

PRIMER OF PHILOSOPHY

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Primer of philosophy by Paul Carus

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PAUL CARUS

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PHILOSOPHY**

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BY

DR. PAUL CARUS

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PREFACE.

LEST the title of this booklet be misunderstood, the author must state that he here means by "Primer" a presentation of the subject in the plainest and most lucid form in which he could put it.

"The Primer of Philosophy" is not expressly designed to give instruction to beginners in philosophy, but it is, nevertheless, eminently available for that purpose. The uninitiated student will not be bewildered or mystified, in perusing its pages, by high-sounding words or unintelligible phrases, but will, despite this lack of learned adornment, find in them the information he desires. The subject is presented with great simplicity so that its leading idea can be gathered by a mere glance at its contents. The most essential technical terms are explained, and the high practical importance of philosophy is never lost sight of.

The point of view adopted in this, as in other publications of the author, is new to the extent that it cannot be classified among any of the various schools of recent thought. It represents, rather, a critical reconciliation of rival philosophies of the type of Kantian apriorism and John Stuart Mill's empiricism. The reconciliation reached disposes for good of a number of fundamental problems, and, particularly, of that old *crux philosophorum*, the question of the nature of reason, and will, thus, after a long unsettled period of embarrassments in which all progress has ceased, set the ship of philosophy afloat again.

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For the philosophy of these latter days is indeed like a ship run aground. Her helmsmen themselves have declared that further headway is impossible; that philosophical problems in their very nature are insolvable, and that there can be, therefore, but one true philosophy—the philosophy of agnosticism, which indolently acquiesces in the profession of a modest *ignorabimus*. It is but natural that under such circumstances the proud craft was abandoned by the most gallant of her crew. There was no work left for bold inquirers; there was no hope of accomplishing anything; the ship was fast, and her sailors were told to seek consolation in the idea that she had reached at last her haven, and that her present resting place, the belief in the Unknowable, was the stratified wisdom of all ages.

Philosophy in former ages boldly led the van of human progress, but it has now ceased to be considered of any practical importance. The public smile sarcastically at the perplexities of its hopeless condition, and the scientist has got into the habit of ignoring it entirely. And why should he not? Philosophy has become more of a hindrance than a help to him, blockading his way and spreading a mist before his eyes. Thus, to the detriment of true science, the sciences have gradually degenerated into mere specialties; with their philosophical background, the various branches of scientific inquiry have lost all intercoherence and deeper significance.

All this must change; and if the spirit in which this book is written, be true, it will change.

A new vista is opened before our eyes in which philosophy will become what it ought to be. Philosophy is no longer doomed to lie in the stagnant swamp where progress has become impossible, but strikes out boldly for new fields of noble work and practical usefulness.

THE AUTHOR.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE PRINCIPLES OF PHILOSOPHY: POSITIVISM, MONISM, MELIORISM.

THE philosophical principles which dominate modern thought can be expressed in the two names, POSITIVISM and MONISM, the one being complementary to the other. True positivism is monistic; true monism is positive.

POSITIVISM represents the principle that all knowledge, scientific, philosophical, and religious, is a description of facts. Natural laws are formulas describing facts with the greatest possible economy, that is, in the most concise and exhaustive manner. Our abstract concepts do not represent any absolute or metaphysical entities, they represent certain features, qualities, or relations of existence. They are not forces behind nature. There is not something beyond that mysteriously produces natural processes. The natural processes themselves are reality.

The facts of experience are specie, and our abstract thoughts are bills which serve to economise the exchange of thought. If the values of our abstractions