

From *Philosophical Books*, 46:1 (January 2005)

*Fundamentals of Philosophy*

Edited by JOHN SHAND

Routledge, 2003. xii + 445 pp. £65.00 cloth, £17.99 paper

This volume is another addition to the ever-growing library of introductions to philosophy. It comprises fourteen newly written essays, primarily on the central areas of Anglo-American philosophy, along with a brief introduction by the editor, which attempts a modicum of scene setting by sketching some relations between those areas covered in later chapters. The collection arises from the Routledge series of the same name, with many of the contributors having authored volumes in that series. The standard of essays is on a par with that of the earlier volumes; without exception, the entries are lucidly written, engaging and up to date.

Averaging around thirty pages in length, the essays tend to fall into one of two categories; either they serve to provide reasonably thorough discussions of some of the major theories within an area, or they offer brief overviews of the main points of debate in the field. One of the best examples of the former is Alexander Miller's chapter on the Philosophy of Language; this is a clear, succinct and comparatively detailed account of Frege's main theses (fifteen are outlined in fourteen pages), followed by concise discussions of the contributions of Russell, Kripke and Putnam. In contrast, Piers Benn's entry on Ethics is more of a survey of the area, sketching the main normative theories in accessible terms after brief notes on relativism and egoism, before moving on to introduce the reader to metaethics.

This book is not the best introduction for those entirely unfamiliar with the subject. The space allocated to individual contributions is not sufficient to allow authors room to gently introduce newcomers to philosophy, and there is generally little done to motivate the detailed discussion of particular issues in a way that would engage the lay reader. For example, three pages into the main body of Alan Goldman's chapter on Epistemology we are already on indefeasibility; one more page and we encounter reliabilism, having already cantered through justification, internalism and Gettier. Such a discussion is likely to be daunting to the uninitiated.

Goldman's contribution is the first, and possibly least accessible, chapter. Nevertheless, it helps draw attention to one of the book's major strengths. The collection really comes into its own in terms of the breadth of subjects covered and the depth of discussion. Few other introductions contain such detailed discussions; even fewer do so while covering such a range of subjects. The collection will be of particular benefit to those students already interested in the subject who wish to expand their philosophical horizons. The experienced student capable of tackling Goldman's chapter will come away with a respectable grasp of the main concerns of contemporary epistemology.

It is worth mentioning that this collection also goes further than most introductory works by including three chapters on the history of philosophy. Weighing in at a total of 110 pages, these chapters cover the ancient, medieval and modern periods and provide a historical context for the other area-based chapters. These chapters differ in their approach; Richard Francks' chapter on Modern Philosophy focuses on six key philosophers (Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley and Hume) and sketches one or two key ideas from each, and Suzanne Stern-Gillet's chapter on Ancient Philosophy introduces the major schools as well as the masters. In contrast, Dermot Moran's chapter on Medieval Philosophy—the

longest in the book—not only discusses the likes of Augustine, Aquinas, and Ockham, but ten or so other figures, including John Scottus Eriugena and Nicholas of Cusa.

The inclusion of a chapter on Continental Philosophy by Simon Glendinning is also to be welcomed for similar reasons. This chapter mainly consists of thumbnail sketches of the major thinkers in this tradition, taking us from Kant to Michele Le Doueff, with forty nine stops en route. These are helpful and informative, although it is hard to imagine the new reader gaining much from these alone. Possibly more useful is the section containing outlines of various schools or movements within the area; here the reader will find brief accounts of Lacanian Psychoanalytical theory, Post-Structuralism and the like.

Offering this collection to new students would be equivalent to offering an espresso to someone unsure of whether coffee was to their taste. There are plenty of milk-and-two-sugar introductions out there; this book is best seen as a resource for those keen on the subject but wishing to develop their palate further. It will be of particular use to those students already partway through an undergraduate degree in philosophy, both as a revision tool and as a means of deciding between alternative courses of further study. Unlike some of the other general introductions on the market, this collection merits space on the bookshop shelves and is worth recommending to those students interested in reading further into the subject.

THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

CHRIS LINDSAY