

THE PHILOSOPHY OF BERGSON

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The philosophy of Bergson by A. D. Lindsay

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A. D. LINDSAY

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OF BERGSON**

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BY

A. D. LINDSAY

FELLOW AND TUTOR OF BALLIOL COLLEGE, OXFORD



1911

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PREFACE

SOME apology is needed for publishing a book on the philosophy of Bergson. Books on philosophers are always a poor substitute for the writings of the philosophers themselves, and that is especially true of a writer so brilliant as Monsieur Bergson. My excuse is that in some degree the very brilliance and charm of Monsieur Bergson's writing has hindered a proper appreciation of his work. His method of philosophical exposition is a combination of abstract thinking and most illuminating and suggestive concrete illustrations. The combination constitutes, I think, an ideal method, but, as few professional philosophers since Plato have had the artist's power of concrete vision, an unusual one. In consequence the suggestiveness of the illustrations has obscured the systematic nature of the thought which they illustrate, and Bergson has, in spite of his explanations and protests, too often been regarded by his

admirers as a philosopher who does not believe in systematic thinking and by his critics as a writer remarkable indeed for some brilliant *aperçus* but not to be taken seriously as a philosopher. I have therefore endeavoured to bring out the unity and systematic nature of Monsieur Bergson's thought, and to show something of its connection with the historical development of philosophy, and more especially with the philosophy of Kant. The book does not pretend to be an account of all Monsieur Bergson's work. There are many things in his writings which I have not discussed, notably his contribution to æsthetics in *Le Rire* and his more special psychological studies, such as *Le Rêve*, *L'Effort Intellectuel*, and *Le Souvenir du Présent et la Fausse Reconnaissance*. Further, as I have wished to examine certain problems with which modern philosophy is especially concerned in the light which Monsieur Bergson throws upon them, rather than to make a critical study of his writings in great detail, I have not been careful to distinguish when I am merely giving a résumé of what Monsieur Bergson says and when the arguments are my own.

For the same reason I have ventured to criticise the details of Monsieur Bergson's arguments when they seemed to me to obscure what I take to be the main results of his thinking.

As a justification of my attempt to reduce to more technical terms and to connect with previous philosophy, writing so fresh and original I would quote Monsieur Bergson's own words:—

“La philosophie, dans ses plus profondes analyses et dans ses plus hautes synthèses, est obligée de parler la langue de tout le monde. De là une illusion assez répandue, qui consiste à croire qu'on peut aborder d'emblée l'œuvre d'un philosophe contemporain, y entrer de plain pied et la réfuter au pied levé, trancher les problèmes qu'elle pose ou les écarter comme autant de futilités, sans tenir compte des vingt cinq siècles de méditation, d'inquiétude et d'effort qui sont comme condensés dans la forme actuelle de ces problèmes et jusque dans les termes dont nous nous servons pour les énoncer.”¹

For convenience I have cited the pages in the English translation of *Les Données Immédiates de la*

¹ *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, vol. xvi. p. 32.

Conscience, Matière et Mémoire, and *L'Évolution Créatrice*, and have referred to these books by their English titles and in most cases quoted from the translation. As the *Introduction à la Métaphysique* which appeared in the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, January 1903, is now out of print and almost inaccessible in French, I have in referring to it cited the pages of the German translation.

The book contains the substance of lectures which I delivered at Balliol as Jowett Lecturer, and I have not been careful to remove all traces of their original form, nor to change their original character, of an endeavour rather to help myself and possibly others to understand the main lines of Monsieur Bergson's thought than to appraise its value or to attempt a complete and critical answer to the questions which it raises.

A. D. LINDSAY

April 1911

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