PREFACE

THE author of the papers collected in this volume seemed to me to combine very exceptional brilliancy with very great soundness of judgment in philosophy. He was an extraordinarily clear thinker: no-one could avoid more easily than he the sort of confusions of thought to which even the best philosophers are liable, and he was capable of apprehending clearly, and observing consistently, the subtlest distinctions. He had, moreover, an exceptional power of drawing conclusions from a complicated set of facts: he could see what followed from them all taken together, or at least what might follow, in cases where others could draw no conclusions whatever. And, with all this, he produced the impression of also possessing the soundest common sense: his subtlety and ingenuity did not lead him, as it seems to have led some philosophers, to deny obvious facts. He had, moreover, so it seemed to me, an excellent sense of proportion: he could see which problems were the most fundamental, and it was these in which he was most interested and which he was most anxious to solve. For all these reasons, and perhaps for others as well, I almost always felt, with regard to any subject which we discussed, that he understood it much better than I did, and where (as was often the case) he failed to convince me, I generally thought the probability was that he was right and I wrong, and that my failure to agree with him was due to lack of mental power on my part.

Ramsey was not only exceptionally capable of thinking clearly himself; he also had a most uncommon power of explaining clearly to others what he thought and why he thought it. There are many good examples in this volume
of his great capacity for lucid exposition. But sometimes I
feel that he fails to explain things as clearly as he could have
done, simply because he does not see that any explanation
is needed: he does not realize that what to him seems
perfectly clear and straightforward may to others, less gifted,
offer many puzzles. I must confess that I personally often
find a difficulty in understanding at all clearly what he means,
in cases where he does not seem to have been aware than any
difficulty whatever would be found. No doubt, in many of
these cases, some readers will understand him without
difficulty; but I suspect that many will be in my case. In
the last two sections of the volume (the notes of 1928 and 1929),
where he was writing chiefly for himself and not expanding
and explaining as he would have done if writing for publica-
tion, the difficulty of following him with adequate comprehe-
sion is naturally specially great. But even where you cannot
understand him completely you can often understand him
enough to find him extraordinarily interesting; and I am
convinced that it is well worth while to try to understand
him. No doubt sometimes he may make mere mistakes;
but in general I think he himself knew very well indeed what
he was about, and, even if he was wrong, had very good
reasons for the opinions at which he had arrived. It is a
great misfortune that his early death prevented him from
making these opinions, and the reasons for them, as clear as
he, and perhaps he alone, could have made them.

G. E. Moore.

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