

## Preface

A REMARKABLE NUMBER OF PHILOSOPHERS, among them many of the greatest, have cast at least some of their work in dialogue form. For each expected name there turns out to be another (Descartes, Spinoza . . . ), and when the professionalisation of the subject and the rise of the journal have all but killed the genre, it has bounced back exuberantly in Lakatos's *Proofs and Refutations* and Scruton's *Xanthippic Dialogues*. The reasons for choosing the dialogue form are often obvious. It can be a fine tool of persuasion, as the author's view is followed to victory though successive trials by combat. At the other extreme, *What the Tortoise said to Achilles* was surely the ideal way for Lewis Carroll to publish a puzzle to which he did not have an answer. Scholars have discerned less obvious reasons, such as Noam Flinker's suggestion that Hobbes's *Behemoth* was a calculated attempt to discredit the very genre to which it belonged. Students of rhetoric have also studied the dialogue as a literary form, for example Peter Walmsley's *The Rhetoric of Berkeley's Philosophy* and Seth Lerer's *Boethius and Dialogue*. What this admirable scholarship often does not do, however, is to tie in the structure and dramatic detail of a dialogue in any philosophically significant way to its content or to other distinctive ideas of its author's, if only because often there is no such tie.

This is what the contributors to this volume have set out to do. David Sedley reveals the remarkable extent of the strictly philosophical use Plato makes of the dramatis personae in the *Phaedo*; his essay shows incidentally what formidable reserves of historical, philosophical and linguistic knowledge the task requires. Jonathan Dancy takes the question of the authorial voice in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* and stands it

on its head to produce a wholly new explanation in terms of a distinctive feature of Hume's epistemology. Including Wittgenstein in a symposium on philosophical dialogues might have been prompted by that book *Byron in Egypt*, whose blurb begins 'Although Byron never was in Egypt, this fully-documented study of the poet's absence . . .' In fact it was an inspiration on the part of Myles Burnyeat, fully vindicated here by Jane Heal's pioneering study of the voices in the *Philosophical Investigations* and their connection with Wittgenstein's conception of its subject.

These three contributions provided the menu for a one-day symposium held at the British Academy in March 1994. For the last forty years the Academy has promoted a series of lectures on the history of philosophy, endowed under the will of Professor George Dawes Hicks. All were printed in the *Proceedings* of the Academy, but a selection built round a common theme was made more readily accessible by Anthony Kenny in *Rationalism, Empiricism and Idealism* (Oxford, 1986). The idea of a symposium continues the attempt to make the series more interesting and accessible to the academic community. I am grateful to the three Dawes Hicks Lecturers for their co-operation, and to two of the Academy's staff: Rosemary Lambeth for organising the symposium, and James Rivington for arranging this publication of the proceedings.

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