

Gustavus Watts Cunningham

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Gustavus Watts Cunningham was born of a Southern family and spent his early years in South Carolina. His undergraduate study was done at Furman University where he received his A.B. degree in 1902. For three years he served as Professor of English and Philosophy at Howard College in Birmingham. In 1905 he came to Cornell as scholar, and later fellow, in the Sage School of Philosophy. He received his Ph.D. in 1908 with a dissertation on "Thought and Reality in Hegel's System." He was a member of the societies of Phi Beta Kappa and Phi Kappa Phi.

From 1908 to 1917 he served as a teacher of philosophy at Middlebury College. While there he published his Cornell dissertation and also *A Study in the Philosophy of Bergson*. In 1917 he was called to the University of Texas as Associate Professor of Philosophy, soon being advanced to full rank. Two books appeared during his years at Texas. One entitled *Five Lectures on the Problem of Mind* was published in 1925. The other was published a year earlier under the title *The Problems of Philosophy*. This book, a systematic survey of those problems as they engaged thinkers in the field at that time, became a popular text in introductory courses; it was revised and enlarged in 1935.

He began his long and influential professorship at Cornell in 1927, serving as Chairman of the Sage School of Philosophy and Susan Linn Sage Professor of Philosophy. When he came, Cornell was a stronghold of neo-Hegelian idealism, and his own philosophical sympathies lay in the same direction. However, he was never a follower of any philosophical school, and his idealism became increasingly critical, as was evident in his book on *The Idealist Argument in Recent British and American Philosophy*, published in 1933. It was in harmony with his broad orientation that representatives of various philosophical viewpoints were brought to Cornell during the period of his leadership, so that the Sage School became known as actively fostering a wide spectrum of philosophical positions. Through a large part of this period he was an editor of the *Philosophical Review*, and several of his many articles were published in its pages. His interest in University affairs was vigorous and his participation in debates at meetings of the University faculty was lively. From 1944 to 1948 he served as Dean of the Cornell Graduate School where his scholarly concern and wise judgment were constantly evident. He retired from University duties in 1949.

Professor Cunningham gave the Howison Lecture at the University of California in 1933 under the title "Perspective and Context in the Meaning Situation." He contributed chapters toward the *Essays in Honor of James E. Creighton*

(edited by G. H. Sabine), *Contemporary American Philosophy* (edited by G. P. Adams and W. P. Montague), and *Contemporary Idealism in America* (edited by C. L. Barrett). He was president of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association in 1936-37, giving his presidential address on the theme "Meaning, Reference, and Significance." His alma mater Furman University honored him with a D.Litt. degree in 1916, and an LL.D. in 1935.

Many former undergraduate students in the Sage School will remember his illuminating lectures in the history of philosophy, which he continued to teach during his deanship, and candidates for advanced degrees will especially remember the seminar on Hegel which he gave for many years. To his colleagues he was a man of strong conviction, especially on the important role of philosophy in higher education, and also a man of genial friendliness in his personal relations. The picture of his courtly figure rhythmically swinging his cane as he walked to and from the campus, will long remain with those who knew him.

On retirement in 1949, he settled in the old family plantation near Laurens, South Carolina, where he lived for the nearly two decades that ended with his death. He had won a distinctive place in American philosophy and in the growth of the Sage School at Cornell. His wife, the former Mattie Hipp, who had been his close companion for more than fifty years, passed away in 1966. They had no children. His will provided for the establishment of two fellowships in philosophy at Cornell to be awarded annually on the recommendation of the Graduate School. One is named after his wife and the other after himself.

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