

# Editorial: Continental Drift

The French are such a logical people that a letter on the future of philosophy in France naturally comes to us from 5 Rue Descartes. The French are also a philosophical people. Philosophy is taught for the baccalaureate on such a scale and so effectively that a philosophical visitor is constantly impressed by the willingness and capacity of French physicists and physicians, painters and writers, to discuss questions that their counterparts in this country regard as nonsensical or dangerous or unfathomably mysterious. But are the French philosophical *enough*? The letter from the Rue Descartes quotes a statement by the French Minister of Research and Technology on the need for further development of the subject. It is officially admitted that philosophical research still occupies only a modest place in France, largely confined to the universities and the National Centre for Scientific Research. Even so, we are assured that philosophy is still at the heart of the French cultural tradition and constitutes an irreplaceable element in the intellectual development of the individual and in the growth of scientific research and artistic creation. But there is more to be done, and the Government is taking two important steps. The study of philosophy at the secondary level is being extended, and preliminary consultations are in progress for the founding of an International College of Philosophy. This will encourage philosophical research and interdisciplinary co-operation, and provide a welcoming atmosphere for educational experiments as well as opportunities for organic relations with analogous enterprises abroad. The address in the Rue Descartes is that of the *Mission pour la création du Collège International de Philosophie*, and the letter is signed by Professor Jacques Derrida, *Chargé de coordonner les travaux de la Mission*. Professor Derrida was presumably chosen because he could be expected to apply to practical questions of planning and organization the clarity and common sense that are familiar to us from his writings. We are surely an analogous enterprise abroad, and we are happy to answer the appended *prière de bien vouloir diffuser cette lettre aussi largement que possible*.

But the British are a sceptical people, prone to fits of empiricism, and will await further and better particulars before investing even emotional capital in the new project. In the first of these editorials, exactly ten years ago, we reported the chilly reception given by a group of British philosophers to the proposal for the designation of one of the 1970s as an International Year of Philosophy. That tender plant seems not to have survived the cold. We must not lose our reputation for *sang-froid* or forget that species of *savoir faire* that consists in knowing when to do nothing at all.

One of the surprising features of such an idea for a British audience is its public and institutional character. It is hard to envisage a government

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initiative in Whitehall and Westminster to establish a more central role for philosophy in the life of the nation. The corresponding style here is for individuals as members of the general public to act in concert as they did for the foundation of this Institute in 1925. The individuals included some who were active in public life—such as A. J. Balfour and Sir Herbert Samuel—as well as academic philosophers and some hybrids like Bertrand Russell, A. D. Lindsay and Harold J. Laski.

Even in a tenth anniversary editorial we may turn aside from high policy to consider another international philosophical institution of more domestic concern to philosophers and scholars. We publish in this issue a thoughtful article by Professor Cora Diamond on the theory and practice of the *Festschrift*. The practice is growing so fast that several relevant volumes have appeared since the article was commissioned: *Substance and Form in History: A Collection of Essays in Philosophy of History*, edited by L. Pompa and W. H. Dray and presented to W. H. Walsh (Edinburgh University Press, £12.00); *The Philosophical Frontiers of Christian Theology: Essays Presented to D. M. MacKinnon*, edited by Brian Hebblethwaite and Stewart Sutherland (Cambridge University Press, £17.50); and *Language and Logos: Studies in Ancient Greek Philosophy Presented to G. E. L. Owen*, edited by Malcolm Schofield and Martha Craven Nussbaum (Cambridge University Press, £27.50).

The sceptical Australian view expressed by Mr Stewart Candlish (quoted by Professor Diamond on p. 76) could no doubt be met by nationalizing the subject in the French manner. The effects would be far reaching. For example, if a continental sense of the fitness of things were applied in London, these words would start on their cross-Channel journey not from Gordon Square but from Berkeley Square or at least Russell Square.