of knowledge? Is memory reliable? Are any statements always and everywhere true? An examination of some central features of the Rationalist-Empiricist debate.

Prescribed texts:

Descartes, R., *Meditations*, I, II, V, VI, from *A Discourse on Method*; *Meditations on the first Philosophy*; *Principles of Philosophy*; Hume, D., *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Sections I-VII.

Part II—Moral Philosophy

(i) Classical Views of Ethics

Is it important to show that justice is worth having for its own sake? Is there an absolute Good and can knowledge of the Good be attained by the use of reason alone? How does the good man behave and by what characteristics are other kinds of men recognised? What is virtue? Is happiness the true end of moral behaviour? An examination of the views of Plato and Aristotle.

Prescribed texts:

Plato, *The Republic*, Bk. II to 376c, II 412b-IV (end), V 462-466d, VIII, IX; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bks. I, II, III, VI chapters 1-8 inclusive, X.

(ii) Sentiment and Happiness in Morals

Is there an objective moral order in the world or are all moral judgements matters of emotion and social comment? What is the role of value judgements? Does moral action spring from sentiment and/or reason? Is an action good and right if it makes for the happiness of the greatest number? What sort of proof, if any, can be given for a moral position?

Prescribed texts:

Mill, J. S., *Utilitarianism*; Nietzsche, F., *Beyond Good and Evil*, Part V, The Natural History of Morals,

We Would Welcome Readers' Comments on This Syllabus

The Conference of Socialist Economists in Sheffield last July was held under the title 'New Realisms for Old?'. This gave philosophers a chance to get a word in. The first plenary was addressed by Roy Bhaskar, who counterposed his own 'critical realism' to the implicit ontology of New Realism on the basis of the piece in the Chesterfield issue of *Interlink*. John Lovering developed this theme in terms of a middle way between New Realism and 'fundamentalism'.

Conference then divided into workshop streams: socialist planning; gender and race; state and capital; politics of technology; quantitative Marxism; and 'value and social form'.

This last was about dialectic and its applications. The best item here was a paper by G. Carchedi taking further the ideas of his recent book. The discussion developed some interesting angles on the 'transformation problem'. It was agreed that it would be worth reconvening this stream next year under some such title as 'dialectical political economy', and several of those present indicated willingness to do papers.

On the more immediate political agenda we had an 'after lunch' speaker: an inspirational address by Tony Benn. The last plenary, on international developments, featured Nira Yuval-Davis on the Palestinian uprising, Trevor Evans on economic policy in Nicaragua, and Hugo Radice on the end of the Soviet road in Hungary. It was a real pleasure to hear three people who knew their stuff inside-out and articulated their enthusiasm so cogently. A lively discussion ensued on the role of religion, the politics of bolshevism, and hopes for the future.

Next year will be the twentieth conference of the CSE: Hugo Radice and Simon Clark gave notice that they are planning something special. Stay tuned.

C.J.A.

PHILOSOPHY AT CHESTERFIELD

Following our reports on the developing work of the Chesterfield Socialist Conference in RPs 48 and 49 (News), it is good to be able to report the success of the second Conference, which took place in Chesterfield in June, consolidating and extending the work of the earlier initiative in a number of ways. Although larger than the first conference (about 1800 attended), it was better organised, less disrupted by gestural sectarian interventions (although people's experiences from the different workshops obviously varied quite a bit about this), and most encouraging of all, it was far more focused than the earlier event. Delegates were divided into an array of different Policy Groups, fairly extensive discussion papers for which had previously been prepared, and published (in the main) in the special issue of *Interlink* that was handed out with the registration cards. And this time, by sub-dividing the Policy Groups into series of workshops discussing distinct topics, much more productive debate was possible.

A number of plans for future action and events emerged from the conference. There will be a conference to discuss resistance to the introduction of the Poll Tax, this autumn. And there are plans to provide a quick-response solidarity network for workers in dispute. More generally, several of the Policy Groups are planning seminars, dayschools and conferences.

Of most direct relevance to *Radical Philosophy* is the formation of a *Philosophy Policy Group* to generate theoretical and critical debate around socialist ideas and policies, and to organise educational events. The Philosophy Workshops at Chesterfield,

following the discussion document by Roy Bhaskar, were centred upon the political significance of different kinds of philosophical realism: Bhaskar's 'critical' scientific realism opposing itself to the 'empirical realism' of the *political* 'New Realism'. And there was some lively discussion about the usefulness of mapping philosophical oppositions onto political ones in this way. Ted Benton developed a realist perspective in a rather different way by examining its significance to current debates about the character of human needs, in the context of environmental issues. And Robin Blackburn led a workshop on 'Concepts of Socialism'.

The future work of the group, however, will be more open and wide-ranging than was perhaps suggested by the Chesterfield document. It is subdivided into various different groups pursuing different themes. Anyone interested in joining can obtain further information about the various sub-groups and their projects from:

Socialist Conference Philosophy Group
20 Altenburg Gardens
London SW11 1JH

A Dayschool is planned for Saturday 26 November, in Newcastle. The topic is **Socialism and Democracy**. For further information about this, please write to:

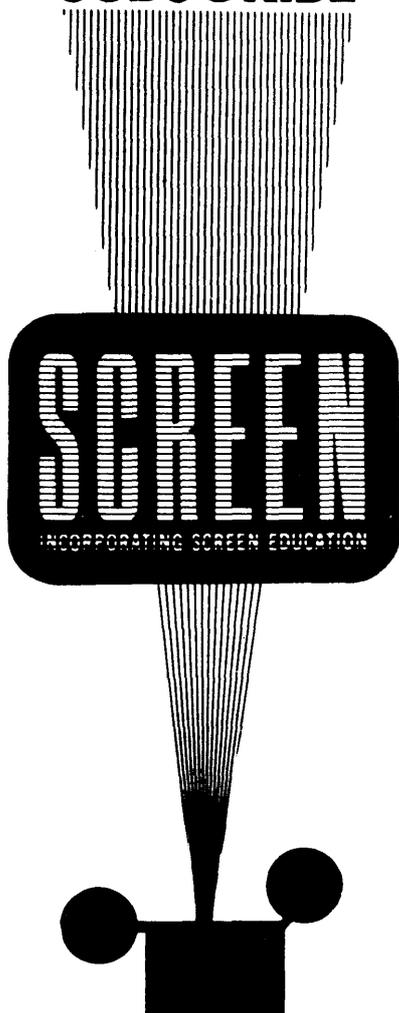
Tessa Gray,
4 Normanton Terrace,
Elswick, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

FEMINISM AND PHILOSOPHY: CALL FOR PAPERS

The September 1989 issue of the American Philosophical Association's *Feminism and Philosophy Newsletter*, edited by Laurie Shrage and Nancy Tuana, will focus on Feminism and Aesthetics. Submissions on feminist literary theory, film criticism, art criticism, and feminist theories of art and aesthetic judgment are welcome. Also welcome are book reviews, literature surveys, ideas for mainstreaming feminist aesthetic theory in philosophy courses, and short commentaries on: (1) the writings of women aestheticians, (2) the politics of art reception and reproduction, (3) feminist aesthetics and theories of meaning and representation.

All submissions must be limited to ten manuscript pages. Essays should be submitted in duplicate with the author's name on the title page only. The deadline for submissions is 1 May 1989. Send manuscripts to Nancy Tuana, Arts and Humanities, JO 3.1, University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, Texas 75083-0688, USA.

SUBSCRIBE



The Journal of Film and Television

1988
issues include
Cybernetics, Ownership,
Ontology
A Future for Left Culture?
The Last Special Issue
on 'Race'



1988 RATES (for 4 quarterly issues)
£15.00: Individual inland
£20.00/US\$38.00*: Individual overseas
£26.00: Institution inland
£32.00/US\$58.00*: Institution overseas

Full-time students and unemployed in
UK £10.00: application to be
accompanied by a current proof of
studentship or UB40.

*Exchange rates may cause US dollar
prices to vary in 1988.



I wish to become a member of the
*Society for Education in Film and
Television Limited (SEFT)** and to
receive its quarterly journal *Screen
incorporating Screen Education*

Name

Address

School/College/Other

Enclosed is my remittance for

*SEFT membership is also available by
subscription to its termly education
bulletin, *Initiatives* (UK individuals
£5.00/UK institutions £7.50/All
overseas £10.00)

Please send cheque payable to SEFT to
Screen,
Crystal Management Liaison Ltd.,
46 Theobalds Road,
London WC1X 8NW, U.K.

