

Editorial: Key Issues

PHILOSOPHY CONFERENCE: KEY ISSUE. The placard looked as if it might be advertising a newspaper with a special feature on the 1981 Joint Session of the Mind Association and the Aristotelian Society, then just about to open at Owens Park, University of Manchester. It turned out to be an invitation to the members to collect their room keys from the registration desk.

The Joint Session was last held in Manchester in 1946. In those days the Supplementary Volume of the Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society had a title as well as a number and a year. Volume XX (1946) is called *Logic and Reality*, a title prompted by the first symposium, 'Why are the Calculuses of Logic and Arithmetic Applicable to Reality?' by G. Ryle, C. Lewy and K. R. Popper, supported by 'Can Philosophical Theories Transcend Experience?' (D. M. Emmet, C. H. Whiteley and J. Laird), and reasonably well covering 'Other Minds' (J. Wisdom, J. L. Austen [*sic*] and A. J. Ayer) and R. B. Braithwaite's Inaugural Address 'Belief and Action'. 'Is Anthropology Relevant to Ethics?' is more of a strain. Austin's 'Other Minds' was only his second publication, which is no doubt why nobody knew how to spell his name. In the Programme, the Contents List, the title and running heads of the symposium, and even in the references to him in Ayer's reply to his paper, he is systematically spelt in such a way as to reinforce the jocular identification with Jane Austen on which he and others expended much labour and much humour (mixing their labour with their humour).

The only speaker from the 1946 Joint Session to attend the 1981 Joint Session was Professor Dorothy Emmet, whose main memory is of the optimism and relief with which philosophers returned to old friends and old preoccupations at the end of the war. If there is a Manchester Joint Session in the year 2016, the veterans of 1981 will have a different story to tell. They may remember the Warrington by-election, less than a week away in the future, and Miss Emmet's recollection of interviewing the young Mr Jenkins for a post in the teaching of Political Theory. But the keynotes of 1981 were struck by events less than a week away in the past. Within a few hundred yards of Owens Park there were streets with broken glass and boarded windows from the night of the Moss Side riots, and police sirens continued to punctuate the evening meetings. In the same week the University Grants Committee had written to each university in the United Kingdom to give notice of the extent to which its income would be reduced, and to advise on the distribution of the necessary economies.

On the Saturday afternoon of the session some members of the two

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societies attended a seminar on Bradley and others made an excursion to a country house. Many more forgot about Reality in their anxiety about reality. At a meeting more animated than any of the philosophical symposia Professor Mary Hesse, a member of the University Grants Committee, was examined by members of the threatened Philosophy Departments of the Universities of Surrey and Stirling. Mr Bryan Magee, philosopher and Labour MP, gave advice on the relative power and value of a letter to the Editor of *The Times* and an approach to a Conservative MP with ministerial experience of the Department of Education and Science. Some called for the resignations of all the members of the UGC; others warned of the reign of terror that would follow if the unpopular decisions were made directly by DES officials and Government Ministers.

Even on the floor of the conference there was a breath of political reality. In the last symposium, 'Liberty, Equality, Property', bourgeois values were vigorously questioned by Dr Richard Norman and mildly defended by Mr D. A. Lloyd Thomas. The defence was too mild for Professor Antony Flew (see Booknotes) whose own ripostes to Dr Norman would have been at home in the by-election or at the Saturday afternoon inquisition, and might have been heard during the quieter passages of a riot.

The weekend must have reminded those who knew it of the headline printed in a Melbourne student newspaper during an earlier crisis in human affairs: PHILOSOPHERS ON STRIKE: NATION AT STANDSTILL. We shall all be at Oxford in 1984.