EDITORIAL

The Radical Philosophy Group, so the mission statement on the inside cover used to announce, grew in part out of opposition to 'the sterile and complacent philosophy taught in British universities and colleges'. And, as any radical philosopher would have told you, nothing more typified this sterility and complacency than the school of 'linguistic analysis' or, as it was sometimes called (usually by outsiders and opponents), 'ordinary language philosophy', which once dominated English philosophy like an incubus from its headquarters in Oxford. It was the defining antithesis of radical philosophy: not merely sterile and complacent, but elitist, insular, frivolous, formalistic, anti-substantive and second-order, conservative, trivial, boring and bourgeois.

The image of Oxford philosophers called to mind by this was nicely and predictably captured in the cartoon accompanying Ted Benton's and Sean Sayers' article in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* celebrating the fiftieth issue of RP, in which copies of *Radical Philosophy* shoot off the press and hit slumbering dons of advanced years in the backs of their necks.

In contrast to this picture Jonathan Rée's account of English philosophy in the fifties recounts a period of dynamism, energy and vision, carried forward with revolutionary enthusiasm by a group of mostly young philosophers under the organisational leadership of Gilbert Ryle and the intellectual domination of J. L. Austin. Yes, it was elitist, insular, frivolous, formalistic and all the rest of it, but it was also a period of great excitement and promise for those involved, and without parallel in subsequent British philosophy.

Supposedly the defining approach of linguistic philosophy had to do with attention to established linguistic usage: lack of care with which had been the primary source of the metaphysical conundrums of the past. Thus, just as in many a good philosophical revolution, the main enemy was the metaphysics of the bad old days. According to Rée, however, those who sought to find a distinctive approach in linguistic analysis were usually disappointed (indeed, asking for one would show you up for having missed the point). When pressed to declare the method of linguistic analysis, its apostles were apt to be reticent, or even to deny that there was one. The reason for this, Rée suggests, is to be found in what was called 'the paradox of analysis': that if there is anything misleading in the expressions of ordinary language, any philosophical translation with the same sense as the original would be unnecessary, and any translation with a different sense would be false.

This fundamental methodological paradox was publicly glossed over by much reflexive irony and bluff, and internally by the iron discipline of the Oxford tutorial system. The teaching of philosophy has been one of philosophy's perennial preoccupations, and emerges in Rée's account as a persistent concern of the linguistic revolutionaries, who appear to have regarded the Oxford system as inheriting the mantle of Plato's Academy. The tutorial system was the bulwark against all of the pernicious influences – metaphysics, continental philosophy, logical positivism – against which linguistic analysis set itself. Rée describes a routine in which undergraduates were repeatedly browbeaten into explaining what they meant by this or that word, this or that sentence, until any stray item of metaphysics had been winkled out and dispatched.

Despite its self-defining insularity and supposed commitment to nothing more than fidelity to settled linguistic usage, Rée locates the Oxford revolution within the currents of fifties intellectual culture. As such it was bound to end. Its influence in professional philosophy in Britain and elsewhere has been diminished and tempered, but still persists. Lacking the confidence and sense of mission of Ryle's army, troubling questions about its identity and place in the world are increasingly difficult for British professional philosophy to evade.

Problems of identity and relations to other are also raised (this time in respect of nationality) by Francis Mulhern in 'A Nation, Yet Again'. Mulhern examines the organising assumptions at work in the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*. The anthology, which appeared in 1991, has been the subject of considerable criticism for its meagre representation of women writers and feminist texts, and its lack of attention to some of the momentous campaigns for women's rights and freedoms in Ireland. Mulhern argues that such exclusions reflect more than sexist prejudice, and are the unintended consequences of a guiding idea that Irishness and Irish national identity is the dominant theme of Irish culture. The editors of the anthology did not, he stresses, set about the task of compilation with the aim of giving expression to an unproblematic national identity. Seamus Deane in the introduction to the anthology explicitly

rejects any justification of the principles of selection by appeal to Irish identity, or authentic history, and sets out its aim as being 'to re-present a series of representations' exploring a 'nexus of values, assumptions and beliefs'. Throughout the anthology the notion of 'Irishness' is deliberately and methodically questioned, and the problems, inconsistencies and shifts in its historical meaning are brought to the fore. But the open, pluralistic and complex conception of Irishness the anthology seeks to express at the same time excludes and misperceives writing, cultural projects and political events whose concerns are other than those of national identity.

Mulhern critically examines the editorial contributions of Luke Gibbons, who, while striving to reveal diverse and pluralistic currents within Irish nationalism, at the same time attempts to assimilate the whole of modern Irish cultural debate to an argument between nationalism and its opponents, and to cast all critics of nationalism in the form of a group of liberal revisionists, including Conor Cruise O'Brien. Gibbons' post-structuralist critique of monolithic nationalism, therefore, is the foundation for yet another reductive metanarrative in which the historical materialist James Connolly is sequestered exclusively to the cause of nation and it is the bourgeois liberal critics of nationalism who alone cling to failed universalist Enlightenment values.

The Ireland that emerges from the pages of the anthology, Mulhern argues, is one viewed symbolically from the point of view of Derry – 'the capital of the northern crisis': a perspective from which southern society is 'rendered marginal to itself'. The struggle of Irish feminists against the Catholic church's attack on women's rights is hard to see in an imaginative landscape dominated by the North, and yet it is the struggle against the 'confessional ascendancy' that has been the recurring issue of southern politics. Seamus Dean had imagined that the anthology's self-conscious metanarrative could provide a home for the plurality of Irish micro-narratives. According to Mulhern, the fact that it is national identity, 'yet again', that is taken to define Irish culture renders this otherwise remarkable achievement unable to perceive forms of difference and otherness that cannot be represented within its purview. He concludes by arguing that the Irish story now unfolding is not a national one, and that it is time for Ireland's critical intelligentsia to recognise that Irishness is not the key to Irish culture.

We also publish in this issue a review article, by Kelly Oliver, of Teresa Brennan's book *The Interpretation of the Flesh: Freud and Femininity*, in which, again, relationships of identity and difference are explored. Brennan breaks with Freud's and Lacan's accounts of the development of ego identity, in claiming that the ego does not occupy a self-contained or self-generating position within its relationships to others, but that it is an affect of the interplay of intersubjective psychic forces. Brennan's account of these psychic forces involves a physics-based model of psychic energy exchanged within a spatio-temporal field that is constructed through such exchanges (Oliver does not take up the question of whether the model is effectively dualist, and this might provide fuel for further discussion). Psychophysical exchange originates in the relationship between mother and foetus. Subsequently psychical exchanges between human beings can be unequal, particularly between women and men. Directed energy from external sources is necessary, according to Brennan, for constructing and sustaining a self-image. Unfortunately the passive feminine ego (which is not essentially female) becomes a receptacle of disabling affects projected out from the active masculine ego, and a net looser of energy.

Oliver believes that Brennan's intersubjective theory of drives can be combined with work done by Irigaray and Kristeva on maternity, to provide what she describes as an alternative model for the primary ethical relation between self and other that is disabling to neither. She argues that Brennan's account of interdependence and exchange originating in the placental relationship challenges Kantian conceptions of autonomy and provides us with a new image of reciprocal relationships in which maintenance of identity is recognised as intrinsically dependent on others.

In the last issue of *Radical Philosophy* we published an article by Axel Honneth on conceptions of civil society and their relationship to possibilities for democratisation. The theme is taken up again in the interview with Honneth we publish in this issue. In the first part of the interview Honneth describes his early intellectual development and peregrinations between German universities, alongside developments in the politics and philosophical debates of the German student movement of the early seventies. He goes on to describe his work in attempting to reconstruct the normative background of critical theory, arguing that philosophical anthropology will provide a stronger and richer normative basis for a critique of contemporary societies than Habermas's communicative rationality. He also considers whether that critique must be confined to prospects for greater democratisation in which capitalism is taken as given, or whether the anti-capitalist character of critical theory can be preserved. The interview concludes with a discussion of the current political situation in Germany, in which Honneth argues that the left has failed to provide an intellectual alternative to the economically and politically centralising tendencies of the Maastrichth treaty, and must begin to think about a model for a unified Europe of federated local democracies.

An analogous but more profound failure is identified by Bob Brecher in his provocative Commentary. Brecher castigates much of the British Left for its abandonment of any substantive vision of the good life and its accommodation to the spurius but trecherous neutrality of recent liberal thought.

Finally, from the next issue onwards Sean Sayers replaces Jonathan Rée as reviews editor. Jonathan has held the position, which has a heavy workload, for the last five years and has done much to ensure readable and concise prose in the reviews section. The Editorial Collective would like to express its appreciation for Jonathan's sterling work, and its thanks to Sean for taking on the position.

Kevin Magill