

## Pragmatism and French Voluntarism: With Especial Reference to the Notion of Truth in the Development of French Philosophy from Maine De Biran to Professor Bergson (Girton Coillege Studies) (Volume 6)

L. Susan Stebbing

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The author of this compact volume writes from the standpoint of intellectualism, and consequently is committed from the beginning to a critical attitude toward pragmatism and French voluntarism, especially toward that development of voluntarism which is represented by Bergsonian Intuitionism. Nevertheless, her treatment of these 'New Philosophers' shows that she "is not blind to the interest and importance of M. Bergson's work." She distinguishes carefully between M. Bergson's anti-intellectualism and the antiintellectualism of the pragmatists. Both fail to give a satisfactory account of truth, but with the pragmatist it is because he identifies truth with one of its consequences, while with the Bergsonian intuitionist it is because he identifies truth with reality. Throughout the discussion of pragmatism the author assumes that pragmatism as a whole adopts the notion of truth presented by James in *The Meaning of Truth*, that "what works is true and represents a reality for the individual for whom it works." Thus in the consideration of the relation between truth and utility M. Bergson and his disciples are at the opposite pole from pragmatism. For while M. Bergson condemns the intellect because it is pragmatic, the pragmatists condemn any view of the intellect which makes it not pragmatic. For M. Bergson utility is rather synonymous with error than with truth. Where pragmatists substitute will and desire for the intellect, Bergsonians substitute the mystic faculty of intuition. These constitute two of the three ways offered by voluntarism for the solution of problems which the intellect has thus far left unsolved. The author classifies these methods as: (1) solution by extrarational choice, such as the "will to believe" of James and the "wager" of Pascal; (2) solution by means of action, which constitutes part of the pragmatic method; (3) solution by means of intuition. The criticism which the author passes on these three methods is that they are not solutions at all. The antinomies which they are supposed to solve are antinomies of reason and must be solved by reason. Any extra-rational solution is merely a confession that the problem is insoluble. The way to further advance lies, she thinks, in the complete development of the intellect, not in a resort to anti-intellectualistic methods. The book as whole is stimulating, if only for the questions which it raises in the mind of the reader. The author's grouping of voluntarists may seem at times more or less arbitrary, and her treatment of other questions than that concerning the nature of truth somewhat confusing. In passing it may be remarked that the treatment of Fouillée's philosophy of *Idées-forces* should properly have been reserved for a separate work; for the author's general discussion of voluntarism and pragmatism, as opposed to intellectualism, leaves little room for an adequate treatment of a philosopher who was at once a voluntarist and an intellectualist, and who opposed with equal vigor the intuitionism of M. Bergson and the pragmatism of James.

-The Philosophical Review, Volume 24

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