

Editorial: Radical Philosophy

Discontent is not always divine. Some unrest is deeply rooted in unreason. When philosophers take to publishing pamphlets and manifestoes they need to be specially careful to avoid the pitfalls of the genre if they are not to be met with the unthinking dogmatism of which they will in any case be promptly accused.

Even in philosophy there is a place for programmes and protests, though the most programmatic protestants of recent decades have tried to persuade themselves and others that there is not. They have brought home to us how much harm can be done by taking sides and forming parties; we can now afford to listen to the other side of the argument. There was bound to be a reaction sooner or later from a new generation of young bloods. It has come in a form which would inhibit its authors from accepting that description of themselves or their movement: the Radical Philosophy Group and their journal, *Radical Philosophy*. Have the members of the new ginger group anything more meaty than pepper and spice to offer in place of the stones and scorpions that they reject?

Some of the signs are favourable, and a careful reader of the first few issues of the new journal will not offer too straightforward an answer. Such a reader will be met nearly half-way by the more gifted and serious of the contributors. There are others who are so busy and so noisy being radical that they forget to be philosophers; and what they think of as radicalism is the tired orthodoxy of student unreason and unrest. The description of a staff-student meeting at Cambridge is all the more depressing because behind its posturings there can be perceived a mind and a style that could have contributed something more considered and considerable even to the study of the peripheral questions that are made central. What is more encouraging is the intelligence and the learning and the patience brought to the discussion of important philosophical questions by several of the young academic philosophers who are writing in these pages. Richard Norman, who would be editor in name as well as in fact if it were fitting for a democratic journal to admit that it had an editor, contributes a thoughtful article 'On Seeing Things Differently', and is thoughtfully answered by Tony Skillen. Jonathan Ree's diatribe against the professionalism of professional philosophers has few of the professional vices against which it inveighs, and many of the professional virtues whose importance it might mislead us into demeaning. In another article he criticizes Philippa Foot's moral philosophy in terms that would be quite at home in any of the old-fashioned pre-revolutionary journals or indeed anywhere where philosophy is properly discussed.

But *Radical Philosophy* does have something distinctive to offer. Side by side with its theoretical philosophical objectives is its concern with practice, both with the institutional and social context of the philosophy whose barrenness is deplored and with indefinitely wider political aspirations. On the narrower front there are direct hits on some well-chosen if not very

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original targets: specialization, parochialism, ignorance and arrogance. A sense of humour is displayed and deployed, sometimes with incongruous solemnity but usually effectively enough to revive memories of *Why?*, the parody of *Analysis* of which there were a number of issues about twenty years ago.

The worm in the bud is that the radicalism in philosophy is mingled with an unphilosophical radicalism about questions that have nothing to do with philosophy. The vaunted liberalism is skin deep. One contributor, with what is at the best a pitiable naïveté, speaks of propagating 'the *tenets* of radical philosophy'. The italics are not his own, but the strident illogicality is, and he is proud of it. Marx is loosely nailed to the masthead, and he could easily fall off, but the impression is strong that to be a subscribing radical philosopher one would at least have to be orthodox on Vietnam, cannabis and school milk, to say nothing of more fundamental questions such as syllabus reform and the wickedness of grading.

This coalition of system-smashers with sober critics of current philosophical shibboleths shows welcome signs of being unstable. In the work of the best of the contributors there may be a political slant that shows that they have shibboleths of their own, but they are appealing as reasonable men to other men of reason and offering reasons for their appeals. Meanwhile the wild ones, feeling the cold wind of logic blowing between the columns of the paper, have withdrawn to darker cover. Enfolded in recent issues there have begun to appear duplicated leaflets, their doctrinal purity attested by their standards of spelling and proof-reading, accusing the editors and authors of the parent journal of careerism, conservatism, open-mindedness and kindred crimes. It is not clear whether these enclosures are authorized by the management or infiltrated during distribution. It does not matter very much. Whether or not the journal is a sell-out in that sense, it is by all accounts a sell-out in another and more measurable sense, and can afford to practise its despised liberalism as well as to preach it. The host can survive with or without the parasite, and on the evidence to date it deserves to survive.