

**THE PHILOSOPHY OF
HUMANISM: AND
OF OTHER SUBJECTS**

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The Philosophy of Humanism: And of Other Subjects by Viscount Haldane

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PREFACE

IF I had called this book *The Philosophy of Humanism* without more, that title would virtually have covered its scope. But the reader would not have had his attention drawn to the significance which the word 'Humanism' imports for myself.

To avoid misinterpretation I have therefore added in the title the words *and of Other Subjects*. Part I, which is concerned with Humanism in its restricted sense, contains the substance of three Donnellan lectures delivered this summer at Trinity College, Dublin.

In a volume published last year, *The Reign of Relativity*, I sought to lay the foundations of a view of the uniqueness distinctive of individuality which would show the relation of its principle to that of the general relativity of reality to knowledge. This view is carried further in the present volume, which is a companion one to that of a year ago.

As regards two of the scientific subjects discussed, I am under much indebtedness for counsel and assistance while working out the principle. Professor A. N. Whitehead, F.R.S., has gone over the proofs of the three chapters devoted to mathematical physics. My brother, Professor J. S. Haldane, F.R.S., has done the same for the chapter on biology. Neither

of them is thereby to be looked on as responsible for sharing my point of view in philosophy, or for modes of expression which are my own. But none the less my debt to them is great for having permitted me the advantage of their criticism in what I have written on their respective subjects.

LONDON,
June 1922.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Aristotle and Goethe on the character of the object world. The actual is always concrete. The real nature of our experience. The relation to it of thinking. W. K. Clifford on this subject. The character of the object in mathematics. The character of our knowledge generally. What is 'mind'? The continuity in the history of philosophy. Philosophy must not hope for finality. The meaning of this. The Italian Idealists and Professor Gentile. His teaching about space and time. New Realism. The purpose of this book is to examine the characters of the standpoints assumed in various branches of knowledge to be adequate for explaining the aspects of reality with which these branches of knowledge are concerned. The relation of reality, as appearing in the various orders of knowledge, to knowledge itself. Primarily the object of knowledge appears to be always individual and unique. It implies universals as well as particulars in its aspect, and it is the former that reflection isolates in its abstractions. The plan of the book pp. 1-32

PART I

THE PHILOSOPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF HUMANISM

CHAPTER I

THE PHILOSOPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF HUMANISM

Humanism means what conforms to the standards of value in domains such as those of Literature, of Music, of Art, and of Religion. The standards there employed are different from those by which we test values in Science and Metaphysics. There is a kind of value recognised in what we call direct apprehension which is other than that which we set on correctness in inference from general principles. Still, there must be a common standard of some kind which will bring into congruence knowledge of the most different sorts. The purpose of

these three chapters is to endeavour to bring this question under the light cast by the principle of the Relativity of Knowledge. What lies at the foundation of this principle is, that when we say we know it is not sufficient merely to regard the self as a thing that establishes an external and accidental relation between something that knows and an object outside the relation of knowledge. Our personal thoughts do not make things, and yet things have no meaning, and therefore no reality, apart from knowledge. We are ourselves objects in knowledge, but knowledge not the less must come first in logical order in our interpretation of ourselves as actual. For, outside of actual or possible knowledge, existence has no significance. It was reserved for Kant to point out, as against the British School of thinkers, that when we know we are always more than we take ourselves to be, and that meaning is the essential foundation of existence. The question of the genesis of knowledge is thus an inherently irrational one. All scepticism assumes that it possesses the instrument for which it sets out to account. We must, therefore, inquire what knowledge in the fuller sense imports. The problem is as old as the Greeks. In the relation of the Active to the Passive Reason there seemed to them to lie a solution. When we talk of thought as making things we conceive it inadequately, and represent it under the form of a set of abstract conceptions which we present to our minds as if objects. The ultimately real appears to be, on the contrary, neither mere subject nor mere object, but the significance of an activity within which both are distinguished in reflection. By his application of the principle of relativity in knowledge to mathematical physics Einstein has awakened a vivid interest in this subject. His application is, however, only a particular and limited one. Explanation of the fashion into which he has cast it. The basic four-dimensional world and the tensor principle. A wider application to the case of the living organism. Life and mind. Levels in experience and degrees in knowledge. The form of the concrete universal is that assumed by all reality. It contains, not as separate entities but as logical moments, the universal and particular, which are actual only in what is individual and unique, and it is resolved into its logical moments by our abstractions. It is only in reflection that these are dissociated. The particular is essential for reality not less than the universal. The dangers of the uncritical use of metaphors about knowledge. With this view of its true character we come in sight of the interpretation of its Humanistic phases pp. 35-57

CHAPTER II

THE PHILOSOPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF HUMANISM (continued)

Recapitulation. The implications of 'uniqueness.' The pure particular an asymptotic limit and unattainable in description. But

none the less an essential moment in actual individuality. In its attempts to find in the particular a basis scepticism has always defeated itself. The dialectical character of reflection. The character of mind. Its abstractions and the symbols it employs in the activity of thinking. These symbols are individual facts, even in mathematics. We begin from what is concrete and work downwards in the process of reflection. The necessity of being critical in our selection of the conceptions that are appropriate to the aspects of reality we are concerned with. The nature of *character* in individual men. A certain particularism implied. Abstract principles not enough. The instinct for individuality of the man in the street. Leadership. The meaning of 'Humanism.' Illustrations of this meaning. Values. The testimony of Browning. Two descriptions of Humanistic value given by great writers. The Oxford Movement as characterised by Cardinal Newman, and the reflections of educated bystanders on the execution of a murderer as described by Hegel. Matthew Arnold on the inseparability from the finest forms of Humanism of high knowledge. The importance in poetry of moral ideas. But Arnold is emphatic in holding that in the case of Wordsworth, for example, his philosophy is of secondary value as compared with his poetical gift. He seems to mean that general principles taken by themselves are inadequate to reality, and are actual only in living and individual form, and that in poetry in particular genius in style is what is determining. For it is this which, at least as much as reflection, is essential in art. The quality of 'inevitableness.' Still, the beauty of Wordsworth's poetry, like all beauty of its kind, is a beauty born of the mind. The difficulties in the relation of the Irish to the English mind are partly due to that tendency to insist on particular aspects which imparts to the outlook on life a dynamic character. Still, in literature and philosophy alike, this has on the whole proved a source of strength. Sainte-Beuve on Greek literature, and on Shakespeare and Goethe. He declares that criticism cannot be static in its standards. In the very relativity of all criticism in literature to the standpoint of its time, its truth and reality appear to lie pp. 58-83

CHAPTER III

THE PHILOSOPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF HUMANISM

(continued)

Humanism in literature is that form of knowledge in which the stress is laid on the individuality and uniqueness found in direct perception and emotion. It is as values that the universals of knowledge enter into such Humanism. Such imaginative constructions thus owe their beauty to their being born of the mind. The standards by which their value is estimated may be relative to periods and altering modes of expression, but they imply continuity in principle.

In Humanism it is in the main only on certain aspects falling within the entirety of knowledge that we dwell. The recognition of marked personality, as in leadership, is of this kind. There is an inexhaustible and indefinable particularism in this sort of personality which compels the imagination of others and confers transforming power. We fall in love with persons, not qualities. So, too, in religion. The significance of its symbolism. Fanaticism lays excessive stress on a merely abstract principle. Even science has to avoid such one-sidedness strenuously. But Humanism is capable of excesses as great as those of the abstract mind. Neither the particular nor the general moment in knowledge can safely be taken in isolation from the other. Humanism, not less than science and philosophy, has to recognise that knowledge is an entirety. The merit of the *Upanishads*. The attempt at present being made to introduce into the organisation of the German universities what is called a Humanistic Faculty. Our own effort to spread the true university spirit extra-murally through our democracy. The necessity of preserving the balance in the higher knowledge between its two sides. Goethe on the value in this regard of the Scottish School in philosophy. His own attitude to philosophy. Summing up of the three chapters. Reality is indissolubly one with knowledge, but is neither a construction by merely abstract thinking, on the one hand, nor, on the other hand, has it meaning or existence apart from the setting which thought gives to the particularism implied in all knowledge. Humanism is an interpretation which owes its nature to the standpoint from which the entirety is surveyed pp. 84-99

PART II

THE PHILOSOPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF OTHER SUBJECTS: MATHEMATICAL PHYSICS, BIOLOGY, AND PSYCHOLOGY

CHAPTER IV

MATHEMATICAL PHYSICS

The fresh ideas recently introduced into mathematical physics. Their relation to philosophy. The universal and the particular actual only as logical moments in a form that is individual. This is the character of all experience. The *quantum* theory. Max Planck on the true point of departure for the physicist. His justification of the concept of Force. The *Æther*. The deductive tendency in geometry.