

# EDITORIAL

This issue of Radical Philosophy covers a range of topics central to the journal's concerns: the Frankfurt School, socialism and democracy, feminist aesthetics, and reflections on the state of being a philosopher.

Joseph McCarney's article on the Frankfurt School in RP 42, 'What makes Critical Theory Critical?' is the subject of a reply by Peter Dews and Peter Osborne. Essentially, Dews and Osborne consider that McCarney's view of the School is too negative. They charge him with running the risk of 'seriously misrepresenting' the School's significance, both in historical and theoretical terms. Their response is organised around six key areas of disagreement with McCarney and aims to reaffirm the importance of the School to current theoretical and political debates. What follows is a closely-detailed reading of McCarney on such aspects of the School's work as critique and ideologiekritik, where the respective readings vary quite widely. The ultimate aim of Dews and Osborne is to prove that the School remains a valuable resource to theorists: a point they do not feel comes over in McCarney's work.

Roger Harris's article began as a review of John Keane's book Public Life and Late Capitalism and has since developed into a wide-ranging survey (Keane, Habermas, Marx, Hegel, Rousseau) that confronts that perennial problem-area for socialist theorists: the relationship between individual and collective. The target is a certain kind of romantic individualism (found no less on the left than the right) which is more interested in gestures and purity of doctrine than in collective solidarity of action to alter specific abuses: 'the "dissident" who proclaims what we ought to do without addressing the problem of how we can'. 'How we can' (with the emphasis firmly on the 'we') is precisely Harris's concern as he seeks to theorise the necessary conditions for reconciliation, such that individual autonomy may be understood in the context of the realities of collective social existence.

Pauline Johnson takes issue with the 'postmodern turn' to feminist aesthetics, which she feels does not present a radical enough challenge to patriarchal norms. She gives an essentially sympathetic reading of modernism in relation to the work of Woolf, and suggests that postmodernists have underestimated modernism's value to a feminist writer caught in a tradition-bound society. To a woman like Woolf modernist aesthetics could be ideologically liberating, and the autonomy of the work of art a radical alternative to an aesthetics based on patriarchal consensus. While Johnson does not deny the elitist aspect of modernism (or the contradiction within Woolf's fiction) she does ask us to balance this against its feminist virtues. She offers no easy solutions to the 'significant dilemma' confronting contemporary feminist aesthetics, but then it has always been a complex task to separate out the politically positive qualities of aesthetic theories from their patriarchal commitments. The debate no doubt has a lot of mileage in it yet.

If you have ever been confronted at a party by the question 'What exactly is philosophy?' then James Grant's article is the one for you. No, it does not provide a party-line to reproduce, but it does let you know that you are not alone in being unable to answer that nasty little question satisfactorily. Although Grant describes himself as operating from within the analytical tradition, he does not feel it is honest to cultivate the 'highly impersonal style of expression' it favours, so 'I' is very much to the forefront here. Grant's reflections on the way the personal and the impersonal interact in philosophical discourse lead him to believe the distinction is a false one. For this author, the personal is philosophical: 'the problem is my position, whether I like it or not.' The piece voices many of the unspoken doubts and anxieties of the professional philosopher. Meanwhile, if anyone does have a successful party-line perhaps they could let us know...

Stuart Sim

## SUBSCRIBE TO RADICAL PHILOSOPHY AT REDUCED RATES

Apart from critical commentary on leading figures of the philosophical establishment, and a continuing engagement with the Marxist and Hegelian traditions, *RP* has carried articles on issues in: feminism, race, imperialism, ecology, alternative medicine, nuclear disarmament, radical psychology and science, post-structuralism — and on many other topics.

Contribute to the emergence of a self-reflexive theoretical focus of emancipatory oppositional trends. Subscribe now! A two-year subscription saves you even more.

### Individual Subscription Rates

	annual (3 issues)	2 years (6 issues)
Inland	£5.00	£9.00
Overseas surface	£8.00/\$10.00	£13.00/\$35.00
Overseas airmail	£12.00/\$30.00	£20.00/\$50.00