

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Debates over the founding of any new discipline are normally as fruitless in the long run as they are fascinating in the short run. For when it becomes clear that a quorum of scholars have found their interests within an area of research that is not quite accommodated by the existing areas of inquiry, it is usually impossible to tell who got there first, and it seems pointless to debate the issue endlessly when there is important work to be done. Of course, there are always some who wish to drag their feet; to deny the legitimacy of the interests of those who first make their way into a new discipline. Yet ultimately, if the discipline has enough people who are interested in it, and who are willing to chip away at the parochialism of those who would deny it, a new field of inquiry gradually emerges.

Such is the case, we believe, in the newly emerging field of The Philosophy of Chemistry. Long the neglected sibling of the philosophy of physics and the philosophy of biology, we are here to put the philosophy of chemistry on its rightful philosophical footing – if not to found it as an area of research, then at least to announce to the philosophical community that it has arrived, and therefore to launch it as a legitimate area of inquiry within the philosophical imagination.

At this important moment in the history of the philosophy of chemistry, however, it is important to realize that its status as an independent area of research should not be taken for granted. Indeed, compared to the long-standing philosophical focus on the areas of ethics, logic, epistemology, and metaphysics, the philosophy of science *itself* is of fairly recent vintage as a philosophical specialty. More recent still is the tendency to specialize within the philosophy of science into subdisciplines like the philosophy of physics, the philosophy of biology, and the philosophy of social science. It is worth noting that the last two mentioned, in fact, have come into their own as legitimate subspecialties only within the last thirty or forty years.

Can a case be made that they should now be joined by the philosophy of chemistry? That is in fact what has been attempted in the first paper in this volume, entitled ‘The Case for the Philosophy of Chemistry’, and to a certain extent the case is made by each of the papers throughout this volume. The very idea of gathering together the best work of some of the leading figures in the philosophy of chemistry, along with a comprehen-

sive bibliography of other works in the field, itself makes a case for the discipline.

It should nonetheless be realized, however, that at this early stage in its development there is great diversity in the lines of research which may be thought of as constituting the philosophy of chemistry. Indeed, there may even be controversy over what counts as legitimate work within the field. The papers gathered together in this issue reflect, we think, some of the internal tensions within the philosophy of chemistry. No attempt has been made by the editors to present only those papers which complement one another, or argue only for a particular point of view. We feel instead that the greatest case for the philosophy of chemistry can be made by presenting the best work in the field, which reflects perhaps alternative points of view.

Thus, it is our hope that here the reader will find ample evidence not that we should consider allowing the philosophy of chemistry into the club with the other subdisciplines within the philosophy of science, but that it has *already emerged* as an area of legitimate philosophical inquiry. That more good work may now be done in this long neglected area is the intended goal of this volume.

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