
RECENT AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY

BY

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If one looks at the philosophical menu today one finds among others the following items of food: Absolutistic Personalism, A Search for a System, The Philosophy of a Meliorist, Philosophical Liberalism, In Vestigiis Veritatis, The Way of Opinion, Logic and Pragmatism, Problematic Realism, A Tentative Realistic Metaphysics, Confessions of an Animistic Materialist, Empirical Idealism, Personal Realism, Empiricism, and An Unborn Idealism¹).

For tomorrow's menu we are offered some further additions, such as: The Humanization of Philosophy, The Gospel of Technology, Toward a Social Philosophy, The Socialization of Morality, Experimental Naturalism, Toward Radical Empiricism in Ethics, An Amateur's Search for Significance, Toward a Naturalistic Conception of Logic, and A Catholic's View²).

We see from this simple enumeration of various points of view that there is a great activity in the field of philosophy in this country. Some sixty philosophers give us a sample of their *credo* in the three volumes from which the titles above are given. These represent a large fraternity now teaching at the many universities and colleges of the land.

In the second place, there seems to be a great independence of thought manifest among American philosophers today. There was a time when American philosophy, as American literature in general, was largely a rehash of what Europe and particularly of what Great Britain, offered. That is no longer the case. Looking

1) *Contemporary American Philosophy*, Personal Statements, Edited by George P. Adams and Wm. Pepperell Montague. N. Y. 1930. Table of Contents.

2) *American Philosophy Today and Tomorrow*. Edited by Horace M. Kallen and Sidney Hook.

at the whole scene in 1930, GEORG HERBERT PALMER, then past eighty, said: "At present too little history is studied. Our young philosophers lack balance. Fifty years ago they lacked courage" ³). A premature yearning for the niche and the palm seems to have induced a certain recklessness of spirit.

This leads us to think that the variety of foods that appear on the menu today is not so bewildering as it appears at first glance. When I eat at a "Child's Restaurant" for a considerable period of time, I become darkly suspicious that a comparatively small number of staple products compose all the host of dishes that are offered. There are many sandwiches for my choice: I seem to taste bread in them all. There are many salads alluring me; the royal lettuce appears in most of them. So too no new foods have really been discovered in America. We give men credit for the cleverness with which they make new combinations and give these combinations new names, but we cannot forsake our common sense that tells us that there is nothing new under the sun.

As to the ingredients from which all these combination-dishes are prepared, they are few indeed. For an appetizer we have the usual fruit-cup, now called *experience*. PLATO no doubt relished biting into the eternal Ideas at the outset of the meal. As for us, we need to be introduced gradually to such high and lofty realms. "In the beginning is the given" ⁴). The pre-critical datum is absolutely uninterpreted.

It is upon this pre-critical, uninterpreted datum that the human intelligence must begin its work ⁵). "The evidence which we can at present command compels the belief that man's life on this planet is a unique phenomenon in the universe, and that he will in vain consult the stars or the heavens above to chart his course" ⁶). We consult no revelation of any sort ⁷).

Does this declaration of autonomy mean that we think we can comprehend the whole of heaven and earth in our philosophy? Not at all. We have given up the search for absolutes and for

³) *Contemp. Am. Phil.*, I p. 30.

⁴) *Contemp. Am. Phil.*, I p. 61.

⁵) *Contemp. Am. Phil.*, I p. 145.

⁶) *Contemp. Am. Phil.*, I p. 342.

⁷) HEINEMANN, *Neue Wege der Philosophie*, p. XXI.