

**THE PHILOSOPHY
OF THOMAS HILL
GREEN**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649212521

The philosophy of Thomas Hill Green by W. H. Fairbrother

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W. H. FAIRBROTHER

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SECOND EDITION

184668
18.10.23

METHUEN & CO.
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.
LONDON
1900

PREFATORY NOTE

THE substance of the following pages was originally given, in the form of lectures, to students of philosophy at Oxford. It has been entirely recast and rewritten, as well as added to, but my object is the same, viz., a simple, plain exposition of the philosophic teaching of T. H. Green. Such an exposition ought to have a certain value of its own, but my real motive is to help the younger student to "read Green" for himself. In the ordinary course of tutorial work it has been found that, to many men, Green is not easy reading. The sterling honesty which made him so anxiously painstaking in writing his sentences, lest they should express more than seemed to him the exact truth, has, for its effect, that the reader experiences something of the same mental effort. Those who felt his personal influence need no further help or stimulus in reading his books, but men who only know Green through his writings, and perhaps, as yet, scarcely realise the importance

of the questions under discussion, sometimes find his thorough and exhaustive method of treatment a little too difficult for them. The result is too often a superficial and second-hand acquaintance with his supposed views. The loss is incalculable. Opinions may differ as to the value of Green's conclusions, or even the cogency of his reasoning, but no one can question the benefit to be derived from a thorough study of his teaching. His is, perhaps, the only modern philosophy of life which is, at once, complete and consistent—which derives and justifies both moral responsibility in the present, and hope for the future, from a rigorously scientific metaphysic.

It is solely in the belief that a short, straightforward account of Green's method of working, with the results thereby arrived at, may indirectly help to promote the study of his writings, that these few pages have been written.

LINCOLN COLLEGE, OXFORD,

January, 1896.

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY

IF a phrase be sought with which to sum up Professor Green's general position in regard to life and its problems, it would be difficult to find one more fitting than Aristotle's *ἔσμεν ἐνεργεῖα*. Not in wisdom merely, or in potential capacity, but in actually living his life, does Green hold that true well-being for a man is to be found. To discover and to demonstrate in what true human well-being consists is the highest intellectual object for man, and is specially the aim which philosophy should set before itself; to realise this discovery in civic life is the one practical function of the good citizen. Thus Green's primary aim is Moral and Political Philosophy, of which the latter¹ is

¹ Cf. Works ii. p. 335. "My purpose is to consider the moral function, or object, served by law, or by the system of rights and obligations which the State enforces, and, in so doing, to discover the true ground, or justification, for obedience to law."

Ibid. p. 334. Nettleship's note. Civil institutions are "regarded as the external expression of the moral progress of mankind, and as supplying the material through which the idea of perfection must be realised."