RALPH CUDWORTH
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An Interpretation

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CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
1951
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PREFACE

This is not the book I intended to write. My original purpose was to study the historical development of ethical rationalism in England, from Cudworth to the present day, in an attempt to understand its persistent vitality. I began to read the Cudworth manuscripts in the expectation that they would confirm the traditional account of his ethics, and would allow me to write of him as the first English representative of modern rationalism. But once the initial difficulty of sorting out the manuscripts had been overcome, an ethics began to emerge which looked very different from the 'Cudworth's ethics' of the text-books. With this clue, I returned to the study of his printed books. I thought I could now discern the outlines of a theory which was both interesting in itself and historically of very considerable importance. This book presents that theory. It is, then, primarily a work of historical excavation.

The brevity of the book is deliberate. Cudworth is not a first-order genius, whose every word must be scrutinized with care. It would be absurd to trace out every change in the movement of his thought, to mention every inconsistency into which he falls, or to expound his views on matters which are not now of the slightest interest to anyone. There are obvious dangers in a policy of selection; but Cudworth must somehow be rescued from his own wordiness. No doubt other Cudworths could be hewn out of the great mass of his work; I hope I have not ascribed to him any views which he at no time held, but I do not pretend to be presenting every view he at any time maintained. I have not hesitated to modernize spelling, punctuation, capitalization; the reader of Cudworth has enough obstacles to overcome, even in a modernized text.

The first and last chapters are primarily historical. The first chapter sets out to destroy the current 'stereotype' of
Cudworth, which pictures him as an antiquarian, remote, in his Cambridge isolation, from the philosophical controversies of his own time. The last chapter sketches his influence on Locke, Shaftesbury, Clarke and Price. The fifth, sixth and seventh chapters describe, critically, the ethico-religious doctrines of the manuscripts; this is the heart of the book. The remaining chapters outline Cudworth’s general philosophy, especially in so far as it is relevant to the understanding of his ethics. The Appendix is added for the benefit of those who might like to make their own way into the disorder of the Cudworth manuscripts.

I have tried to acknowledge my indebtedness to my predecessors in the notes and in the bibliography, but I owe so much to works from which I have nowhere had any occasion to quote that any such list is bound to be incomplete and somewhat misleading. Similarly, I cannot hope to make quite clear the extent of my indebtedness to Professor John Anderson, Professor of Philosophy in the University of Sydney, both because he has written so little and because his own interests do not lie particularly within the field of scholarship. But to him this book owes whatever philosophical qualities it may possess. On the other side, the side of detailed scholarship, I should like to acknowledge the training, and the encouragement, I received from the late Professor A. J. Waldo and Mr R. G. Howarth, of the Department of English in the University of Sydney, although in the years that have since elapsed I have had time to forget a great deal that they taught me. Professor H. B. Acton, Professor of Philosophy in Bedford College, the University of London, and Professor John Anderson have been good enough to read through the manuscript of this book—of course, they take no responsibility for its contents; and my wife undertook the task, by no means a sinecure, of checking my references. Professor J. La Nauze and Professor R. M. Hartwell have helped me to make my bibliography less imperfect than it would otherwise have been. Errors which remain must be set down to my own obstinacy. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Dr H. von Leyden, of the Univer-
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sity of Durham, for helping me to make use of the unpublished and at that time uncatalogued, Locke letters in the Bodleian Library.

And then there are the libraries. Above all, of course, the British Museum, but also the Fisher Library of the University of Sydney, the Dr Williams Library, which much facilitated, by its generous loan of books, the final stages of this work, the Warburg Institute, the Library of Bedford College, the Library of the London Society of Antiquarians and the Bodleian. Finally, I should like to thank the Senate of the University of Sydney for granting me leave of absence, and the Arts Research Committee, which so generously assisted me to meet the expenses of my year in England.

J.A.P.

LONDON

November 1948
ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviated references are used in this book:


E.I.M., 1, 1, 1 . . . A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality, Book I, Chapter 1, Section 1.


4982, 1 . . . . Additional Manuscripts in the British Museum Collection, Number 4982, page 1.

