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978-0-521-09923-3 - Neutrality and Impartiality: The University and Political
Commitment

Andrew Graham, Leszek Kolakowski, Louis Marin, Alan Montefiore, Charles Taylor, C. L.
Ten and W. L. Weinstein

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Neutrality and Impartiality

*The University and
Political Commitment*

BY

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Preface

This is an open-ended and not very systematic book about a certain rather untidy family of concepts – such concepts as those of neutrality, impartiality, objectivity, open-mindedness and so on. It is also a book in which use is made of these concepts to discuss certain issues concerning the position of universities in their internal and external relations and that of university teachers and researchers in relation to their subjects, their students and their wider political commitments. And finally it is a book in which a number of people from different countries with very different backgrounds of theoretical and practical experience come together to discuss those matters. With the exception of Part III the reader would in general find no particular difficulty in moving among the various sections and contributions as if from one independent discussion to another. Nevertheless, its authors think of the book as having a certain overall unity. It may therefore be helpful to start with a word or two of explanation of the basis on which it has been compiled.

In some parts of the world many of the most politically conscious and active members of the universities have over the last few years been demanding that the university as such should take up deliberately partisan social and political positions. Most of those who take this line would reject as hypocritical or, at best, as irresponsibly naïve the traditional ‘liberal’ claim that the proper business of the university lies in the disinterested search for true knowledge and in the transmission of the concern for this search, just as they would reject the traditionally accompanying claim that this is an essentially academic concern and, as such, strictly non-political. In other parts of the world these positions are virtually reversed. There, many of the most politically conscious and active members of the universities have been demanding that the university as such should be recognised as politically independent, that it should be treated and should treat itself as politically neutral and that its individual members should be allowed in their individual capacities to take up any political stance they might please, including that of political indifference. Those who take this line reject any claims by the authorities established in their societies to determine the nature of professional university activities in the name of what are alleged to be the higher interests of society, insisting that the academic

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vocation and the freedom of the individual alike presuppose and imply the duty of the university and the right of its members to abstain from all political activities.

Whatever else may be unclear in the often heatedly unclear contexts of these conflicts and debates, it is at least evident that issues of great importance for the whole status of university research and education are here at stake (and, indeed, of much other education beside). But what issues precisely? The key terms are often used differently not only by members of different sides, but even by members of what appears to be the same side – quite often indeed by one and the same man on maybe not so different occasions. Moreover, it is not uncommon to find terms which could (and should) be used to mark important distinctions being used in practice as if they were casually interchangeable with each other. In such circumstances clear mutual understanding would rarely seem possible; and though clear understanding is no sufficient condition of closer agreement, it is certainly a necessary condition of any agreement on which the parties concerned might rely. Indeed, before questions of agreement or disagreement can even arise, it is hard to think clearly for oneself without having in the process to pin down the different key terms to more or less fixed relations to each other. An attempt to make a start on doing just this was the first point of origin of this book.

Pure conceptual analysis, however, may not only appear dry and remote – that, after all, is a risk which only propagandists and pedagogues need take really seriously; it may actually become too dry and remote for it to rank even as acceptable conceptual analysis. If a major purpose of analysis is to make possible clearer thought and debate, the debate itself will provide the only ultimately serious testing ground for the analysis. Moreover, if these debates had not had the interest and importance that they do, there would not have been the same motivation to undertake the analysis in the first place. In other words, the analysis of the relevant concepts and their use in substantive discussion are closely bound up with each other as different aspects of one complex enterprise; and it was a shared concern for the issues at stake in these discussions that provided the book with its second point of origin.

In practice, the book got itself under way in 1969 when I undertook to work out a first rather rough and incomplete set of analyses of some of the central concepts involved and to circulate them to the other contributors. Selected parts of these first background analyses constitute Part I of the present book; they have been cut down and somewhat recast, but nothing has been removed to which any of the other contributors have made explicit or implicit reference in their papers, however inadequate it may now appear; nor

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has anything of importance been added in this Part, however badly it may now seem to me that certain things need adding. This means that it must be read as a first, provisional approximation. Part II contains the papers of all the other contributors. Part III contains (some of) my present further thoughts on the matters raised in Part I, seen now in the light of the discussions of Part II, as well as in that of many subsequent critical discussions in and out of seminars.

But this is in a number of ways an over-bald statement of the position. For one thing, it is already obvious that, whatever the differences of emphasis, there can be no neatly separate distribution of the conceptual and substantive aspects of the discussions among the several parts of the volume. For another, it is worth mentioning that some of us were able to have quite extensive discussions with each other during the latter part of 1969 and 1970, when some of the papers of Part II were moving from earlier to subsequent drafts. In particular four of us were fortunate enough to be able to take advantage of an invitation from the Department of Philosophy at the University of Montreal to join in holding a colloquium on the topics here under consideration, in April 1970. The interest which both English and French speaking participants derived from this experience of working together, out of their very different philosophical backgrounds, in this hospitable bilingual and bi-cultural context, persuaded them that it would be worthwhile to seek to publish the eventual volume in the two languages simultaneously. The problems of translation, in both directions, have been as instructive as they have been difficult; they have also unavoidably been the cause of a rather considerable delay in final publication.

There are two other acknowledgements that should be made in the Preface. An earlier version of section 2 of Part I was included in a contribution to a conference organised in October 1969 by L'Association Internationale des Futuribles at Perugia and subsequently published (in Italian) in their journal, *Futuribili*, no. 18, and in *Proteus*, Vol. I, no. 3. I am most grateful for permission, kindly given in advance, to reproduce the substance of that contribution here. Finally, especial thanks are due to Jeremy Mynott of the Cambridge University Press for the immense care with which he has worked through the whole book. But for him it would have remained in a far more imperfect state.

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A.M.

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Andrew Graham Fellow and Tutor in Economics at Balliol College, Oxford, and a University Lecturer in Economics. He is currently (1973–4) on partial leave of absence from Oxford while acting as a Policy Adviser at 10 Downing Street. He was previously an Economic Assistant at the Department of Economic Affairs 1964–6, an Economic Assistant at the Cabinet Office 1966–7, and an Economic Adviser attached to the Prime Minister's Office 1968–9.

Leszek Kolakowski Born 1927 in Radom, Poland. Professor in Warsaw University and Chairman of the Section of History of Philosophy until 1968; expelled from the University in March 1968 for political reasons. Visiting Professor at McGill University, Montreal, and University of California, Berkeley. From 1970 Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford. Author of books dealing with history of philosophy and of religious ideas in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and with philosophy of culture.

Louis Marin Born 1931 in France. Studied at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. Has taught at L'Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes and the Universities of Nanterre, Paris I, California (San Diego) and is currently at Johns Hopkins (Baltimore, U.S.A.). From 1965 to 1967 was Director of the Institut Français in London. His books include *Sémiotique de la Passion, Topiques et Figures* (1971); *Etudes Sémiologiques – Ecritures, Peintures* (1971); together with Claude Chabrol, *Sémiotique narrative: les récits bibliques* (1971); *Le Récit Evangelique* (1974). He has also published a translation, with introduction, of Radcliffe-Brown's *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*; has edited (and contributed to) a volume entitled *Utopiques – jeux d'espaces* (1973); has published editions of *La Logique de Port-Royal* (1970) and *Pensées de Pascal*; and has contributed articles to innumerable learned and cultural journals.

Alan Montefiore Read P.P.E. – Politics, Philosophy and Economics – at Balliol College, Oxford, from 1948 to 1950. From 1951 to 1961 taught philosophy, a lot of it moral and political philosophy at the then new University College of North Staffordshire, now the University of Keele. In 1961 returned to Balliol as Fellow and Tutor in Philosophy. Tutor for Admissions in Balliol 1962–7. Has written or edited books on *Moral Philosophy, British Analytical Philosophy*

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and *Philosophy and Personal Relations* (the latter being a joint Anglo–French–French Canadian enterprise); and published articles in a variety of professional journals.

Chin Liew Ten Born in Malaysia. Studied philosophy at the former University of Malaya in Singapore (now the University of Singapore), and then at the London School of Economics. From 1964 to 1970 taught philosophy at the University of Singapore. Left Singapore in 1970 to join the Philosophy Department, Monash University, Australia, where he is now a Senior Lecturer. Currently working on a book, *Mill on Liberty*.

Charles Taylor B.A. McGill (History) 1952, B.A. Oxford (P.P.E.) 1955, John Locke Scholar, Oxford, 1955, D.Phil Oxford 1961. At present Professor of Philosophy and Political Science at McGill; has also taught at l'Université de Montréal, Princeton, University of California at Berkeley. Sometime Fellow of All Souls. Publications: *The Explanation of Behaviour* (1964), and a number of articles on philosophy of mind, philosophy of psychology, philosophy of politics. A book on Hegel is to be published shortly. Also active in politics. Ran a number of times for Canadian Federal Parliament; member of Federal Executive, New Democratic Party of Canada.

W.L. Weinstein Fellow and Tutor in Politics, Balliol College, Oxford. Has been Tutor for Admissions there 1967–71; other university experience in America, East Africa and Australia. Political theorist; articles published on liberalism, freedom, privacy; writing book on rival conceptions of freedom.