PREFACE

This book owes its existence to my having been invited by the trustees of the Sulgrave Manor Board to give the Sir George Watson lectures for 1957. According to the terms of their endowment, these lectures, which are given annually, are intended to deal with ‘the history, literature, and institutions of the United States’. The trustees informed me that this might be taken to cover a comparison of British with American philosophy. In a series of four lectures, which were delivered at University College London in November 1957, under the overall title of ‘Pragmatism and Analysis’, I accordingly attempted to trace the course of the main stream of American philosophy from Peirce and James to Quine and Goodman, alongside that of the main stream of British philosophy from Moore and Russell to Austin and Ryle. I believe that the lectures contained some points of interest, but the breadth of their subject and the pace at which they covered it prevented them from being very much more than a series of vignettes.

Having delivered the lectures, I put the manuscript aside for some years, partly because I was engaged in other work, but partly because I was not sure how I wanted to develop it for publication. Deciding eventually that I ought to go into the subject a little more deeply, I soon gave up the idea of trying to compress the better part of a century of British and American philosophy into one volume. I still meant to adhere to the theme of Pragmatism and Analysis but decided to concentrate on the originators of these two movements. My plan was to give a critical account of the philosophical views of Peirce and James on the one side, and Moore and Russell on the other. Both for historical reasons, and because I knew least about him, I started with Peirce. In going through his works in detail I found so many points of difficulty and interest that I was drawn into writing
about him at much greater length than I had intended. When the same turned out to be true of James, I decided that the first half of my plan was enough to be going on with; a critical examination of the philosophy of these two great pragmatists would make a large enough book on its own. I have not, however, entirely given up the idea of publishing a comparable study of the philosophy of Moore and Russell at some later date.

It has not been my aim to produce a work of historical scholarship. I have read the works of Peirce and James attentively, but I have not tried to situate them in the history of philosophy, nor have I studied the writings of other commentators, to see how far their interpretations agree with mine. If this book contains passages in which other commentators discover an echo of their own published views, I can, therefore, only ask them to accept my assurance that the plagiarism is unconscious. I have tried to make up my own mind about what Peirce and James were saying and I have also felt free to develop my own theories on some of the main issues which they raise.

Finally, my thanks are due to Professor Richard Wollheim for saving me from an inconsistency in my account of Peirce’s theory of probable inference, to Mrs. Rosanne Richardson for typing the first three sections of this book and to Mrs. Guida Crowley both for typing the remainder and for her help in compiling the index and correcting the proofs.

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