

## In memoriam Michael Dummett

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Karen Green at the beginning of the obituary published in *The Philosophers' Magazine* writes 'Michael Dummett was arguably the most important British philosopher of the second half of the twentieth century'.<sup>1</sup> It is not the place in *Social Choice and Welfare* to describe Dummett's magisterial philosophical work. Let me only mention that he made major contributions to the theory of meaning, the debate between realism and anti-realism, Frege's philosophy, formal logic (intuitionism), the philosophy of mathematics, the history of analytic philosophy etc.<sup>2</sup> During WWII, he learnt Japanese to eventually become a translator based in India. After his demobilisation in September 1947, Michael Dummett decided to read PPE (Philosophy, Politics and Economics) at Oxford and he 'was soon captivated by philosophy'. In the 1950s, while he was a fellow at All Souls, he met Robin Farquharson who was still an undergraduate and already

<sup>1</sup> *The Philosophers' Magazine*, Issue 57, 2nd Quarter 2012.

<sup>2</sup> The obituaries by Dag Prawitz in the *Bulletin of Symbolic Logic* (2013) 19:119–122 and by Richard Heck in *Philosophia Mathematica* (2013) 21:1–8 are worth reading as is Dummett's own 'Intellectual Autobiography' in *The Philosophy of Michael Dummett*, The Library of Living Philosophers Volume XXXI, edited by Randall E. Auxier and Lewis Edwin Hahn, Open Court, 2007.

interested in the theory of voting. The outcome of their collaboration was a paper published in *Econometrica* in 1961 in which they precisely conjectured what would become Gibbard–Satterthwaite theorem. They also defined a concept of stability in voting and demonstrated the possibility of this stability by using individual restricted preferences that extended Black’s single-peakedness.<sup>3</sup> Dummett’s interest in social choice and voting theory did not fade away. He later published two books which were targeted at a rather general audience of educated people. The first one (*Voting Procedures*, Oxford University Press, 1984) obviously missed the target for evident reasons: it was too complicated with references to Arrow and Gibbard–Satterthwaite theorems, with proofs.<sup>4</sup> The second book (*Principles of Electoral Reform*, Oxford University Press, 1997) perfectly succeeded in what Dummett had in mind by avoiding technical details without forgetting rigour.<sup>5</sup> He was obviously in favour of the use of Borda’s rule (he even devised a procedure based on Borda’s rule and later wrote a paper to show how we could limit the incentive to manipulate the agenda when Borda’s rule was used). He was knighted in 1999 for ‘Services to Philosophy and to Racial Justice’. His very active involvement, with his wife Ann, against racism beginning in the 1960s certainly delayed the writing of his book on Frege. Based on this experience, he published a book untitled *On Immigration and Refugees* (Routledge, 2001).<sup>6</sup> His last book, *The Nature and Future of Philosophy* (Columbia University Press, 2010) is like a philosophical testament. As far as I know, only in this last book did he develop some views which can be interpreted as belonging to moral philosophy. He spent most of his academic career in Oxford where he became Wykeham Professor of Logic in 1979. He died in Oxford on 27 December 2011. His wife passed away a few weeks later.

Maurice Salles

<sup>3</sup> On this collaboration see Dummett’s paper in the 2005 historical special issue of *Social Choice and Welfare*.

<sup>4</sup> I wrote an extended review of this book which appeared in *Social Choice and Welfare* (1989) 6:337–346. See also my chapter on Dummett’s contribution to social choice and voting theory in the book edited by Auxier and Hahn cited above.

<sup>5</sup> I had the rare honour to be the dedicatee of this book.

<sup>6</sup> On this and many other topics see his fascinating responses to the questions of Rudolf Fara and I in the interview we conducted in 2004, interview published in *Social Choice and Welfare* (2006) 27:347–364.