

MONTEFIORE, Alan (1926-)

Michael Rosen

Alan Montefiore was born in London on 29 Dec 1929 as part of a prominent British Jewish family. He was educated at Clifton College and, after military service in Singapore, at Balliol College, Oxford where he read PPE from 1948 to 1951. Among his Balliol contemporaries were B.A.O. Williams and J.R. Lucas. He embarked on a doctoral thesis at Oxford under Stuart Hampshire, although this was abandoned after his appointment to a lectureship at what was then the University College of North Staffordshire (later, Keele University) in 1951. In 1961 Montefiore was elected to a fellowship at his old college where he remained as a Tutorial Fellow until his retirement in 1994. He also held visiting appointments at McGill University and the Université de Montréal.

Montefiore's philosophical interests in the nineteen-fifties and early sixties were principally in moral philosophy. The issues that he addressed and the approach that he took to them were standard ones in analytical philosophy of the time. He published articles on such topics as the meaning of 'good' and the relationships between 'is' and 'ought' and 'ought' and 'can'. In his book, *A Modern Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, he developed an answer to one of moral philosophy's central problems – the objectivity or otherwise of moral judgement – through an extensive comparative analysis of factual statements and value judgements. He also published a regular series of survey articles on contemporary French philosophy and was a participant in the celebrated Colloque de Royaumont of 1958 which brought together the leading French and British philosophers of the day.

From the late nineteen-sixties onwards, the main focus of Montefiore's philosophical activity changed somewhat. He organised a number of collaborative projects, often bringing together philosophers and non-philosophers. His work showed a particular concern for

questions that arise for individuals as they operate in public contexts – issues such as responsibility, integrity and neutrality. His writing also articulated a reflexive sense of the problematic nature of philosophical discourse that was much more in keeping with contemporary French writers (such as his friend, Jacques Derrida) than the more business-like idiom dominant in Britain and America.

Montefiore was uncommon for the period in his sympathy for both the analytical and the continental philosophical traditions. Although the former was more marked in the early part of his career with the latter coming to prominence later, there were also some important continuities. In his analytical writings on moral philosophy Montefiore defended the separation between facts and values. However, an appreciation of the embeddedness of evaluative judgements in descriptive contexts and the existence of competing descriptive languages led to a worry about the possibility of neutrality that carried over into later work. Another continuing theme was Montefiore's interest in the philosophy of Kant. His response to Kant was somewhat unusual in Oxford at the time. Rather than looking for ways to arrive at conclusions similar to Kant's by methods that did not rely on transcendental psychology, as the leading analytical Kant interpreters of the day were doing, Montefiore held that the connection between Kant's critique of Humean and Cartesian approaches and the doctrine of the transcendental ego was essential to his thought. This made him not unsympathetic to the belief prevalent in the Continental tradition that there is a philosophically cogent progression leading from Kant's account of transcendental subjectivity to Hegel's absolute subject although he feared that in this process of increasing transcendentalization the connection between the notion of the subject and the actually existing empirical individual becomes lost.

While Montefiore did not develop these ideas in detail in his published work, the influence he had on late twentieth-century philosophy in Britain was quite considerable. Not only did he sustain an extensive network of international philosophical interlocutors but he

was an exceptionally broad-minded and sympathetic teacher who helped to educate many philosophers who would go on to do distinguished work in a large number of fields.

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