

Editorial: A British Philosophical Association?

There are, it seems, 30 or more philosophical societies in Britain. Some, such as the Aristotelian Society or the Mind Association, are mostly for professional philosophers, but of all stripes. Others, such as the Royal Institute of Philosophy, are for anyone interested in philosophy, whether professional or, in the best sense, amateur—that is, not paid for their philosophy. Then there are those smaller, but by no means unworthy bodies, which cater for interest in some special branch of philosophy, such as phenomenology or philosophy of religion or of science. There are societies for European philosophy, for the history of philosophy, for applied philosophy, for women in philosophy, and for much else besides.

If not exactly chaos, it all testifies to a real and possibly fruitful diversity in the British philosophical world. But in the last year or so, leading figures in many of the societies have been meeting to discuss forming an umbrella organization to encompass the whole lot. Whether this umbrella is to provide shelter for philosophers from squalls raining down on us from above, or whether it is for some other purpose, is not entirely clear.

That there are squalls, at least for those teaching the subject in universities and elsewhere is clear. Teachers everywhere, from universities to primary schools, suffer from a deluge of managerial irrelevance, much of it apparently predicated on the latest managerial nostrum. According to the Government's own guru of 'delivery', managers no longer need to 'win hearts and minds', but should rather push through short term measures for long term gains, come what may. We have little idea what this means, but it sounds unpleasant. There may well be a case for an Association to speak with one voice on behalf of a profession which needs a degree of freedom from management in which to teach and to think, and which is increasingly called on to respond as a profession to managerial initiatives.

But not, we would hope, to speak with one voice on anything else. A one voice philosophy is a contradiction in terms, even were there only one philosopher. Nor does philosophy need a slate of people to speak to the media and the general public. It would be too much like a list of officially licensed authorities where there should be no

Editorial

authority. And it will not work anyway. Good producers and editors will continue to consult the philosophers they know and like, just as they always have.