

**ESSAYS IN
COMMON
SENSE PHILOSOPHY**

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Essays in common sense philosophy by C. E. M. Joad

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COMMON SENSE
PHILOSOPHY

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INTRODUCTION

THE essays in this book are an attempt to present the cardinal points of a common sense philosophy.

The quarrel between the "plain man" and the philosopher is of long standing. The "plain man" regards the philosopher as a spinner of academic sophistries which have no relation to the world, as he—the plain man—knows it, or as a student in blinkers who overlooks the truth under his nose, and goes into the byways and hedges to find unintelligible evidence for his complicated theories of Reality.

The philosopher regards the "plain man" as an unreflecting fool, shut up within the walls of his five senses, who refuses to admit the existence of anything of which his superficial understanding does not inform him, and who glibly uses words such as goodness, beauty, truth and reality, without the vaguest notion of the meanings he attaches to them. If the philosopher lights a torch to see the sunrise, the plain man sees the reflections of a half-penny dip and calls them the sun.

The following essays are, I suppose, sufficiently philosophic to seem singularly like nonsense to the plain man. At the same time they are sufficiently akin in spirit and conclusions to the plain man's view of the everyday world as we know it, to appear pedestrian and unsatisfying to most philosophers.

The history of philosophy has been, on the whole, the history of an attempt to synthesise and unify

the multitudinous conflicting appearances of the world of sense into a correlated self-explanatory whole, which can preferably be regarded as the embodiment of a deliberate design and purpose, Philosophy has found a world of scattered bricks and has heroically tried to supply the mortar to fit them into a house.

In the opinion of the writer this attempt has been on the whole a failure, and it has been a failure because Reality is not a synthesised organic whole, but simply a collection or aggregate of different things without apparent design or structure.

The world undoubtedly presents to the plain man such an appearance. It is possible, and to the writer it appears probable, that this appearance does not belie its real nature.

If this is the true state of the case a very great deal of the philosophy that has been written is beside the point. Philosophy becomes simpler if less sufficing, and the salient matters can be treated of more shortly and less ambitiously than most philosophers have treated them.

Much Philosophy has been little more than a clever essay in imperceptibly varying the meaning of well-known words. Once the meaning of important words such as sensible objects, truth, and beauty has been ascertained, or rather once we have determined in what respect it cannot be ascertained, our task is done.

For we have not to represent a system. There is no system in the commonly accepted sense of

the word to present. We have only to state what seems to us the truth about some of the most important matters that philosophers have discussed. And this is the explanation of a question which might easily present itself to the reader of these essays, namely why in the world just those particular subjects are discussed which are discussed, instead of and in preference to a number of others.

Why for instance is there an essay on the meaning of truth and no essay on the meaning of causality ?

The answer, as suggested above, lies in the presumption that if the world is not an interrelated teleological whole serving some definite end, if consciousness is not a uniquely significant phenomenon within it, the number of things to be ascertained and the number of remarks to be made both about the world and consciousness is considerably reduced. And as metaphysics consists in the endeavour to ascertain the truth about the world, and logic in the endeavour to ascertain the truths about consciousness or human knowledge of the world, the scope both of logic and metaphysics becomes very largely confined to pointing out why the claims of philosophers to have found out important truths tending as a rule to indicate system and purpose in the world and in our knowledge of it, are inadmissible claims.

On the positive side there remain certain important questions about which something fairly definite must and can be said, if only to justify the assertion

that nothing *more* and nothing *more* definite can be said.

These important questions seem to the writer to be the following.

First, the nature of our knowledge of physical objects, whether there are indeed physical objects to be known, and whether we can ever know more than our own knowledge about them.

Secondly, the question of the relations that appear to exist between these objects, and whether those relations are real or imaginary; whether in fact the Universe is ultimately to be regarded as a perfect indivisible whole, or rather as a box containing many different and separate contents.

Thirdly, the meaning of truth, the test by which our knowledge is to be judged.

Fourthly, the nature of beauty and of æsthetic enjoyment.

Fifthly, the nature of those entities other than physical objects that have their place in the constitution of the Universe, entities variously called concepts, universals, and forms, and the nature of our knowledge of these entities.

I have also attempted to apply what I would call the common sense method in philosophy to current theories as to the nature of the State, with the object of discrediting that German theory of the State which idealises the entity called the State at the expense of other associations.

The final essay discusses the extent to which our thought and knowledge is free, how far our