

Preface

In 1985, for the first time, it was possible to sit an examination in philosophy for the General Certificate of Education. The examination was at Advanced level, and was set by the Associated Examining Board. In 1986, the AEB was joined by the Joint Matriculation Board in providing 'A' level examinations in philosophy. There have been talks about other GCE Boards following suit.

Anyone who studies the AEB and JMB 'A' level philosophy syllabuses will be struck by the extent to which the two Boards, despite the difference in the design of the syllabuses, agree in their choice of classical philosophical texts to prescribe: Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Descartes' *Meditations*, and so on. They may also be struck by the omission, from the lists of reading suggested by the Boards, of commentaries on the prescribed texts.

The 1985/86 programme of Royal Institute of Philosophy lectures was intended to repair this omission. All the lectures in this volume are specifically on the texts prescribed by one or other, or both, of the two GCE Boards.

I invited the lecturers to provide 'critical expositions of the prescribed texts, exemplifying the highest standards of analysis and evaluation, but expressed in such a manner as to make them accessible to sixth-formers without previous acquaintance with philosophy'. How far they succeeded is for the reader to judge. It is easier to preach accessibility than to practise it. I found this out for myself when I tackled the section of Hume's first *Enquiry* in which he gives his answer to 'the most contentious question of metaphysics, the most contentious science', the question of liberty and necessity. Philosophy simply is not simple.

The lectures were given, as usual, at the Institute's London headquarters, 14 Gordon Square. They were remarkably well attended. I suppose this was because most of the texts prescribed for the 'A' levels are also required reading for philosophy students at universities and polytechnics. Aiming at one, fairly well-defined, audience, the lectures in fact attracted a considerably wider one. I hope this volume does the same.

The format of the volume differs slightly from that of earlier ones in the series: before the lecture(s) on a philosopher's text(s) there is a short biographical and bibliographical note. In some cases I have based the bibliographical part of the note on suggestions made by the lecturer.

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