

**STUDIES IN
PHILOSOPHY, ANCIENT
AND MODERN**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649159079

Studies in philosophy, ancient and modern by W. L. Courtney

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RIVINGTONS
WATERLOO PLACE, LONDON

MDCCCLXXXII

P R E F A C E.

Two of the Essays included in this volume have appeared before. The one entitled "The New Psychology," was published in the *Fortnightly Review*; "Epicurus" formed one of the essays in *Hellenica*, edited by Mr. Evelyn Abbott. The others, though written at different times, are now published for the first time.

It is probably useless to profess complete consistency of standpoint in a collection of papers which deal with such different subjects and refer to such different periods in the history of Philosophy. But the one common feature which runs through them is intended to be a vindication of the Kantian standpoint, as against popular English Philosophy on the one side, and later German Metaphysics on the other. And in Kant himself the preference is given to the Critique of Pure Reason rather than to the two Critiques of Practical Reason and the Faculty of Judgment. It

is the two latter treatises which have given rise to the systems of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, with all their imposing structure of Transcendentalism.

The main question which a modern metaphysician must solve appears to me to be this. Assuming that the chief interest of Philosophy is to determine the meaning and content of "Consciousness," the question is whether the Ego of man is, in its fundamental essence, a thinking or an acting power. If it is essentially an acting power, then I can understand (despite of Hegel's professed inability to do so) the supremacy, the unlimitedness, the freedom of the Ego, exhibited, as for instance Kant exhibits it, in Morality and the reality of a Moral Law. I can then also understand its independence of experience, of the physical world of nature. But if the Ego be essentially a thinking power, then it seems to me to be necessarily limited, conditioned, not free. To think is, in more senses than one, to limit and to be limited, to determine and to be determined; and a thinking reason is dependent on conditions which may justly be described as foreign to itself. But to say that the Ego, as a thinking power, is absolute, to deliver the theoretical reason from all bondage to the Non-Ego, appears to me to savour of that *Schwärmerei* which is so fatal a tendency in metaphysical systems. If it

be said that the Ego is both a thinking power and an acting power, the conflicting relations of the two have to be solved, and the original question reappears.

To the English school of thought, as I understand it, the content of "Consciousness" is not a main philosophical interest, but rather the supposed evolution of man's essence from material conditions, the explanation of consciousness from the side of non-consciousness,—involving, in most cases, the denial that the Ego is a power at all. But how the scientific school of thinkers are able to explain away the metaphysical difficulty, I find myself unable to comprehend.

That these studies are but slight contributions to the subject, and that they are critical rather than constructive, are facts of which I am only too conscious. But it is impossible to construct on insufficient data. "To fly to the highest universals" is indeed a common philosophical device, even since the time of Bacon, for those who demand Philosophy "aus einem Stück;" but it argues a sanguine optimism which, I confess, I do not see to be warranted by the present condition of metaphysics. And perhaps after Hegel's dialectic of the Idea, Comte's *Philosophie Positive*, and Herbert Spencer's *Synthetic Philosophy*, we have had enough "construction" to last our time.