



The Development of Modern Philosophy by Robert Adamson

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merits have lain too long unrecognized—is very interesting and welcome, as bringing into more general notice his significance for modern speculation. With this book of Professor Laurie in the one hand, and that by Professor Pringle Pattison on “Scottish Philosophy,” with its fine comparison of the Scottish and German answers to Hume, in the other, the student will not fail to know what is most important for him to know of this interesting phase of philosophy.

KILMARNOCK, SCOTLAND.

JAMES LINDSAY.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY, with Other Lectures and Essays. By Robert Adamson, M. A., LL. D. Sometime Professor of Logic and Rhetoric in the University of Glasgow. Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1903. In two Volumes. Pp. *xlxviii*, 358, and *xv*, 330.

These volumes are edited by Prof. Sorley, who has prefixed to them an interesting and sympathetic memoir. The whole of the first volume is occupied with the lectures on the Development of Modern Philosophy, which are reproduced from the notes of students. The lectures on Kant formed part of a separate course, and are on a considerably larger scale than those on the Philosophers who precede and follow him. The historical lectures are followed by others entitled “Suggestions towards a theory of Knowledge based on the Kantian.” The views put forward here are of great interest, but any attempt to give an account of them would take this notice more deeply into Epistemology than would be suitable for a *Journal of Ethics*.

The latter half of the second volume is occupied by a course of lectures on the “Principles of Psychology,” any detailed notice of which would also be beyond the sphere of this paper. There remain the seven Essays and Addresses with which the second volume commences. These are, an Inaugural Address in the University of Glasgow, a lecture on Giordano Bruno, another on Psychology and Epistemology, an early fragment on Kant’s view of Psychology, and addresses to popular audiences on Philosophy and the Social Problem, the Basis of Morality, and the Regeneration of Germany.

The address on Philosophy and the Social Problem contains some valuable criticism of the ideas of Organism and Development as applied to society. Of the first, Dr. Adamson says,

“undoubtedly no conception has more commended itself to our ordinary thinking. It was among the earliest, it is among the latest of the general ideas brought to bear on the social life. . . . Yet I venture to say that the employment of the notion is always a sign of an unscientific stage of sociological thinking. No one would deny the historical value of the idea. . . . But it has to be borne in mind that the differences between the social life and that of an organized living being are far more important and go far deeper than the resemblances which at best are but superficial” (ii. 81).

With regard to the notion of Development the author does not deny that it may have some validity as applied to human history, but insists that “it is an intruder, and a uselessly disturbing intruder, to sociological inquiries (ii, 84). For, although, when events have happened, they may perhaps be profitably considered as the unfolding of a plan, yet the ground of our endeavor to bring about certain events can never reasonably be that they are included in the eternal plan, which cannot be certain till they have happened. In guiding or predicting action we must base our conclusion, not on the nature of the eternal plan, but on the human desire to bring about a state better than the present.

In the address on the Basis of Morality the main contention is that the idea of an absolute end is itself a derivative notion and cannot be taken as the ultimate foundation of morality. While rejecting much of Green’s position, the author entirely agrees with him in the admission that all our definite conceptions of morality have to start with existing usage and law. What remains rather obscure is how, from this starting point alone, a start is ever to be made. After all, morality frequently find itself in the position of asserting that the present state of things is wrong. Now, is it possible to justify this assertion if we have no other basis for morality than the very state of things we are condemning? On this point the address gives us no guidance.

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