Book Notice

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Here is a book written or edited from stenographic reports of the brilliant lectures and class-room discussions conducted in 1921–22 by Henry Horace Williams, Professor of Philosophy for fifty years (1891–1941) at the University of North Carolina.

Henry Horace Williams was part of the Hegelian movement which exerted a powerful influence upon American thought in that era. Hegelianism broke with fundamentalism and all theological authority. Its method was the interpretation of experience by reason. But its chief aim was to vindicate religious beliefs closely similar to the traditional ones in God, free-will, and immortality. It respected science but would not take science as a guide in thinking. It admitted the truth of Darwinian evolution, but it drew none of the important conclusions, indicated by that doctrine, about the biological basis of the spiritual life of man, or about his precarious status in the universe.

Hegelianism was tremendously important in weakening the hold of authoritarian fundamentalism upon the universities, and thus in creating a situation where a truly scientific philosophy could develop. This is what Horace Williams did in North Carolina through the teaching which is reported in the present volume. His influence prevented the passage of an anti-evolution law in that state, and was a major factor in the cultural and intellectual awakening that has occurred there since 1900.

The volume before us is a noble tribute to a great teacher and a great man. But its contribution to our knowledge of philosophical or of scientific truth is seriously questioned.

Gardner Williams