

**MODERN THINKERS AND PRESENT
PROBLEMS: AN APPROACH TO
MODERN PHILOSOPHY THROUGH
ITS HISTORY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649651078

Modern Thinkers and Present Problems: An Approach to Modern Philosophy Through Its History by Edgar A. Singer

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

EDGAR A. SINGER

**MODERN THINKERS AND PRESENT
PROBLEMS: AN APPROACH TO
MODERN PHILOSOPHY THROUGH
ITS HISTORY**



GIORDANO BRUNO

From a bust attributed to Villefranche. In the Johnson collection, Philadelphia.

MODERN THINKERS
AND
PRESENT PROBLEMS

AN APPROACH TO MODERN PHILOSOPHY
THROUGH ITS HISTORY

BY
EDGAR A. SINGER, JR., PH. D.
PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA



NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

1923

10009

22

COPYRIGHT, 1923,
BY
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

November, 1929

PRINTED IN
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PREFACE

THESE papers, which had been written from time to time and for various occasions, have been brought together without any attempt to make them tell a smooth unbroken story, yet not without regard to their connectedness. They have sometimes served me to bring before the mind of youth certain problems on which philosophers have thought again and again. But if they have had any interest for youth, if they are to have any for maturity, it can only be because the names that stand over the chapters might, if moments had names, be those of moments in each man's history.

And as such, unless I have altogether failed to make my characters real, these names will be recognized. Who has not sometime been that Bruno who stepped from his Father's House, where all had revolved so solicitously about himself, to find without the cold stars gazing down on his atomy from their places in endless emptiness?

Who has not come to feel, with Spinoza, those inviolable laws of mechanism which govern the world about him creeping into his own inmost being, threat-

PREFACE

ening there all that he had so simply and yet so dearly clung to as his freedom and autonomy?

How many reflecting in their maturity on the unquestioning faiths of their childhood have thought to bring these to the test of such experience as natural science depends on, only to find, as Hume found, these faiths unconfirmed?

And of those who have lived through this moment of disillusionment, there will always be some who will have come in their own way to the position severe reasoning forced on Kant: The spiritual aspects of reality are not issues of science and intellection, but belong to that other order of truth grasped by the "practical reason."

Others, meanwhile, will have refused to let their speculation go beyond the insight experience yields, and of these some at least will have found that experience holds out nothing hopeful for now or forever. They will have seen with Schopenhauer into the "deep abyss" and found at the bottom of it only this counsel: Not-being is better than being.

Or if perhaps they have for a moment thought, with Nietzsche, that evolutionary science had brought to view a goal that gave heart to the pitiless struggle of life by holding before it the vision of the "far future man," they may in the end have come to see beyond this Superman. But to have seen beyond

PREFACE

him nothing but the super-superman is to have seen the goal vanish and the heart lose its hope.

And what then? The pages on "Pragmatism" and on "Progress" may offer suggestions of an answer. They are still historical in their spirit, and like those that had gone before them mean to illustrate, not to demonstrate or affirm. They, too, would stand for moments of any thoughtful life and will have done all they were intended to do if they inform such a life with, and give it a sense of attachment to the world that has gone before and is going on 'round.

But if one would at the outset know something of what the writer suspects to be the outcome of ordered and historically guided reflection on these subjects, let him turn to the closing chapter, if not for encouragement then for warning.

Every one will remember the word to his reader with which Montaigne closes the preface to his *Essays*. 'Tis but of himself he would write and "it is then no reason thou shouldst employ thy time about so frivolous and vain a subject. Therefore farewell."

I cannot close *my* preface without confessing a misgiving that must have beset everyone who ever wrote of the past: that whereas he set out to lose

PREFACE

himself in history, he may have found in history nothing but himself. But on the bare chance of this having befallen me, I need not say "farewell" beforehand; for well I know no reader will accompany me far through this past save one who finds *himself* there too.