

# Editorial: Fifty Years of Philosophy

The correspondence columns of *The Times* will soon be filled with conflicting opinions on whether the birth of a new century should be celebrated on 1 January 2000 (when only 1999 complete years will have elapsed) or on 1 January 2001 (which is not a very comfortably rounded date). The Royal Institute of Philosophy has even greater scope for similar puzzlement about when it should celebrate its golden jubilee. These words are printed on the first page of the fiftieth volume of *Philosophy*, and this year sees the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the British Institute of Philosophy, though there was a preparatory meeting at the London School of Economics on 10 November 1924. The first issue of the *Journal of Philosophical Studies* appeared in January 1926. The journal's name was changed to *Philosophy* in 1931. The Institute was granted a Royal Charter in 1947 and then became the Royal Institute of Philosophy.

To look through the first fifty years and fifty volumes of *Philosophy* and the history of the Institute is to see a cross-section of the whole story of philosophy in this half-century. One of the most striking impressions is of the growth of professionalism in philosophical studies. From the beginning *Philosophy* was able to publish articles and reviews by the most eminent British philosophers. In the first few volumes there were contributions by Bertrand Russell, Samuel Alexander, C. D. Broad, R. G. Collingwood, H. W. B. Joseph, J. A. Smith and H. A. Prichard. Nearly every eminent philosopher of more recent times has contributed to the journal, most of them on numerous occasions: Susan Stebbing, H. H. Price, Gilbert Ryle, G. F. Stout, A. C. Ewing, P. F. Strawson, Stuart Hampshire, W. C. Kneale. There have been notable papers by Elizabeth Anscombe, Peter Geach, Dorothy Emmet, A. N. Prior, A. I. Melden and D. H. Monro.

These are names of professional academic philosophers. It is in keeping with the objects of the Institute, as still announced in each issue of the journal, that there should also have been articles and reviews by men and women eminent in other branches of learning (from Gilbert Murray and W. R. Inge in earlier days to Professor J. Z. Young in very recent times). It was commoner in earlier decades than it is now for contributions to be received and printed from men active in public life outside the universities. Distinguished among these was Lord Samuel, who was elected President of the Institute in 1930 in succession to Lord Balfour, and who was succeeded by Lord Halsbury in 1959. These have been the only three Presidents. There have been four Chairmen of the Council (L. T. Hobhouse, J. H. Muirhead, Sir David Ross and Professor H. D. Lewis) and four Directors (S. E. Hooper, Leo Robertson, H. B. Acton and Professor Vesey). Mr Hooper was Editor for the first thirty years, and his successor, Professor H. B. Acton, retired only two years ago. The loyalty and continuity that these names and dates represent are among the most valuable assets that any institution can possess.

## Editorial

These qualities have been shown in unfailingly generous measure by two officers of the Institute who have had less public recognition of the value of their contributions to its life and work. They have not made public appearances, and no writings of theirs have appeared in the journal. Members will have heard with sadness of the death on 30 August 1974 of Mr Brian Magee, who had been Accountant to the Institute since 1931 until his death. Mrs Joan Joyce, the Secretary, who joined the staff in 1954, continues to give indispensable service to the Institute and to its members, and especially to her colleagues the Director and the Editor. An anniversary is a fitting occasion for remembering what it is easy on other occasions to forget: to pay public tribute to qualities and efforts which are all the more remarkable for being so continuous and unailing that they are in danger of being taken for granted.

Another debt that any journal owes is to its publisher, and here again the story is of stable continuity. The first forty-nine volumes of *Philosophy* have been published by Messrs Macmillan. It is a pleasure to express the gratitude of the Institute and its members, and the journal and its subscribers, for the publishers' record of help and service, and not least for their assistance in the preparation of the present design and typography of *Philosophy*, which have been widely and warmly welcomed.

It happens that this anniversary coincides with a change of publishers. Macmillan have decided not to continue to publish academic quarterly journals. From Volume 50 onwards *Philosophy* is to be published by Cambridge University Press, with whom the Editor and the Institute look forward to what promises to be a long and happy association.

An occasion like this, when an anniversary is celebrated and a change is announced, calls for attention to the future as well as to the past, and this takes us back to the still and always controversial question of the professionalization of philosophy. It is not difficult to avoid the vices of professionalism, but it is hard to do so without at the same time sacrificing its virtues. Correspondingly the enthusiasm that is the eponymous merit of the amateur is often accompanied by the limitations of amateurism. The problems here are philosophical problems in their own right: problems about the relation between technical expertise and private judgement, such as arise in and between all the arts and sciences. Philosophy's link with the sciences is that it is concerned with truth and discovery, with a search for knowledge and understanding. But many of the things it seeks to know are things that it befits human beings as such to know, whether or not they are specialists in philosophy or in any other field of knowledge. To see this is at once to be tempted to forget that philosophy is also a special field, and in two senses. There are questions of epistemology and philosophical logic which are of interest to specialists, but which may not and need not be of interest to 'the plain man'. But the questions asked by ordinary men and women and children that do call for philosophical

reflection call for a reflection at least as strenuous and disciplined as that required by any specialized or technical enquiry.

The instructive analogies here are with literature and the arts. The voice of the poet speaks to men who are not poets, and speaks of what concerns them as much as it concerns himself. That does not mean that there is no scope for poetical skill or technique or for a disciplined poetic thought and imagination. It does mean that such skill and technique and thought and imagination are akin to those of the common reader himself. We all partake in the universal poetic genius that Blake ascribes to mankind as such, but we still recognize Blake and Eliot, Sophocles and Shakespeare as spokesmen for that power in all of us. To recognize that the arguments and conclusions of philosophers may and should be intelligible to the common understanding is not to deny that the tasks of philosophy call for talent, training and experience which do not always accompany even the most earnest desire for wisdom and understanding, and never (well, hardly ever) accompany a self-conscious wish to be a sage, pundit or authority.