

**A STUDY IN THE  
PHILOSOPHY  
OF BERGSON**

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A study in the philosophy of Bergson by Gustavus Watts Cunningham

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**GUSTAVUS WATTS CUNNINGHAM**

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BY

GUSTAVUS WATTS CUNNINGHAM, A.M., PH.D.  
GEORGE NYE AND ANNE WALKER BOARDMAN PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY,  
MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

UNIVERSITY OF  
CALIFORNIA

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## PREFACE

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IN recent years much has been written concerning the philosophy of M. Bergson. The philosophical journals have been crowded with articles dealing with one phase or another of the 'new' philosophy, while the presses of both this country and Europe have sent forth book after book expounding, elaborating, or criticizing the views of the French thinker. It would seem appropriate, therefore, that another essay in the midst of this flood of literature bear in its preface a word in justification of its appearance.

The reason why this unpretentious volume has been written and published is simply this. The very popularity of Bergson's views, as evidenced by the discussion which they have aroused, is sufficient indication of the fact that they must perforce be taken into serious account by contemporary workers in the philosophical field. Particularly is it incumbent upon those who, like the present writer, find themselves holding views which are radically different from what at first glance would seem to be the doctrine so forcefully and eloquently set forth by the author of *L'Évolution Créatrice*,

to come to grips with this new theory and to measure their views in the light of the suggestions which it presents. The present study is the result of the writer's efforts to do just this. It is sent out to the public in the hope that it may, to some extent at least, aid in the clarification of some of the issues involved in Bergsonism and also—if so bold a statement be permitted—in the exposure of what to many would seem to be errors which the new philosophy threatens to perpetuate.

In order to prevent a possible misconception of this study, let it be said at once that it is a critique and not a summary. Consequently the writer has not hesitated to pass by many interesting phases of Bergson's thought and to confine his attention to what he regards as his author's basic doctrine. It will not be surprising, therefore, if the reader finds that certain views which he has been accustomed to associate with Bergson's name are touched upon only incidentally, if at all, while other matters which may have seemed to him of small import loom large in the discussion. The aim of the writer has been to fix attention exclusively upon the method of the new philosophy and the conception of reality which that method implies. The effort has persistently been made to focus debate upon the fundamentals and to avoid obscuring the issue by the introduction of what might perhaps be regarded as more or less irrelevant details. What the discussion lacks in comprehensiveness will thus, it is



hoped, be atoned for by continuity and definiteness. If the reader, when he shall have completed the book, feels that at least one problem of fundamental importance not only in the philosophy of Bergson but also in the philosophical field generally has been raised and an answer to it, contrary to the letter but perhaps in harmony with the spirit of Bergson's own views and also in harmony with the main line of the development of modern epistemological theory, suggested, the book will not have wholly failed of its purpose. It is, of course, gratuitous to add that, so far as the writer has been able to make it so, the criticism which the study undertakes is constructive.

The substance of the chapters dealing with duration and finality has already appeared in the form of articles in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. XXIII. I wish to express to the Editor of that journal my appreciation of his kind permission to present here the same material in a somewhat altered and expanded form. Since the English translations of the author's principal works have received his personal approval, their text and pagination are made use of in connection with the references and quotations which concern those works.

My study of M. Bergson's works has been a source of many thought-provoking suggestions, and it is a genuine pleasure to me to make acknowledgment of the fact. I do not exaggerate when I say that my own philosophical outlook is materially

different from what it was before I undertook a systematic investigation of his brilliant writings. I make this confession all the more gladly, since I have been compelled in the pages which follow to state as vigorously as I might my disagreement with much of what he has written. Students of philosophy by no means always derive the greatest assistance from those with whose opinions they find themselves in full accord. My colleague, Professor Vernon C. Harrington, of the English Department of Middlebury College, has read the entire work in manuscript, and I wish here to express my appreciation of his interest, encouragement and helpful criticism. I am also deeply indebted to Professor J. E. Creighton, of the Sage School of Philosophy of Cornell University, for many valuable suggestions. My friend and pupil, Mr. C. H. Wright, has very kindly assisted in the arduous task of verifying the numerous quotations and references.

In conclusion, I desire to place on record my sincere gratitude to Viscount Haldane for the encouragement and inspiration which I have received from correspondence with him during the course of this study. While he is in no way responsible for any opinion which finds expression in the work, I nevertheless feel that the success of my efforts, whatever measure of success may perchance have attended them, is in no small degree due to him and to the sympathetic interest he has manifested

in a former work of mine. Indeed, apart from a remark made by him apropos of that work concerning the inadequacy of the Bergsonian point of view and the necessity of supplementing it by bringing it into harmony with the fundamentals of intellectualism, I am not at all sure that the present argument would have taken tangible shape.

G. W. C.

MIDDLEBURY, VERMONT,  
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