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Sommario/riassunto

Goldwin Smith (1823-1910) was a celebrated, transatlantic writer on current events, politics, religion, history, and literature. While he made his academic mark teaching at Oxford, Cornell, and later as a resident guru at Toronto, his facile pen earned him a far greater reputation with general readers throughout the English-speaking world. Determined to rouse concern over issues that he deemed to be important to the advancement of humanity, Smith was deemed the controversialist by the Dictionary of National Biography. A study of his life and his writings provides new insight into liberalism, anti-semitism, the role of the journalist, and other aspects of life in late 19th century North America and Britain. As a public intellectual, Goldwin Smith spoke out on a variety of issues, frequently provoking intense debate. Phillips argues that the core of Smith's thought and the driving force behind his role as a controversialist lay in his moral philosophy, which provided a sense of direction to Smith's many and sometimes disparate writings and activities. This study will also probe the serious dilemma posed by Smith's path to agnosticism in the last decades of his life. By moving to a position of virtual unbelief, Smith risked damage not only to his carefully-crafted public persona, but also to a life's work as an impassioned moralist.

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