

BRITISH EMPIRICAL PHILOSOPHERS: Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Reid, Mill.

Edited by A. J. Ayer and Raymund Winch. (Routledge and Kegan Paul; 25s.)

This book brings together in a handy form a series of selections from the works of the British empiricists. In it are included a ruthlessly abbreviated version of Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, the whole of Berkeley's *Principles* and portions of the *Dialogues*. Hume, as might be expected, claims more space with 220 pages, almost all from the first and fourth parts of the *Treatise*. Reid is represented by a snippet in which he criticises Hume, and Mill is allowed to present in a few pages his description of matter as the permanent possibility of sensation.

The book will be useful to those who are following an introductory course of philosophy, but it may be doubted whether students should be encouraged to read philosophers in versions or selections. Both Locke and Berkeley have suffered from this. The justification of this treatment is that it enables the teacher to use a series of philosophers as illustrations of a typical viewpoint or of the development of a single philosophic enquiry. The difficulty about it is that the philosophers concerned are bigger than their 'history of philosophy' strait-jacket and there is a danger that 'selected texts' may hide their true greatness from the student.

Professor Ayer has written an interesting introduction to the anthology in which he maintains that the characteristic of the empirical school is their contention that all propositions are either formal or descriptive, and secondly that nothing is a genuinely descriptive proposition unless it describes what could be experienced. Significant experience is taken as meaning that which is analysable in terms of sense impression. This expresses well enough the general drift of British empiricism, but, quite apart from the question as to whether the description does not impose from the outset an arbitrary restriction on philosophic enquiry, it also fails to do justice to Locke, Berkeley and Hume. Each of them had the wit to invoke knowings which could not be expressed within the rigid framework of their theory of ideas. Perhaps this was inconsistent of them; it is none the less a sign of their greatness. Locke's 'substance', which plays a much greater part in the final form of the *Essay* than in the first draft, has at times an almost *a priori* character; Berkeley was not only the foe of abstractions, he invoked notions that are not ideas in order to account for elements in our experience; even Hume failed to fit time and space into his theory of impression, while he constantly appeals to Nature. Metaphysics is always being banished, but each time returns in disguise.

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