

The Society for European Philosophy

Following an appeal published in *Radical Philosophy*, and widely distributed to academic departments in the UK, a meeting was held at Birkbeck College in London on 28 June this year to found a new philosophical society. Its aim is to bring together all those in Britain who are working in the various non-analytical traditions of European philosophy. About one hundred people attended.

After some introductory remarks by Andrew Benjamin, the day was divided into three sections. In the morning a number of speakers addressed the theme of 'Traditions in European Philosophy', and in the afternoon that of 'The Philosophical Geography of Europe'. These two sessions, each comprising a series of short papers and a discussion, were followed by a general debate on the name, aims and constitution of the proposed society.

In prospect, the titles of the two main sessions promised ceremonial gestures rather than substantial intellectual fare. But in fact, the discussions which the various contributions sparked were remarkably lively. Undeniably, part of the dynamic behind the calling of the meeting derived from the unjustly poor showing of non-analytical departments in the latest Research Assessment Exercise. But although some speakers, most notably Simon Critchley in his sketch of the continental tradition since Kant, expressed a certain hostility towards analytical philosophy and its institutional bastions, this attitude was by no means general. For example, Christine Battersby, in her talk on feminist philosophy, argued that feminist work in the discipline cuts across the analytical/continental divide in quite novel ways, forcing a reassessment of the usual opposition. On the part of many participants there was, it seemed, a desire to be genuinely ecumenical, and not to adopt an exclusionary attitude towards analytical philosophy, however difficult dialogue may sometimes be.

These questions of the relation to the (culturally predominant) 'other' continued in the afternoon session, when the issue of the title of the proposed society began to come to the fore. In a characteristically lively and idiosyncratic speech, Jonathan Rée argued that the society should be called the 'Society for Continental Philosophy', even though 'continental' has become the established designation for non- (and perhaps even anti-) analytical philosophical activity. Rée supported his view with a historical argument: namely that 'continental philosophy' is a well established indigenous tradition, and thus not really exotic at all. This tradition is, he suggested, at least as old as Mill's essay on Bentham and Coleridge, which plays two fundamentally contrasting modes of thought off against each other, with points of origin on opposite sides of the Channel (one, Mill says, is primarily concerned with the question 'Is it true?', and the other with the question 'What does it mean?'). Others felt, however, that it was time to break out of the ghetto implied by the 'continental' label.

It was partly on the basis of such considerations that the name 'Society for European Philosophy' was eventually supported by a considerable majority of those present, despite a number of alternative proposals. A provisional constitution was set in place (to be finalized next year), and a committee elected. The Society will hold its first conference (probably at the University of Lancaster) some time next year.

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Anyone interested in joining the Society should contact: Society for European Philosophy, c/o Department of Philosophy, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL.