

**EARLY AMERICAN
PHILOSOPHERS. LECTURES
ON MORAL PHILOSOPHY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649495078

Early American Philosophers. Lectures on Moral Philosophy by John Witherspoon & Varnum Lansing Collins

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

JOHN WITHERSPOON & VARNUM LANSING COLLINS

**EARLY AMERICAN
PHILOSOPHERS. LECTURES
ON MORAL PHILOSOPHY**

**LECTURES ON
MORAL PHILOSOPHY**

EARLY AMERICAN PHILOSOPHERS

LECTURES ON
MORAL PHILOSOPHY

BY

JOHN WITHERSPOON, D.D., LL.D.

PRESIDENT OF THE COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY

Edited under the Auspices of
The American Philosophical Association

BY

VARNUM LANSING COLLINS



Princeton, N. J.

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

1912



JOHN WITHERSPOON, D.D., LL.D.

[From the painting by Charles Wilson Peale]

198314
OCT -6 1915
BM
.W77

PREFATORY NOTE

As this book is the first of a proposed series of reprints of works of early American philosophers, a word may be said as to the general plan of which it forms a part.

Projected by the American Philosophical Association, the series is to be published under the Association's auspices by the institutions with which the authors of the works chosen were more particularly affiliated. Thus, this volume bears the imprint of the Princeton University Press; and it is hoped to issue in due course, at Columbia University President Johnson's "Elements of Philosophy", at Harvard University the Dudleian "Lectures on Natural Religion", at Yale University selections from the philosophical writings of the elder Jonathan Edwards, and elsewhere other works of similar character, representative of the deeper currents of American thinking in the early period. Much of this thinking is at least respectable, and some of it significant and important; but knowledge and appreciation of it seem at the present day to be remarkably lacking. The aim then of this series is to develop a consciousness of the historical background of our native American philosophy, especially among those who, as teachers and students of philosophy, are heirs of the tradition, and therefore should also be its keepers.

INTRODUCTION

President Witherspoon's memory rests in the keeping of several classes of readers. Those who concern themselves with our Revolutionary history—and they form the largest group—know him as the Scottish Presbyterian clergyman who became president of Princeton, an active patriot, a member of the Continental Congress, and a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Students of early American academic history, on the other hand, find in their field frequent witness to his educational inspiration—for example, he signed the bachelor diplomas of thirteen college presidents, to say nothing of teachers of lesser prominence. Likewise, those who are acquainted with the annals of American Presbyterianism are aware of Dr. Witherspoon's influence in framing the present constitution of that church; and finally, he holds a place in the slender company of early American philosophers because it was during his régime, and through his teaching, that Princeton became the home and fountain-head of Scottish realistic philosophy in America. Behind all this, moreover, one catches echoes of a brave career on the other side of the Atlantic; and one is driven to wonder then what manner of man this many-sided Scotsman was who, with life two-thirds spent, yet could come to a new country and, within the swift compass of a quarter of a century, leave on its history an impress so broad, so deep, so unimagined. And it is this question that these preliminary pages will try to answer.

Sprung from stock that was largely ecclesiastical John Witherspoon was destined for the church before he had learned his letters. A precocious boy, with gifts carefully fostered in the sober atmosphere of his father's manse, he was able to read his Bible at the age of four, and, after a grammar school preparation, to matriculate at Edinburgh University in February 1736—a few days after his thirteenth birthday. Here he spent the next seven years of his life, receiving his degree in 1739, and his licensure in 1743. He had been occupying his first charge, that of Beith in Ayrshire, barely half a year when he proved that he was already one of those men whose eager sympathies and quick enthusiasms will never let their lives be hedged in by the mere offices they happen to be filling. For, soon after the outbreak of the Rebellion of 1745, he raised a company of volunteers and marched away to aid in repelling the Young Pretender's invasion. The company was disbanded before it saw any active service, but its fledgling leader was not to be completely thwarted. In his veins was racing an atavistic strain of fighting blood, the blood of ancestors who bore the wooden "spon" or spear, whence came the family name. And at the battle of Falkirk accordingly, accompanied by his faithful beadle, he appeared as a spectator. But he lingered too long; the beadle had neglected to divest himself of his weapons; and when the day was done the worthy pair, protesting stoutly but in vain, found themselves swept up by the Pretender's forces and held as prisoners of war. Mr. Witherspoon's experiences at Castle Doune, where he was confined, were such that he never fully recovered his health. His next appearance at a scene of conflict was to