

**THE NEW  
PHILOSOPHY.  
PART I**

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The New Philosophy. Part I by Anonymous

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## INTRODUCTION.

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IN these times, when knowledge of all sorts is making such general progress, and science continually opening further discoveries in nature, and also the means of practically applying them, it doubly imports that the moral progress—the progress of the mind—should be equally attended to. I say, doubly; for first, the mind, as mind, is of most consequence, and that that therefore should be set in a state to take right views and form just conclusions, is the primary concern; for did not the mind first conceive, no action at all would follow, and where it conceives erroneously, ill effects result: secondly, therefore, when knowledge begins to enlighten mankind, and science, as now, to put power into their hands, by enabling them to lay hold, as it were, on the elements,—to use, and in some degree, command them,—it is of vital importance that the directing mind should be enlarged with that increase of power. It would be dreadful, indeed, if the power were increased, but the mind not at the

same time improved to use that power well ; and many do, on this account, fear a new discovery : they think if the power of man be thus augmented, it will be dangerous and pernicious, by his abuse of it. This, however, is a mistake : in fact, the fear of remaining ignorance ; all knowledge, all the discoveries of science, have in themselves a tendency to improve the mind, giving it knowledge, as they invariably improve the condition of man when brought into practical action. But why should not science and knowledge receive the advantages they give ? Why, while they enlighten and enlarge the mind, should not the mind give freedom and full strength to them ? We still enthral the mind itself. We approve of research into scientific and learned pursuits, but we forbid the mind to use its faculties equally on moral questions : by this its native powers are fettered and kept dormant, and great impediments are thereby raised to science itself. The whole mind is weakened, if due exercise be denied on any part to the use of its faculties ; as if one member be crippled, the whole body is thereby distorted, and the subject becomes a deformed person : thus it is, in perverting the mind on one point, the whole becomes a maimed existence. If a man be blind, he may do much - do wonders ; but they are wonders for *him* to do, and only what you expect from the man with his eyes, who is another being. Would you call that man free who was permitted to rove in a garden or extensive parks, but never suffered to go out into the grand plan of Nature herself ? What he sees might be fair and well ordered, but how much nobler and better is there that he has lost unseen ! Thus it is, if we allow

freedom only in part; the mind may see some good, some beauty, but will form the most absurd conceptions, whether for good or evil, of all beyond its barrier, and never can be great or vigorous without the ample range nature provided for it, and fitted it to take.

I allude, I confess, to religion, that most important point; for while it is allowed to be meritorious for the mind to seek for truths, and exert all its faculties in scientific discoveries, it ever has been, and still is, made a crime even to suppose, far less to seek, anything new—anything further—in religious inquiry; and that, perhaps, is the cause why our improvement in morals falls so far short of our advances in knowledge and the conveniences of life. This narrow and pernicious persuasion absolutely prevents men from moral improvement; it divides religion from all other kinds of knowledge, and makes it different to them; whereas *all* knowledge is connected, and all sorts of it to be worked out by the same means. What are those means? To find the truths of any science, we must *search* into it, reason upon it, and compare it with the other manifestations of nature; then build our conclusions: in religion we must do just the same. Infinity and eternity are the province of religion; we can only morally enter there: *they* have no limits. How, then, is it possible she can range where there are no bounds, and *not* make further discoveries, if we only allow her to range? When, then, this last, this greatest bar is once opened, what impediment remains to inquiry of any sort? for none other is it deemed wrong, or sacrilegious, to enter upon. This once made free, with what cheerfulness



will the human mind expand upon a subject so important and delightful!—for what can be more inspiring to mortals subject to decay and death, than *Futurity*, where only they can hope restoration and advancement? When ignorance was general, we all know it was made a crime to make any further discovery, or propose any new theory, even in science; and the most meritorious characters have been shamefully treated, reviled, and persecuted, for doing that for which in after ages they have been justly ranked among the greatest benefactors of mankind. Truth has, at last, so far prevailed, that to search into natural appearances and open scientific truths is acknowledged good, and freedom allowed to the pursuit; but still this prejudice clings fast to moral truth—to religion! Still it is a crime, a condemning sin, to fancy any advance can be made, or offer any new thought there; and what is this but ignorance defending her last stronghold? Would any one say of the sciences,—We have got thus far in astronomy, or geology,—here let us stop; we have found wonders, and will go no further. I fear, indeed, many would; but they are those who from fear or interest *want* to put a stop to it. Many find science and religion at variance, and secretly think they owe it to the last to discourage the first; they cannot deny demonstrated facts, but they are averse to receive themselves, and, as much as they can, check others: this is hurtful to science, and worse to religion. It is because they inquire only on one side. Was as free investigation granted on the other, it would, and *will* be found, science is the best supporter of real religion. In science, those who are at work upon it,

and those who really love the cause, they plainly perceive, however some may retard, that one wonder discovered is but the evidence of more: that one truth opens another truth, and the means they have found, like the truths they find, enable them to acquire further means to bring out yet greater truths. This holds as good in moral truth. Why, then, do we withhold the search of more knowledge in religion? Why do we imagine it so barren as to be able to open no fresh springs to our thirst? Why should we stand still in religion any more than in anything else? Nay, we *cannot* in anything stand still; and if we do not advance, we must go back. Were we to stop further inquiry in science, we should soon inevitably recur to ignorance; and the state of our general morals, I think, too plainly testifies the want of progress in religion: we advance but little that way; and in theory many absurd, many demoralizing tenets are entertained by various parties: assumption marks some, and extravagant fanaticism others, and even gross superstition still prevails. It is evidently high time for some improvement to be attained. And how is this to be done? By the same means we use in science — by *seeking*. The truths of science cannot be discovered nor brought to bear but by research; neither can those of religion. Virtue suffers by forbidding search in religion, because there can be no knowledge in any matter without search; and when we know a thing only a little way, or not rightly, we see it not all, nor its best parts: we see not the reasons that make it good to ourselves, nor the magnitude of its results; consequently we want the most powerful motives and inducements to bring us to act

on it, in wanting the conviction that knowledge affords. Nay, want of knowledge so perverts the mind as to make it hold wrong for right, and consider crime a duty. It is not so many years since a heretic, burnt at the stake, would afford in Spain a gratifying spectacle to the eyes, not only of men, but women; and what was this but thinking wrong in religion? They were not otherwise more cruel than other people; but they thought they pleased Heaven, and did God service. The other nations, when in their state, did the same. But surely that it is a crime in itself, and the error lies in those who take the life, or torture a fellow being for thinking differently to themselves in religion—even though his sentiments were mistaken or wrong—a small advance in religious knowledge will show; and we ourselves condemn the actions we once performed.

I make these instances only to show how necessary it is to think *right* in religion, and hence infer the expediency of seeking knowledge in it, without which we cannot think right. For myself, I have long and most earnestly employed my mind on the search of truth in religion. It is not for me to say I have found it, far less to deny it to any other party, yet I will own that it appears to me that in that search my mind had conceived some new ideas, and in the system I proceeded to build upon them I had opened some truths: if I did not hope this, I should have no right to trouble the public. I think it, because it seems to me the theories I deduce correspond with the evidences of Nature, account for her general laws, and gain corroboration from the facts of science; it is, therefore, to the scientific I