

SAVERY, William Briggs (1875–1945)

William Savery was born on 26 September 1875 in Attleboro, Massachusetts. He received his BA from Brown University in 1896, and then entered Harvard University, receiving the MA in 1897. He studied at the University of Berlin in 1897–8 on a Sheldon Fellowship, and then returned to Harvard to earn his PhD in philosophy in 1899, writing a dissertation on "Some Fundamental Ethical Concepts, with Special Reference to the Concepts of Responsibility and Freedom." Savery's first teaching position was as professor of philosophy at Fairmont College in Kansas (now Wichita State University) from 1900 to 1902. In 1902 he was appointed professor of philosophy and chair of the department of philosophy and psychology at the University of Washington. After psychology became a separate department in 1915, he continued as philosophy chair until his death. Savery died on 8 December 1945 in Seattle, Washington.

Savery was an important scholar and teacher during his forty-three years of leadership at the University of Washington. During that period the philosophy department expanded, graduate study began, and the first doctorates in philosophy were awarded. He had a reputation for the sort of freethinking and liberal teaching that attracted criticism by the local media and conservative clergy. He was prominent on the campus in the state for his active role in advancing the liberal and progressive movement. After his death, Philosophy Hall was renamed Savery Hall. Savery was highly respected among his philosophy colleagues across America. He was Mills Professor at the University of California at Berkeley in 1933, and visiting professor at Columbia University in 1935–6. He also taught during summers at Harvard University, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of California at Berkeley, the University of California at Los Angeles, and Stanford University. He was elected President of the Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association in 1931–2. He was a member of Phi

Beta Kappa, Phi Kappa Sigma, the American Association of University Professors, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

During the first two decades of his career, Savery concentrated on teaching and developing the curriculum, and published very little. However, his philosophical orientation toward a broad and pluralistic naturalism had been inspired by his Harvard teachers William JAMES and George SANTAYANA. Further study of pragmatists Charles S. PEIRCE and John DEWEY further influenced Savery's pragmatic naturalism. His American Philosophical Association presidential address on "Chance and Cosmogony" offers a development of Peirce's theory of inductive probability for a philosophy of science and a non-reductive naturalism. Following William James, Savery called this kind of naturalism "concatenism," which holds that nature is composed of a plurality of individuals that partially overlap but are not parts of any greater all-inclusive type of being. Consistent with this ontological pluralism, Savery developed his "synoptic" theory of truth. As there are six basic logical types of increasingly complex propositions, from observation propositions to conjunction propositions, the six different theories of truth are designed to best fit each of these proposition types. The six theories of truth are the intuitionist, copy, identity, pragmatic, coherence, and adherence theories. The synoptic theory of truth combines the best features of these theories, and remains close to the pragmatic theory of truth.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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 "Chance and Cosmogony," *Philosophical Review* 41 (1932): 147–70.
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 "Possibility and Pluralism," *University of California Publications in Philosophy* 17 (1934): 199–223.
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“The Synoptic Theory of Truth,”

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“The Significance of Dewey’s Philosophy,” in

The Philosophy of John Dewey, ed. Paul
A. Schilpp (Evanston, Ill., 1939), pp.
481–513.

Other Relevant Works

Savery’s papers are at the University of
Washington.

Further Reading

*Pres Addr of APA v4, Proc of APA in Phil
Rev v55, Who Was Who in Amer v2,
Who’s Who in Phil*

Richard T. Hull
John R. Shook