

## EDITORIAL

From time to time I have brought together, in some number of *Religious Studies*, various articles converging on the same theme, and sometimes overlapping very closely in the topics they discussed. I have done so this time in respect to articles on freedom and divine omniscience. I hope that readers will find this an advantage on occasion and not mind too much the lack of the variety at which we normally aim. It may be that teachers especially will find it helpful to have articles on a common theme *occasionally* brought together.

In my own thought about the related problems of freedom, evil and the omnipotence of God I find myself peculiarly helped by the notable writings of the late Professor C. A. Campbell. I am inclined to go further and say that I know of no source, at least in recent times, where these problems, in their inter-relations, are more helpfully discussed. Many of the matters which confuse or bewilder contemporary thinkers, in their considerable pre-occupation with these issues, would be resolved, in large measure at least, by reading the very perceptive analyses offered by this writer.

The books in which Campbell discusses these questions are these: firstly, *Scepticism and Construction*, an early work which made a considerable impact on its first appearance and which should be of particular interest in the present shifts of philosophical concern, both for its style and lucidity and for its insights. Chapters IV and V of this work deal expressly with moral accountability and choice, but it is also an exceptionally rewarding book in all other respects. *In Defence of Free Will* takes its title from an inaugural lecture delivered at Glasgow, but includes other papers contributed to major journals, such as the well-known 'Ryle on the Intellect' (in *The Philosophical Quarterly*), 'Is "Free Will" a Pseudo-problem?' and 'Common-sense Propositions and Philosophical Paradoxes' (both in *Mind*, the second mainly a reply to Norman Malcolm) and the British Academy lecture on 'Moral Intuition and the Principle of Self-realization'. It has now become very common for authors to collect their contributions to various journals in one volume. This has rarely been better justified than in the present case: *Selfhood and Godhood* contains the Gifford lectures in which the author reviews again, with all the ripeness of mature thought, the major problems of self-identity, freedom and God's transcendence ('supra-rational Theism' in the terms most common in these books) which had been the major themes of his other writings. The treatment of 'suffering' in *Selfhood and Godhood* has, in my judgement, rarely been rivalled. A critical discussion of Campbell's writings appears in this journal in Vol. 3, No. 2.

Campbell took his start from the idealism in which he had been nurtured, especially Bradley, but modified it especially in respect to the distinctness of persons and the freedom of the finite individual. The notion of transcendence

is also considerably modified in the interest of a cleaner break with finite existence than is usually found in idealist metaphysics.

On the question of free will and responsibility, Campbell provided replies to objections to the notion of a genuinely open or libertarian choice to which there seems to me to be no answer. There may be other difficulties in accepting a libertarian view, but on the score of the objections, still very commonly repeated and thought to be major obstacles, to which Campbell especially addressed himself, there seems to be nothing which should now seriously trouble the libertarian.

The two objections are these: if there is a choice which is genuinely open, and thus not determined by the main drift of our inclinations at the time, or, as it is sometimes put, by our natures or characters, then the issue seems to be a matter of chance, or just a 'bolt from the blue'. How can such an eventuality be said to be *my own*, a choice for which I am morally responsible? Closely related to this is the supposition that, on a libertarian view, our conduct is bound to be random and chaotic in a way that belies all our experience and expectation – as it is sometimes put, 'we could expect any action from any man at any time'. It is plain that we do count on one another, that we do predict with precision what various people will do on distinct occasions. If this were not the case, if no one could ever be depended upon, if we might do just anything at any time, then life as we know it would be altogether impossible. We could plan nothing in such a wild irrational world, and there is little likelihood that we would survive.

If therefore the libertarian view had the implications here ascribed to it, the case for it would fall utterly to the ground. There could be no more final a refutation. To the first objection Campbell replied that, far from being a case of chance, or some blind randomness, if that ever happens, the free choice is *made by the self* which is more than its formed character at the time. This self does not have a further nature which 'makes' it choose in one way rather than another. The choice is entirely open, as it is not in any other case, but there is a world of difference between a subject deliberately making a choice and anything that comes about by chance or in some random way.

To the second objection the reply is exceptionally convincing, so much so that it is strange to find that the objection continues to be made. The reply is that the area within which the choice is made is limited. I do not have a genuinely open choice to do anything whatsoever. On Campbell's account, the choice is restricted to the occasions when my most dominant inclinations at the time, or my 'formed character', is at odds with whatever I deem to be my duty. Interest points me in one way, duty in another, and it is only when this happens – and it happens in very different ways for different persons, according to what sort of persons they are and their beliefs about their moral obligations – that there is a genuinely open, undetermined choice. Other

sorts of choices are also important, but they flow in the last analysis from the sort of person I am, by what heredity and circumstances have made me. I choose a book to read in the train or a chocolate from a box that is proffered to me, or more important things like the friends I shall associate with, and for most of the time, no specific question of moral duty may arise – there is nothing beyond my natural preference shaping itself. But when I consider that I have a moral obligation which my character is not strong enough to induce me to perform, then I am able, but not bound, to rise to this call or, equally, to take the line of least resistance and follow my preference at the time.

There is a good deal more that needs to be said to commend these positions and remove further misunderstanding, and much of it is most clearly and impressively said in the books I have mentioned. But it should be plain, even on this cursory statement, that the choice of which a libertarian account is offered need not extend to everything we do. There is not the slightest likelihood that I shall, for no reason whatsoever, leap out of the window the next instant. I shall behave in this respect as in others in the way my friends and acquaintances expect. Other things being equal, I shall have neither the inclination, nor the slightest sense of an obligation, to injure or kill myself by throwing myself out of the window. And so for most other things, like keeping with reasonable consistency to the way of life I have embarked upon. There may be sudden changes of character or of circumstances or of moral conviction, but they come about within the general situation in which we make predictions, with varying certainty, but not infallibly, about one another. The uncertainty here affects our prediction but not what is the case. It is only in the very special circumstances of a genuine and ultimate ‘conflict of duty and interest’ that a wholly undetermined choice is presupposed and any exception made to our normal assumption of a continuity of character and conduct. Viewed in this way the indeterminist position wears a very different aspect from that which is often accorded to it.

I shall not pursue these themes further on my own account here. My hope is that I have said enough to whet the appetite of those not familiar with C. A. Campbell’s work for books in which he said in an incomparable way so much that is peculiarly relevant to the themes which are of growing interest again to philosophers in the areas of morality and religion.

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There is a very laudable determination on the part of philosophers today to be as precise and careful in argument as they can. This is sometimes apt to lead to a form of professionalism which, if I may lapse into current jargon myself, is counter-productive. Numbered steps and variations in an argument may help, and abbreviations (F.W.D. – Free Will Defence) may save space and tedious repetition. But they may not be always the best way of achieving

the desired result, and they may on occasion add to the labour of the reader more than they ease it. Some readers of this journal will know how much I disagreed with the late Professor Gilbert Ryle's views and much in his style of argument, but he was a master of elegant and lucid English and of trim presentation of his main themes. For this reason we can turn with particular interest to the witty observations he made on the style of philosophising I have just noted. In the Centenary Number of *Mind* (Jan. 1976) he wrote:

In one recent article the reader had to cope first with one list of eight cited steps in an argument in the *P(armenides)*, indicated as 'P<sub>1</sub>', 'P<sub>2</sub>', . . . , 'P<sub>8</sub>', with 'P<sub>4</sub>' subdivided into 'P<sub>4.1</sub>', 'P<sub>4.2</sub>', and 'P<sub>4.3</sub>'; next with a short list of three premisses attributed to Plato by the commentator A(lexander), indicated as 'A<sub>1</sub>', 'A<sub>2</sub>', and 'A<sub>3</sub>'; and then with a fine array of sixteen potential premisses for something, called for short 'RA', with the indices 'M<sub>1</sub>', 'M<sub>2</sub>', . . . , 'M<sub>16</sub>'. Why 'M'? I have forgotten again! With eight or nine additional T(hree)-B(lind)-M(ice)-type initial strings to memorise the intending reader and reviewer of a very likely excellent contribution to the subject which would, counterfactually, have occupied several industrious hours, learning indeed something valuable about Plato's *Parmenides*, but also re-scanning back pages and then ephemerally memorising the burthens of some three dozen stenograms and registration-numbers which he would never himself employ, or even, for the most part, find employed by anyone else. Why should he?

It is not for an editor to prescribe to those who have important things to say, and very close arguments to present, how precisely they should set about their task. But I hope all the same that Ryle's misgiving will not go entirely unheeded.