



Common Sense

A Journal of a wholly new type



2



BRIAN Mc GRAIL

Common Sense

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The third issue of Common Sense will appear in August 1987, during the Edinburgh Festival.

Notes for contributors: send articles in clean typescript, single-space or space-and-a-half (not double-space). Leave wide margins on both sides.

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WHY COMMON SENSE?

In the 18th century, Scottish philosophy understood common sense to mean (a) public or shared sense (sensus communis) and also (b) an as-it-were "sixth" sense which establishes relations and distinctions between the data supplied by the other five. What is exciting in this philosophy is its thesis that these two meanings of common sense by no means exclude, but on the contrary imply, one another. On the one hand, I can achieve a coherent totalisation of my experience only in and through interaction with other people; and, on the other hand, it is only as a totalised (an autonomous) individual that I can authentically interact. Thus selfhood and society form a unity. So too do theory and practice, since I can theorise my experience truly only where social and practical conditions making for a free interaction obtain. Theorising, in short, both summons and presupposes what Hegel terms 'mutual recognition': an interest in truth and in social emancipation go hand in hand.

For the Scottish philosophers, common sense enters crisis in a society where a social division of labour exists. In the Hegelian and Marxian traditions, this becomes the thesis that truth can appear only once existing alienations have been set at naught. The journal Common Sense draws the conclusion: wherever it enters crisis, common sense can go forward only as critique.

In keeping with its inspiration, the procedures of Common Sense are wholly novel. Material submitted is photocopied, stapled and distributed on a non-profitmaking basis by a non-existing editorial board. Only boring - which is to say unthinkingly conformist - material counts as non-commonsensical inasmuch as such material merely reproduces the categories which underwrite existing alienations, i.e., the existing order of social things.

In this way, the hegemony of the division of labour as between theory and practice, between readership and contributors and between contributors and editors is thrown to the winds. So too is the division of labour between academia and the outside world (a division which academia itself, like any closed monopoly or corporation, seeks always to keep in play). Thereby, through a detonation of existing boundaries, a space is cleared in which common sense in its two-fold meaning can authentically come to be.

Common Sense is thus as much an idea as a journal: start your own, on the same minimalist basis, and let discussion proliferate outwith the confines which orthodox academia, always respectful of authority, adopts as its favoured own.

Note: If you would be interested in participating in discussion of any issue raised in Common Sense, please contact us. A discussion-meeting on 'Mediation' is planned for September: details in CS 3.

Further note: donations towards our production-costs will always be more than welcome!

The following is a reprint of the initial announcement (carried in Edinburgh Review No. 76) of the idea underlying Common Sense.

A Journal of a wholly new type

Problems of production, of sales/distribution and of editorial policy seem intrinsic to the publication of any journal, whether mainstream or alternative; these problems have stood in the way of the emergence of new alternative journals especially of a theoretical and therefore a relatively non-popular kind. The consequence of this is that universities and professional-academic journals retain their fateful monopoly on the life of the mind. In a period of recession, with universities becoming more restrictive and bureaucratic and with (as a result) increasing numbers of people being driven away from universities, whether into unemployment or non-academic employment, this monopoly seems even more vicious than it was before. A non-university based theoretical journal has thus a sound political point.

In order to minimise the problems of production/distribution/editing, such a journal must be of a wholly novel type. In fact, these problems can almost entirely be avoided if journal-production is thought of in a fresh way.

Technology, (word-processing, xeroxing, etc.) is increasingly on our side. Contributors to such a journal would submit their work in readable (which means: attractively readable) typescript, A4, single spaced, so that articles are not retyped but merely photocopied; the resulting bundle of different articles can then be stapled together and put between simple folded covers (a different colour for each issue, perhaps, but retain the same format each time in order to keep production-costs down). The *only* tasks confronting the production-group would then be photocopying, stapling and distributing. An editorial policy could *virtually be dispensed with* since there would be no fixed limit on the number of articles a given issue might contain; for the same reason, articles could be short or long. The journal could be published occasionally rather than regularly depending on material to hand. It would be sold at more or less cost price.

Initially, its circulation could be minimal: today, a readership of half a dozen and tomorrow the world Back-issues could be reproduced either as a whole or in part, depending on demand, simply by xeroxing a master-copy. Starting small would keep initial costs very low; we could build up a readership by means of a 'network' of personal contacts depending solely on the quality of the material carried; there could also be some local sales. Thereby, problems of distribution could be avoided no less than the other problems mentioned above. Financial risks would be minimal, and we would need to aim only at producing a 'readable-attractive' as opposed to a 'commercial-attractive' publication since it would only be the quality and interest of our contents that was germane.

The attraction of the scheme is its anarchism: it ignores all problems, all commerce, all professional boundaries, all academic establishments, all editorial anxieties. We could publish matter which was esoteric, heterodox, inflammatory and beyond every pale. Articles on anarchist collectives would sit side by side with articles on aesthetic theory; medieval theology could be juxtaposed with venomous political attacks. There would be absolutely no need to write in a popular or accessible way, and yet there would be no need to write in an academically respectable fashion either. The only material to be anathematized would be material which was boring. Through a minimalist approach to journal-production, we solve all problems by ignoring them and circumvent all authority by attacking it, not head-on, but from behind its back.

AN ATTEMPT AT UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF THE SELF THROUGH SOME POSSIBLE
POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS ASPECTS

OR
SELFHOOD - THE OPTIOUS

Richard Morris

To talk about the 'concept' of the self may not be a good start. What if the self is something that is perceived rather than conceived? Rather than discussing different conceptions perhaps the question should focus on different interpretations. On the other hand maybe the self should be characterised as a construct so that from the outset the self is viewed as architecture. A constructed self is a self denied a basic authenticity, but renders discussion about a 'religious' self or a 'political' self much more immediately intelligible. To go further would be to talk about the various 'languages' of the self so that the correct acknowledgement is made at the beginning that the 'self' is being treated as a discourse rather than as a brute fact. But even if it can be denied that the self exists purely as a 'brute fact' (and hopefully this is the case otherwise there will be nothing further to discuss), at some point allowance must be made for the unquestionable immediacy of subjectivity that is partly entailed in the idea of selfhood.

To speak of the self is to attempt to render subjectivity objective, and therefore starting off in such a contradictory way necessitates that there is no clear clean beginning. The word 'concept' will have to do as a term of convenience, and the difficulties involved in any characterisation of the self as 'concept', 'percept', 'construct', 'language', or whatever else come in mind.

THE PURSUIT OF THE SELF

The relationship between the enquirer and 'selfhood' and the relationship between the quest for authenticity and selfhood posit that the self is the object of pursuit. Now this is to explicitly undermine any idea that the self is in some sense static, i.e. unitary and limited to the present tense. Such terms as 'self-determination', 'self-discovery', 'self-transcendence', 'self-realisation', all speak of a self that is not fully in possession of itself.

The pursuit of authentic selfhood takes the form of an eternal quest in religion, magic, myth, psychotherapy, and politics. It may seem that to talk about the pursuit of authentic selfhood is to presuppose that there is a predefined self being pursued. Whilst this may be the case, is it possible to pursue an authentic selfhood that is not predefined? If this predefined selfhood is in itself a starting point, a 'free space', then the predefinition of selfhood includes an arena of possibility. In this sense the self is not regarded as a substance inserted into an empty world, but an emptiness imposed into a world of substances. In any event to talk of the 'pursuit of the self' is to postulate the self as a dynamic relationship (between the pursued self and the pursuing self) which seeks the goal of self-transparency. The idea that the self is a dynamics of movement seeking transparency as a solution to its own opacity is a view shared by the various founders and prophets of religion and modern pioneers of psychoanalysis. On the other hand, the idea of an authentic selfhood gained by 'self-overcoming' finds expression in religious mysticism and Nietzsche. These two views are of course not necessarily contradictory, for although in the first the self is identified with transparency, and in the second the self is identified with opacity, the movement towards authenticity is the same, in the sense that there is the act of transparency penetrating opacity. This is the recurring problem in comparing different views of the self, for the process may be the same, but the 'self' located in different parts of that process. However the important point about the self as

'pursuit-pursuer-pursued' is that the notion of the self as a set, stable entity is rejected in favour of a self consisting of a set of relationships that mutually interact, and maybe even eliminate one another.

SELF AND OTHER

The distinction of selfhood and otherness seems to be an inescapable constituent of consciousness. The basic item of selfhood is the differentiation between 'me' and 'not-me', and the process of this increasing distinction is seen as the process of maturation e.g. the process of a baby becoming a child and a child becoming an adult. Insofar as the distinction seems to break down, consciousness seems to cease; as in deep sleep. However even when in deep sleep it would seem at least that there is still existence both subjectively and objectively. There is subjective existence insofar as when one awakes to a conscious reaffirmation of existence the period of deep sleep is inserted into one's linear-time conception. Objectively the sleeper exists simply by the fact that such a sleeper can be observed. This point is being made to underscore the observation that whilst the self/other dichotomy seems to be a necessary constituent of consciousness, it does not seem to be a necessary constituent of existence. Thus the abolition of the self/other dichotomy may lead to either death or enlightenment.

Selfhood and otherness may seem easily distinct but there are problems, both in terms of identity and embodiment. If there were no problems of selfhood and identity it would not be possible to hear (or utter) the following type of statement:

'I am not feeling myself today'.

This statement indicates a lack of clear subjective unity and there is correspondingly also an objective failure of clear demarcation. The distinct 'edge' of the embodied self gets blurred by its own maintenance operations e.g. food being processed into cells, skin dropping off as dust, limbs being amputated, organ transplants, artificial limbs, and the whole problem of where in the body, if anywhere, the self resides. The embodied self cannot be physically isolated from the surrounding world, but exists rather as a factor of exchange.

The self could be reduced to immediate sensory experience, but if the experience alone is valid, there is no subject/object split, no selfhood and otherness, therefore no self...just the experience. Such relief from the problem of dualism and self is claimed by practitioners of Buddhist meditation. The annihilation of the self is seen as precisely the answer to the problem of the 'unhappy consciousness'.

To talk about the self is to objectify the feeling of subjectivity, to posit that there is more to the self than the immediacy of simple sensory experience. On the one hand the self can always be present to itself, or rather present in itself, but also partly concealed from itself, that is, more complicated than a simple state of awareness, but nevertheless located in the present tense. Such a self consists of both a conscious self and an unconscious self, a mixture of transparency and opacity. On the other hand, selfhood transcends a simple symmetrical relationship with otherness when it encounters time.

SELF AND TIME

In time the self can stand outside of itself ('I see myself doing so and so') and become alienated from itself ('I hate myself for what I did'). It can also be disorientated by such a separation ('I am not myself today'). In time the self no longer contains the sense of immediacy and unity it has in its encounter with space. Otherness can mean the immediate world which is not self (space) but can also mean 'absent tense' - the past and the future. However, to allow the 'past self' and 'future self' to be part of otherness

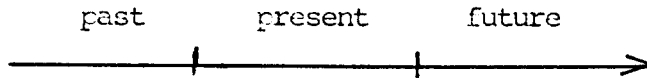
leaves any remaining conception of selfhood stranded in the present, confined to the awareness of immediate sensory experience as discussed previously. If selfhood is allowed to embrace all three tenses then the demarcation between self and other breaks down even further. The attempt to objectify the self is essential, for the self is more than subjective, immediate experience. Once immediate subjectivity starts to present a future self or past self to itself as an object of reflection it objectifies itself for it has gone beyond its own immediate subjectivity. The attempt to objectify subjectivity encounters time, for through time the self is objectified just as through space the self is objectified through embodiment (by thus I refer to the experience of the body as an object in space amongst other spatial objects, an experience that goes beyond regarding the body as purely a 'house of subjectivity'.)

Thus the self is objectified through embodiment and temporality (space and time). Alternatively, space and time are mediated through the self. The spatial analogy of otherness 'surrounding' the self is suggested by the surrounding of the embodied self by the physical world. If this picture is reversed, so that otherness is surrounded by its selfhood, it may give an insight into the nature of 'realisation' and alienation. 'Realisation' may be the experience of the structure of the self embracing all, whereas alienation may be the experience of otherness within all. Any way, I hope to show that the simple vision of a self surrounded by otherness breaks down once the relationship of self and time is considered, for through time the identity of the self loses its essential unity in the present, and through memory and expectation it becomes much more interwoven into the otherness of the world.

THE TENSE OF THE SELF

The only tense that an immediate subjectivity has access to is the present, it is shut off from the past and the future. Traces of the past as memory, and hopes and fears for the future as anticipation, contrast with the experience of the present. The most common characterisation of time is linear continuity i.e.

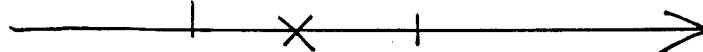
The process of time thus depicted has no demarcations between the tenses, and thus does not accord with the self's experience of time. This is because in experience the tenses are distinct and not continuous, that is, they do not flow into each other. Linear time broken up into distinct tenses looks like this



However in order for the continuous line now broken up into stages to have descriptive value the present tense would have to be envisaged as a moving point along the line - thus at one 'time' the present would be in the past



at another in the present



and at another in the future

