



A History of Philosophy: With Especial Reference to the Formation (Classic Reprint)

W. Windelband Windelb

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The evolution of an idea is in itself as interesting and valuable an object of study as the evolution of a word, of an institution, of a state, or of a vegetable or animal form. But aside from this interest which it has in common with other historical sciences, the history of philosophy has a peculiar value of its own. For the moment we attempt any serious thinking in any field, natural science, history, literature, ethics, theology, or any other, we find ourselves at the outset quite at the mercy of the words and ideas which form at once our intellectual atmosphere and the instruments with which we must work. We cannot speak, for example, of mind or matter, of cause or force, of species or individual, of universe or God, of freedom or necessity, of substance or evolution, of science or law, of good or true or real, without involving a host of assumptions. And the assumptions are there, even though we may be unconscious of them, or ignore them in an effort to dispense with metaphysics. To dispense with these conceptions is impossible. Our only recourse, if we would not beg our questions in advance, or remain in unconscious bondage to the instruments of our thought, or be slaves to the thinking of the past generations that have forged out our ideas for us, is to criticise our categories. And one of the most important, if not the only successful, means to this end is a study of the origin and development of these categories. We can free ourselves from the past only by mastering it. (Typographical errors above are due to OCR software and don't occur in the book.)

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