

PROBLEMS IN PHILOSOPHY

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Problems in Philosophy by John Bascom

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JOHN BASCOM

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BY

JOHN BASCOM

AUTHOR OF "SCIENCE OF MIND," "GROWTH AND GRADES OF INTELLIGENCE," ETC.

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PREFACE.

THIS volume may seem to be constructed on the idea of gathering up the fragments that nothing may be lost. This precept, however, wise as it often is, does not express the law of production in the present case. A few points in philosophy invited more clear or more thorough statement. This labor I chose to undertake directly and briefly, rather than to attempt it as a part of a more extended and systematic work. One evil in philosophy is the accumulation of fruitless discussions. A few positions fortunately taken may be easily lost in their practical value by the extended treatises which accompany them, traversing old ground with no sufficient reward. Philosophy, above most topics, calls for an explicit statement of a few fundamental principles, and a pushing of inquiry in reference to them, till some satisfactory conclusion is reached. The present volume aims to make, in the most direct way, a contribution on the more obscure topics of philosophy. What it has to say is not, taken collectively, extended, and may be still farther reduced by the reader by confining his attention to the one or more subjects which may appeal directly to him. Only one of these discussions—that on liberty—has appeared elsewhere, and that essay has been somewhat modified.

While the discussions now offered touch very closely the points at issue between the empirical and the intui-

tive tendencies in philosophy, they are not conducted with any express conformity to either mode of inquiry. There is, in the consideration of these fundamental questions, a distinct recognition of the fact that the phenomena of mind cannot find a rational substratum of thought within themselves as phenomena merely; and also a recognition of the fact that it is these very phenomena, and these only, that call for explanation. The effort has been, therefore, to bring appropriate ideas to the interpretation of mental facts, as broadly and fully contained in human experience.

Any obscurity that may attach to these discussions, while it may be due in part to a defective treatment, is also in part due to the unavoidable difficulty which attends on the concise handling of topics remote from familiar thought. The separation of each discussion involves occasionally a slight repetition, yet on the whole favors brevity.

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PROBLEMS IN PHILOSOPHY.

I.

METHODS IN PHILOSOPHY.

A SURVEY of the products of human thought in philosophy impresses upon the mind some disagreeable conclusions. The most obvious of these is the extent and endless variety of the antagonism between systems of philosophy, and the hopelessly erratic character of many of these systems. When, however, we are about to draw the natural conclusion from such a result, that this field is either one of uncertainties, or one beyond the scope of our powers, we are led to observe that those who have expressed this opinion have not themselves adhered to it, but have frequently constructed theories, or given occasion to their construction, as extreme as the most extreme of those they have been intended to displace. Science has not for long rid itself of a metaphysic by scoffing at metaphysics, but has only led the way to one of a peculiarly difficult and untenable order. A certain fatality, or rather a supreme force of nature, is disclosed in thoughtful minds, driving them, sooner or later, more or less completely, within the charmed circle of philosophy. No amount of failure discourages the venturesome spirit of man from a new voyage of discovery in search of the poles of thought.