



ALAN KER STOUT

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1900-1983

Alan Ker Stout was born on 9 May 1900, at Oxford, the only child of his parents. His father, G. F. Stout, was then the first Wilde Reader in Psychology at Oxford University. G. F. Stout was a distinguished psychologist, philosopher and editor of the periodical *Mind*. His philosophical work still attracts attention today. He had great intellectual influence on his son. Alan always used to say that, as a philosopher, he was his father's son.

In 1903 G. F. Stout was appointed to the Chair of Logic and Metaphysics in the University of St. Andrews, and this town became Alan Stout's home for the next twenty years. In 1914 he won an open scholarship to Fettes College, Edinburgh. In 1918 he was elected to an open Classical Scholarship at Oriel College, where he read Greats. There were three Oriel Scholarships. Stout won the first, beating the novelist Richard Hughes into third place. As an undergraduate, he became President of the Jowett Society, the undergraduate Philosophical society at Oxford. He was also a member of the less formal Hypocrites Club, recently remembered by the novelist Anthony Powell in his autobiography.

Graduating in 1924, he was awarded Oriel's Bishop Fraser Research Scholarship and began working for a D.Phil. In June 1924, however, he was appointed Assistant Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of North Wales (in Bangor), under Professor James Gibson, the distinguished Locke scholar. During his years in Wales he published three articles on Descartes, on which his early scholarly reputation rests. He also produced plays, part of his life-long interest in the theatre, marrying his undergraduate leading lady, Evelyn Roberts.

In 1934 Stout was appointed Lecturer in Moral Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh, under the well-known Professor A. E. Taylor.

In 1938 Professor John Anderson was on sabbatical leave from Sydney. Anderson visited Edinburgh and Stout saw a good deal of him. Anderson suggested that Stout might like to apply for the foundation Chair of Moral and Political Philosophy at Sydney, then under advertisement. Stout applied, was appointed and arrived in Sydney in June 1939, with his wife, two children and his father G. F. Stout, who lived out his remaining years in Sydney, dying in 1944.

Stout's Chair, and the separate Department which went with it, had apparently been set up with the objective of preventing Anderson from lecturing on moral and political subjects. But if this had been the aim, it was not attended with any noticeable success. Stout had his philosophical differences from

Anderson, of course, but they co-operated in a friendly manner. (Stout also fought alongside Anderson in various public controversies.) The two Departments had a common first year, and Stout lectured to that First Year on Epistemology. He used to explain that, since Anderson felt free to lecture on ethics and politics, he, Stout, thought himself entitled to return the compliment and lecture on the theory of knowledge. However, after Anderson retired, the two Departments were brought together again, and in 1959 Stout became simply Professor of Philosophy, a change which pleased him very much. He was a lively, but clear and straightforward, lecturer who was always prepared to devote time to discussion with students.

Stout did not publish a great deal in academic journals after coming to Sydney. He did edit the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* from 1950 to 1967, years during which the periodical became widely-known and respected internationally. His eye for a misprint was legendary. Another important editorial task was his preparation for publication, from manuscripts left in his hands, of the second volume of G. F. Stout's Gifford Lectures. Cambridge University Press published the book, entitled *God and Nature*, in 1952.

Stout's major intellectual contribution, however, was at what might be called the interface between philosophy and the immediate affairs of the day. In a very great number of occasional lectures, addresses, reviews, letters and appearances on radio and television he sought, in a reasoned and clear way, to apply his moral and political thinking to current controversy, and to matters of general interest, in Sydney and Australia.

He was a Fellow of the University Senate from 1954 to 1969. He himself thought that his election by the graduates was due to his regular appearance on the A.B.C.'s brains-trust programme 'Any Questions?'

He was Foundation President of the N.S.W. Council for Civil Liberties from 1963-5, resigning this post when he went to Wisconsin as Visiting Professor in 1966. He was also a Council member of the Australian Consumers Association from 1963 to 1979. From 1961 to 1965 he was drama critic for the *Australian Quarterly*. He was also keenly interested in film, and served as Chairman or President of various film bodies. Prison reform was another interest of his, and it is noteworthy that his inaugural lecture at Sydney University was on the topic of Punishment.

But in the Index of the collection of Stout's papers in the University archives (compiled by G. L. Fischer), by far the largest series of entries relates to the case of Sydney Sparkes Orr, dismissed from the post of Professor of Philosophy at the University of Tasmania. For a decade, from 1956 to 1966, when Orr died, Stout along with Professor R. D. Wright of Melbourne University, and the late Harry Eddy of Sydney University, was a central figure among those who sought to change the attitude of the University of Tasmania. He fought long and hard, but always retained a sense of the complexity of the affair. He understood that many different interests, those of Orr, of academics, of philosophers, of students of philosophy in Tasmania, and, not least, those of

the University of Tasmania, all had a legitimate place in any resolution of the affair. Stout welcomed the appointment of a new Professor of Philosophy at Tasmania after Orr's death.

Stout retired at the end of 1965. As it happened, he had a daughter living in Hobart, and it was there that he and Mrs Stout established themselves, at the end of 1967. During his long retirement there was only a gradual diminution of his many activities. He died on 20 July 1983, at the age of 83, after a very short illness. He is survived by his wife and daughter in Hobart, and his son in London.

Stout was a man who sought to take his philosophy, and in particular his moral philosophy, into public life. In so doing he brought a quick intelligence, intellectual grasp, a flair for putting things simply and clearly, together with a genuine respect for the views of others and readiness to appreciate their point of view. These virtues served him well also as a teacher and academic. He was always an approachable person, with something to say himself and wanting to know what others had to say.

D. M. Armstrong