

**THE RELATION OF PHILOSOPHY
TO SCIENCE, PHYSICAL AND
PSYCHOLOGICAL; AN
ADDRESS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649299980

The relation of philosophy to science, physical and psychological; an address by Shadworth H. Hodgson

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Cover @ 2017

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SHADWORTH H. HODGSON

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An Address

DELIVERED BEFORE THE ARISTOTELIAN SOCIETY,

OCTOBER 20, 1884

(BEING THE ANNUAL PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS FOR THE SIXTH
SESSION OF THE SOCIETY),

BY

SHADWORTH H. HODGSON,

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

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WILLIAMS AND NORGATE,
14 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON;
AND
20 SOUTH FREDERICK STREET, EDINBURGH.
1884

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The Relation of Philosophy to Science, PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL.

I.

WE re-assemble to-night, for the first time at the beginning of a Session, in our new quarters in Albemarle Street. I hope it may be the first of many Sessions to be held in the same place, and prove in fact to mark the close of the nomad stage in our history, and the opening of a period of steady and united progress. Indeed I think that indications are not wanting of greater homogeneity and definiteness in the aims which we set before ourselves as a Society, and also that we can now form a tolerably clear notion of the means at our disposal for realising them, including more particularly the amount and kind of aid which we are to look for from without. We issued last Session what I may call our appeal to the general public, in the shape of a Circular stating our aims and objects as a Society, and inviting all who took a genuine interest in the serious investigation of philosophical questions to join us. That appeal gained us many new and valued members. Thereby we placed the Society, as we hope, on a definite and sound basis. We now know on what we have to depend for our future prosperity as a Society. We know that we are not to look, for any further accession of members, to any general appeal of the same kind again. The work which we do within our own walls, and

the influence which individually we can exert over those with whom we may come in contact, must henceforth be the means, the gradual but I trust the sure means, of increasing the numbers and extending the influence of the Society as a whole. Ultimately, therefore, it is on the reality of the benefit which we are each conscious of receiving from the discussions of the Society, that our prosperity as a Society depends. And this benefit can only be received individually from the discussions, if we contribute individually, by steady and continued mental work, to make the discussions genuine and thorough. I mean, that the fortunes of the Society, and the work which it can do towards the maintenance and spreading of true philosophical thought, are henceforward in our own hands, and in our own hands only. We are the first and only Society in this country, so far as I know, which has arisen spontaneously, and unconnected with any College, University, or other public body, "for the systematic study of Philosophy."

I could have wished, indeed, that the appeal which I mentioned had procured us more numerous additions from the ranks of those who are or have been professionally employed in the teaching of the various branches of our own subject, of Mental and Moral Philosophy, Logic, Psychology, and Ethic. I could have wished also, that a greater number of scientific men had joined us, in response to that appeal. Philosophy has an independent message to science; an independent message to convey, as well as an independent message to receive. For however true it is, that science proceeds from definitions and by methods of its own, which are justified by their results, yet the moment you begin to reflect on the source, the validity, and the range, of the ultimate conceptions which it employs, such as those of number, measure, quantity, matter, motion, force, energy, cause, and the like, you are

necessarily examining science on its subjective side, as a process of *knowing*, and are thereby treating science itself as an object of philosophy.

Again I should have rejoiced to welcome as our members more of those for whom, from their professional character, the questions which are especially connected with religion have pre-eminent interest. The old intellectual framework of religion, the old Theology, in Aristotle's sense of the term, the old bottles, so to speak, into which the new wine was poured at the beginning of our era,—this old intellectual framework has given way, in the natural course of man's intellectual development, and is being slowly but surely replaced by new forms and modes of thought. The gradual demolition of the old, the gradual formation of the new, intellectual clothing or body of the old incorruptible spirit, are philosophical processes in which we are called to bear a distinctly conscious and intelligent part. I could have wished, therefore, that we had attracted more professed theologians, that is to say, students of man's relations to God, as well as more professed men of science in both its great branches, the group of human or moral, as well as the group of physical sciences, into our ranks;—these two classes, of men of science and theologians, being the representatives, and as it were the double vanguard, of all human progress, one in the direction of pure knowledge, the other in that of morals and aspiration; and one main function of philosophy this, to discern and manifest the unity between them. All we can say is, that to those who *have* joined us from each of these classes, as well as from that of professed teachers of philosophy, the warmer welcome is extended. Would only, that I had not here to mix with welcome the expression of our keen regret for the premature death of one,* whose active participation in the work of

* Mr. Walter Raleigh Browne, at Montreal, Sep. 1884.

last Session seemed to promise, that he would equally adorn the ranks of this Society, as he already adorned by his talents the profession of his choice.

For let us not conceal it from ourselves, the position of philosophy in this country is not a recognised one. We are a nondescript tribe; a small tribe; a tribe which has to grow by accretion, by attracting to itself new members who, in many and perhaps most cases, have already intellectual homes and intellectual affinities elsewhere. To the ordinary Englishman of culture we appear as a rare and inexplicable variety of the *dilettanti* species. A friendly acquaintance said to me only last summer, alluding to this Society, "By the way, haven't you joined a kind of debating club?" "A debating club!" I replied; "I have the honour to be President of one of the learned societies of London, if you please." And considering what a very miscellaneous company of societies, from the Royal to the Shorthand, is covered by the term, I did not think I was exorbitantly ambitious in laying claim to it. But you see that even our right to rank as a learned society would be contested by any one to whom, as to most Englishmen of education, it had never occurred to regard philosophy as a definite pursuit, based on a definite method, and having thereby a definite position by the side of and beyond all other recognised branches of scientific investigation. For the rank of this or any other Society must depend first and foremost, other things being equal, on the rank of the subject which it makes its study.

Now philosophy claims, and always has claimed the very highest rank among all intellectual pursuits. It receives contributions from all the rest, and then by reflecting on these contributions, and their relations both to each other and to the process and nature of *knowing*, as such, it brings them, as it were to a focus, and arranges

them in a scheme which embraces the whole body of experience, the whole of the phenomena of the universe, so far as these are in any manner or any degree within the ken of human speculation. But the claim of philosophy to this rank can only be substantiated,—and this is the point I would insist on as important,—the claim can only then become a reality, a well grounded and justly recognised claim, if philosophy is in possession of a definite method, as well as a definite object, a method by which it can really proceed to *do* what it aims at doing, by which it can reflect on the contributions, new as well as old, and on future ones as they arise, made by other pursuits, that is, other sciences, and weave them into a living and ever growing web of philosophical system. It must be a method at once distinctive of philosophy from science, and common to all philosophical workers. It must be no single principle or hypothesis, which contains its results implicitly in its commencement, but a method which can be applied to examine and judge phenomena, and applied by all, irrespective of the use they make of it, and the results which they bring out. In other words, it must leave the investigation of the phenomena perfectly free and unfettered, giving scope for individual differences of opinion within the method which is common to all, just as any special science gives scope, within the bounds of scientific method, for the most divergent theories respecting its subject-matter.

Of all kinds of knowledge, philosophy is the one which is most completely dependent on the interrogation of consciousness as such, its acknowledged test being that of immediate evidence to the individual enquirer. The disappearance therefore of differences of opinion, springing from differences of idiosyncrasy, or habit, or the use of different languages, and so on, in individual observers, is by no means to be anticipated. The bane of philo-

sophy has hitherto been the prominence given to these differences of idiosyncratic origin, by the adoption from time to time of some principle which has seemed self-evident, now to one man of genius, now to another, as a principle of universally applicable method, although it was really a principle which carried in itself implicitly a whole constructive system, and was therefore a principle, not of method simply and solely, but of much more besides. The problem for philosophy is to find a principle of method, which shall be universally applicable, and yet shall be a principle of method and no more, which, not being of idiosyncratic origin, shall not involve idiosyncratic results, which are really due to the principle adopted, and not due to the facts examined, or subject-matter.

At present, it must be owned, there is but too much excuse for the ordinary Englishman of culture, when he denies the claim of philosophy to be a definite pursuit. At present there is no philosophy, because there are too many philosophies. There is no philosophical method, because there are too many philosophical first principles. There is a wrangling of sects instead of a catholic church. The aim of this Society must be to alter all this; not to make a new sect, but on the contrary to discover the true method; this ought to be our first and foremost aim, because it is the necessary preliminary of all true progress in philosophical thought. The true method, if it can be found, is destructive of sects, and the parent of a general and progressive philosophy, in which all who adopt the method can take part. I fear however that we have to reckon, not only with indifference from without, but also with what in one sense is the opposite of indifference from within; I mean too little indifference to results, too much addiction to the particular principles of particular schools. To those who are satisfied with this state of things, as well as to those who are confirmed