

# Editorial: 'This Century's Greatest Philosopher'

The words occur in a letter from the Director of the London School of Economics, in which we are asked to contribute to the Sir Karl Popper Memorial Fund. We would certainly wish to honour Popper, and his memory. The objectives of the Fund, which are the support of undergraduates and postgraduates, and the promotion of lectures and seminars on Popper's ideas, are admirable. One wonders, though, whether either Popper or his memory are served by some of the claims now being made on his behalf: that, for example, he is the greatest philosopher since Kant or, with Einstein, the greatest mind of the twentieth century; and the same would be true were similar claims to be made on behalf of any other of our influential contemporaries.

For the fact is that no one is yet able to provide a judicious evaluation of the ultimate importance of the living or recently dead. We are too close and too involved. In the nature of the case, we are unable to know what their real contribution to the subject is, or, what comes to the same thing, how it will come to be seen in years to come. Of those who have died recently, and whose memory we honour justly enough from our own perspective—figures such as Ayer, Wisdom, Oakshott, Hayek, Braithwaite, and Popper himself—which, if any will come to occupy a major and permanent niche in the history of philosophy? Or will the truly important figure of our time turn out to be as untouched by academic honour and wordly reputation as, in their day, were Spinoza and Frege? Speculation on such matters is harmless enough as a game; but there are those who treat the game as serious, on their own behalf or on behalf of those they favour. They might reflect on Wittgenstein's warning to Moore, when the latter was awarded his volume in the Library of Living Philosophers, that he was walking on the edge of a cliff at the bottom of which one sees lots of scientists and philosophers lying dead.