

**THE RE-ORGANIZATION OF
PHILOSOPHY: AN ADDRESS
DELIVERED BEFORE THE
ARISTOTELIAN SOCIETY,
NOVEMBER 8, 1886**

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The Re-organization of Philosophy: An Address Delivered Before the Aristotelian Society,
November 8, 1886 by Shadworth H. Hodgson

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SHADWORTH H. HODGSON

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THE
RE-ORGANISATION OF PHILOSOPHY.

An Address

DELIVERED BEFORE THE ARISTOTELIAN SOCIETY,
NOVEMBER 8, 1886
(BEING THE ANNUAL PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS FOR THE EIGHTH
SESSION OF THE SOCIETY),

BY

SHADWORTH H. HODGSON,
HONORARY LL.D. EDIN., HONORARY FELLOW OF G.C.C. OXFORD,
PRESIDENT.

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THE
RE-ORGANISATION OF PHILOSOPHY.

I.

I PROPOSE to speak this evening of that Re-organisation of Philosophy which may be expected to result from the application of the method described in previous Addresses to that great purpose of Philosophy, a Rationale of the Universe so far as attainable by human powers, which was shown in my first Address to be indicated by the history of philosophy as its true end. You may remember that this method was shown, in my last Address, to lead to the distribution of the whole subject-matter of philosophy under four great heads or rubrics, A, Distinction of Aspects; B, Analysis of Elements; C, The Order of Real Conditioning; and D, The Constructive Branch of Philosophy. Yet I am not going now, any more than then, to bring forward any particular *Rationale*, or what is called a System of Philosophy, meaning thereby a Theory of the Universe. It is of a system, a rationale, a theory of philosophy itself, and of its constitution as philosophy, that I have here, as previously, to speak. I wish to bring to a head the results of my previous Addresses, and thereby to show by what method, upon what principles, within what outlines, all future attempts at a Rationale of the Universe must be conducted, if they are sound, and if

they are to have a chance of success. It is a Rationale not of the Universe but of Philosophy, that I attempt to-night.

I begin with a somewhat bold assumption, considering the backward state of philosophical opinion in this country; I begin with the assumption, that the Kantian Era in philosophy is at an end. It has tailed off into *Erkenntnistheorie* again, with which under Kant it began. You know what is meant by Kant's Copernicanism in philosophy. It consisted in his redressing the equipoise of the system, removing so to speak its centre of gravity, or central source of explanation, and placing it in the Subject, instead of in the objective world. He began by putting that question which is the great question of *Erkenntnistheorie*,—How is experience possible?—meaning by *experience* the experience of ordinary life and the experience of science, *Erkenntniss*, which is but a more exact and reasoned version of the former. And his answer was, that experience is possible only on the supposition of a Subject existing as a real agent, with a real constitution of its own, and that the world which was the object of this experience existed only so far as the Subject made it by experiencing it.

Kant originally intended, by the Subject, the finite individual Subject, that is to say the multitudinous Subjects composing the whole number of mankind and other reasonable beings, if any. But the terms in which he spoke of it being general, and the idea that each reasonable being actually made the world by experiencing it being too preposterous even for German assimilation, it soon came about that the Subject was taken to mean an Universal Subject with an Universal Consciousness; and so the original *Erkenntnistheorie* of Kant became expanded and inflated into that monstrous windbag, or collection of windbags, known as post-Kantian Idealism,

post-Kantian Realism, post-Kantian Absolutism, and now usually called vaguely Monism.

But this expanded form of Kantianism having again proved indigestible, except to a scattered few here and there, as for instance in Scotland and at Oxford, the cry *Back to Kant* was raised in Germany;—for you must know that in Germany Kant is a sort of “Grand Old Man,” a Jupiter Optimus Maximus,—“*Ab Jove pricipium, —Jovis omnia plena;*”—and for the last ten or fifteen years the German philosophical press has teemed with treatises on *Erkenntnistheorie*, at odds with fact, at odds with Kant, and at odds with one another.

As to *Erkenntnistheorie* itself, it is sometimes translated *Theory of Knowledge*; but that rendering is far too euphemistic to be accurate. It is a thoroughly German parcel of goods, and had best continue veiled in the decent obscurity of that learned language. The only accurate English for it is *Cognition theory*.

Now I am not going to advise you to plough through that acre or acre and a half, be the same more or less, of German paper covered with German prose, on which the tangled thicket of *Erkenntnistheorie* flourishes. You would be far better employed in “stubbing Thornaby waste.” These speculations are for the most part,—so far at least as my painful experience goes,—signal examples of how philosophy ought *not* to be written, and I am going to advise you how *not* to read them. The world does not want, and never did want, *Erkenntnistheorie*. It never was in Kant's hands, and never will be in anybody's, a valid answer to those sceptical doubts and questionings which found their chief and most powerful exponent in Hume. The world, I repeat, does not want *Erkenntnistheorie*. It wants now, as it has always wanted, *Philosophy*;—it wants a Rationale of the Universe, so far as it is attainable by human powers. It wants a combined treat-

ment of those two questions which can never be sundered, the questions of Being and of Knowing,—of Being as well as of Knowing,—and not a treatment of the question of the validity of knowledge, on the original supposition that the knower is either (1) separate from, or (2) identical with, the object known. You cannot say what *knowing* is, without also in the same words saying what *being* is. And therefore, if *Erkenntnistheorie* were (*per impossibile*) to solve its own problem, it would not be *Erkenntnistheorie* but Metaphysic. The principles on which the combined and philosophical treatment of the two questions is to be conducted are what I hope to make evident this evening. And we shall see farther on, that the special question of *Erkenntnistheorie*, that of the validity of objective knowledge, has a distinct place of its own in the organised structure of philosophy, in which it comes forward for proper and sufficient examination.

The windbag of *Erkenntnistheorie*, when posing as the foundation or fundamental part of philosophy, is punctured by one simple but most important fact. It is this, that the supposed Subject, which is made the centre of explanation of the whole system, and therefore is treated as a real agent with a real constitution of its own, ceases to be a Subject by being so treated, and becomes an Object, the chief object-matter of psychology, an object of one special kind among many; it is de-subjectified in philosophy, and becomes, as a real agent, the object investigated in psychology, though still retaining its name the *Subject*. Its subjectivity meantime retreats, as it were, and takes refuge in that contemplation of itself as an object, in which its treatment as an object, including its treatment as the source of explanation in philosophy, consists. *Erkenntnistheorie*, then, is condemned by its own principle to be a psychological and not a philosophical theory. Nor does it make the smallest difference in principle,

whether the Subject (so long as it is treated in this way) is taken as a finite individual Subject, or is supposed to be the universal Subject with an universal consciousness, an absolute Ego, or Will, or Geist, or even Pure Thought, so long as Thought is held to be a real agency, a *Denkthätigkeit*.

Philosophical enquiry on the other hand, that is, philosophy itself, consists in following, if I may so speak, the subjectivity of the supposed Subject, in its retreat from and contemplation of objects, following the ever present moving moment of experience or distinct consciousness, and so keeping constantly in view the relation of subjectivity to objectivity, of knowing to being. In other words, the moment, the moving moment, of Reflective Perception, described in Rubric A of my last Address, the moment we call *now*, is its central point of observation, instead of the Subject being its centre of activity and explanation, whereby it may explain, as by an hypothesis, how experience is brought about.

I think, then, that the Kantian Era has run its course, by revolving upon itself, and ending where it began, namely, in the attempt to extract sunbeams out of cucumbers, philosophy out of *Erkenntnisstheorie*. And I set in opposition to this entire conception and method of *Erkenntnisstheorie* the conception and method of Reflective Perception, as the only true way of arriving at a philosophy; reflective perception being that one moment (*unum genere not numero*) of distinct consciousness, through which experience passes in becoming experience. I oppose, therefore, what I have elsewhere called the *Philosophy of Reflection* to that branch of knowledge called *Erkenntnisstheorie*, which having begun as *Erkenntnisstheorie* with Kant, and having proceeded logically and irrefragably to various systems of Absolute Nonsense, has at last revolved upon itself as *Erkenntnisstheorie* again; no doubt again to pro-