CONTROVERSIES IN PHILOSOPHY

General Editor: A. G. N. Flew

Each volume in this series deals with a topic that has been, and still is, the subject of lively debate among philosophers. The sort of issues that they embrace are only partially covered, if covered at all, by the usual collections of reprinted work.

The series consists largely but not entirely of material already published elsewhere in scattered sources. It is as a series distinguished by two guiding ideas. First, the individual editors of the various constituent volumes select and collect contributions to some important controversy which in recent years has been, and which still remains, alive. The emphasis is thus upon controversy, and upon the presentation of philosophers in controversial action. Second, the individual editors are encouraged to edit extensively and strongly. The idea is that they should act as firm, fair and constructive chairmen. Such a chairman gives shape to a discussion and ensures that the several contributors are not merely heard, but heard at the moment when their contributions can be most relevant and most effective. With this in mind the contributions as they appear in these volumes are arranged neither in the chronological order of their first publication nor in any other possibly arbitrary sequence, but in such a way as to provide and to reveal some structure and development in the whole argument. Again, and for similar reasons, the editorial introductions are both substantial and forthcoming.

Although most of the contributions in each volume have been published before as articles in journals, the editors are asked not to confine themselves to this source. There will be a fair element of previously unpublished material and, even more frequently, extracts will be taken from books.

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General Editor A. G. N. Flew

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EDITED BY

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Foreword by the General Editor

In at any rate the English-speaking countries the idea that philosophy is in some way essentially concerned with language has since the end of the Second World War become commonplace. The controversy which Colin Lyas presents in this volume deals with the consequent questions of the relations between philosophy so conceived and linguistic science. Since the conception seems to have achieved its common currency without thereby ceasing to appear as some sort of public scandal, it is fortunate that the presentation of the consequent controversy has to begin with a Part I on 'The Philosophical Appeal to Language'. An initial study of that Part, followed by a reading or rereading in Part II of J. L. Austin's methodological manifesto, should do their mite to dispel the stubbornly persistent prejudice that linguistic philosophy is something radically distinct from traditional: the former dealing merely with words, and being ultimately frivolous; whereas the latter was, of course, engaged with the deepest and entirely non-verbal realities.

The truth is, rather, that if linguistic is to be distinguished from traditional philosophy, it must be in terms of differences in the degree of awareness of the inseparability of conceptual questions from questions about the use of words; and also, perhaps, of differences in the strength of the inclination to flaunt any such awareness. Certainly it would be perverse to pretend that the inquiries of Austin's 'A Plea for Excuses' are of a different kind from those reported by Aristotle in chapter 1 of bk iii of his *Nicomachean Ethics*; or that the subject of Sir Alfred Ayer's *The Problem of Knowledge* (London, 1956) is not the same as that of Plato's *Theaetetus*. It is, therefore, perhaps significant that the author of the most widely circulated polemic against 'Linguistic Philosophy' – not being himself, presumably, ignorant of such philosophical classics – is careful always to avoid saying anything substantial and precise about the tradition which he is supposed to be defending. (See E. A. Gellner, *Words and Things* (London, 1959; Harmondsworth, 1968).)

But the challenge with which the present volume is mainly concerned comes from a quite different direction. If it is once granted that philosophy is a conceptual inquiry, and hence concerned in some way with the uses of words, then the question arises of what are its proper relations with linguistic science. If they are competitors, then does not this put the philosopher in the uneasy position of the witch-doctor confronted by the scientifically qualified medico, the untrained manager up against the graduate of the Harvard Business School? Even if he and the philosopher are not direct rivals, surely the findings and the methods of the modern linguistic scientist must be indispensably relevant to the philosopher? In that case all philosophers, and not only those who resonate in sympathy with his politics, need to wait on the words of Noam Chomsky.

The present volume is the fifth and, at least temporarily, the last of a series on 'Controversies in Philosophy'. This is as a series distinguished by two guiding ideas. First, the individual editors of the various constituent volumes select and collect contributions to some important controversy which in recent years has been, and which still remains, alive. They are not restricted to what has already appeared in article form. Second, the editors are encouraged to edit extensively and strongly. The idea is that they should act as firm, fair and constructive chairmen. Such a chairman gives shape to a discussion and ensures that the several contributors are not merely heard, but heard at the moment when their contributions can be most relevant and most effective. For similar reasons the editorial introductions are both substantial and forthcoming. This all involves an uninhibited and self-aware acceptance of the role of teacher, and a corresponding rejection of the suspiciously comfortable doctrine that helpful but hard work by the teacher constitutes always an undesirable spoon-feeding of the taught.

Whether there will be other volumes in the present series in addition to the original five depends entirely on the response which these meet. Certainly as General Editor I shall be glad to hear of other possible members, whether the suggestions come from colleagues who would like to undertake the editorial job themselves, or whether they are made by those who – in whatever capacity – feel a need which they would like someone else to fill.

ANTONY FLEW

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Scribner's, 1969). Chapter XI first appeared in the *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1965) and is reprinted by permission of the editor and Professor Henson.