

**THE SCOTTISH
CONTRIBUTION TO MORAL
PHILOSOPHY: INAUGURAL
LECTURE, OCTOBER 21, 1898**

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The Scottish contribution to moral philosophy: inaugural lecture, October 21, 1898 by James
Seth

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JAMES SETH

**THE SCOTTISH
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PHILOSOPHY: INAUGURAL
LECTURE, OCTOBER 21, 1898**

THE "SCOTTISH CONTRIBUTION
TO MORAL PHILOSOPHY"

Inaugural Lecture

BY

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UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

OCTOBER 21, 1898

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
MDCCCXCVIII

NOTE.

Owing to pressure of time, this lecture was somewhat curtailed in delivery. The passages omitted consisted mainly of citations from the authors under consideration; and as these are important for the interpretation of their views, the lecture is here printed as originally written.

INAUGURAL LECTURE.

IN entering upon the duties of the Chair of Moral Philosophy in this University, I may be permitted to express my sense of the honour of the office, and the satisfaction with which, after a considerable period of work in other lands, I return to the service of my own country and of my own University.

The Chair of Moral Philosophy has been filled by a long line of distinguished men, by Adam Ferguson and Dugald Stewart, by Thomas Brown and Christopher North. But it is not of these names that I chiefly think when I wish to realise the honour and the responsibility of the position to which I have been called, but of him who must be in all our thoughts to-day, my own teacher, who so long and so honourably occupied this Chair. It seems but the other day that I

saw Professor Calderwood for the first time in the Moral Philosophy class-room, and it is difficult to realise that he has already passed beyond our sight. I can never forget what I owe to him; and while it is with great diffidence that I venture to take up his work in the University, the memory of his example will be a constant inspiration in my task. It would be impertinent in me to attempt an appreciation of the work of Professor Calderwood as a philosopher, as a teacher, or as a man and a citizen. But no one could know him in these various relations without perceiving the essential harmony and even identity that underlay them. The man and the philosopher and the teacher were one; he lived his philosophy, and practised what he taught. His life was a rare exemplification of the ancient Greek ideal of the identity of the good man with the good citizen, and the loss of his removal has been felt by his fellow-citizens hardly less than by his colleagues and his students. Such a man's place cannot be filled; such a man's influence outlives himself. The name of Henry Calderwood will not soon be forgotten by the University and the city of Edinburgh.

Throughout his philosophic career Professor

Calderwood was identified with that type of philosophy which has come to be known abroad as well as at home by the national name; and it seemed to me that it might not be inappropriate to the occasion to call attention to the more significant elements in the Scottish contribution to Moral Philosophy. Nor must we limit our consideration to what is technically described as the "Scottish School," if we would understand even this more limited part of the field. The movement of Scottish Moral Philosophy from Hutcheson to the present day is a single movement, which can be understood only if it is studied as a whole.

In this movement the University of Glasgow has played an even more important part than our own University, through the succession of brilliant men who have occupied its Chair of Moral Philosophy. Hutcheson's *Inquiry* and Reid's *Essays on the Active Powers* represent, with Hume's *Treatise* and *Enquiry*, the three important stages in the development of ethical philosophy in Scotland.

"Hutcheson," says the late Professor Veitch, "struck with firm hand the keynote of Scottish speculation."¹ If, in his polemic against the

¹ *Memoir of Dugald Stewart*, p. 19.

crude empiricism which seems to have dominated the Scottish Universities during the first half of the eighteenth century, Hutcheson is an important precursor of Reid, his refutation of the ethical subjectivism of Hobbes has a unique historical importance. He is not to be regarded as merely the disciple of Shaftesbury and the continuator of his doctrine. In the characteristic features of his thought, in his theory of the "Moral Sense," and in his doctrine of Benevolence, he is distinctly original; and in many respects his Moral Philosophy suggests, and bears, the comparison with his greater English contemporary, Bishop Butler.

Hutcheson's polemic is chiefly directed, like Shaftesbury's, against the egoism of Hobbes and his followers. Virtue, he insists, is not a matter of self-interest, as "some of our moralists themselves" would have us believe, "so much are they accustomed to deduce every approbation or aversion from rational views of interest." On the contrary, there is "some quality apprehended in actions which procures approbation, and love towards the actor, from those who receive no advantage by the action," and "a contrary quality, which excites aversion, and dislike towards the actor, even from persons