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PHILOSOPHICAL
PROBLEMS

INTRODUCTION

PHILOSOPHICAL ideas, as the history of philosophy shows, may have a double significance. They may attempt to propound, to discuss, or to solve certain problems; and they may represent symptoms of certain tendencies of the intellectual life of man. Between these two phases of philosophy a constant interaction takes place; for the fact that a problem is propounded and treated in a certain way, may be considered as a symptom of a peculiar intellectual movement; and, on the other hand, the sting of problems excites intellectual movements which otherwise would not arise. In this interaction we
discover an intimate connection between personal life and scientific inquiry. This connection prevails to a greater or less degree in all branches of science; but from the nature of the case it is brought out especially as we approach the border-lines of human knowledge. It appears more clearly in mental than in natural science, and most clearly in philosophy, whose problems are essentially border-problems.

There is a current opinion that personality and scientific research are antagonistic. Hence, on the one hand, the student would fain doff his personality when he thinks scientifically; and, on the other, he lives as if scientific methods and results had no significance for the freer side of his personal development. I myself, in my youth, swore allegiance to such a view, under the overpowering influence of S. Kierkegaard. If I have finally broken its hold on me, I venture to say that that is because I have become better acquainted with both science and the personal life.
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The desire to investigate things is a special form of the striving after consistency with one’s self under all one’s manifold and changing experiences. This effort manifests itself in formal as well as in real science,—in the impulse to form series of concepts in which one member develops itself by inner necessity out of the preceding, as well as in the effort to combine our actual experiences into the closest and richest forms of continuity. Personality consists pre-eminently in the inner unity and connection of all our ideas, feelings, and strivings. It does not abdicate its life when it devotes itself to research. It begets, on the contrary, in science, as in art, an objective image of itself. Only thus can we understand the inner character which the passion for knowledge assumes, that *amor intellectuālis* felt by the seeker as he works up to the pinnacle from which the particulars disclose themselves as parts of one great whole. That holy fire, which, in spite of all smothering and repression ever anew
sets thought ablaze, finds in this its only explanation.

But personality in turn needs refining by the scientific process, since it must bend to the objective connections of thought, the fixed order of things within which every individual being has its appointed place. Freedom is won through hard obedience to the truth. It is the noble prerogative of personality that it can discover the great laws that condition its own conservation, that rightly determine its desires, and fix the conditions for their realization. There is a science of the personal life as of everything else; like all other sciences it is, no doubt, incomplete, but in every earnest investigation into the form and demands of the personal life, it is presupposed. Among present day philosophers, Charles Renouvier lays the greatest stress on the antithesis between the demands of thought and personality.¹ Yet even he calls for a rational conception of personality, and cannot reject all the analogies between the two.
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Such an analogy is thrown into clear relief when one tries to formulate the chief problems with which philosophical inquiry is concerned. These problems arise from the side of personality as well as from the side of science.

In my "History of Modern Philosophy" I have tried to show, in a purely historical way, that there are four such chief problems, namely: I. The problem of the nature of consciousness (the psychological problem); II. The problem of the validity of knowledge (the logical problem); III. The problem of the nature of being (the cosmological problem); and IV. The problem of value (the moral and religious problem 2). In this treatise my task is to point out the inner connection between these problems. At bottom, they are one and the same problem, appearing in different forms and applications.

The motives which may induce philosophical inquiry are very various. Often the motive is ethico-religious; consequently,
practical and personal. If so, one would begin with the fourth problem. It soon becomes plain, however, that its consideration demands insight into the nature of consciousness, into the conditions of knowledge, and into the constitution of that existence which the ethical personality shares with other things. If, on the other hand, an interest in observation impels one, one will begin with the psychological problem, as has happened in the empiricist philosophy under its various forms. But if what we seek is rather to distinguish between what we can know and what we cannot know, we shall begin with the problem of knowledge, the path travelled by the critical philosophy. If, finally, one has full confidence in the possibility of thought and seeks a rounded world-view, one will follow the lead of the dogmatic and speculative schools and begin with the problem of Being. It naturally has not a little bearing on the form and kind of treatment, which problem one begins with; for one problem is easily
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overshadowed by another. In a study of comparative problems, to which in these pages I make a contribution, it is important to give each problem due recognition. Accordingly, it is my purpose — in harmony with the above indicated analogy between personality and science — to begin with the psychological problem, and then proceed to the examination of the nature of scientific knowledge, and to the problem of knowledge in general. If one puts the problem of Being third in the series, the transition to it comes quite naturally, either from personality, which is one part of all being, or from science, whose function it is to lead us to a view of the existing world. The three problems thus far named would be set for us if man were only a purely intellectual, cognitive being. The fourth problem arises on account of the relation in which man, as a feeling and willing creature, stands to Being. Thus are the chief problems of thought linked with the theoretical and practical interests of man.
More important than the question as to the order of the problems, is the question whether or not they can be reduced to one underlying problem. Such a possibility seems to me to lie in the significance which the relation between continuity and discontinuity bears to each one of these problems. This relationship involves the deepest interests of personality as well as of science. In both realms there is, as already noted, a striving after unity and connectedness, and, in so far, the discontinuous appears as an insurmountable obstacle. On the other hand, it is discontinuity (distinction of time, of degree, of place, difference of quality, of individuality) which more than anything else brings new content, releases locked powers, and opens up the greatest tasks in the realm of life no less than in the realm of science. Thus it would appear that neither of the two elements is the only accredited one. It will be of unquestionable interest to follow out their relations to each other under the four points of view furnished by our four chief problems.
In the philosophy of the nineteenth century the significance of the problem of continuity was thrown into prominence by the fact that the various schools fought over it in turn. In the first half of the century, philosophical idealism after its fashion asserted the continuity of being and looked down on experimental science on account of its fragmentary character. Meanwhile, Positivism (as Comte and Stuart Mill expounded it) emphasized the discontinuity of different groups of phenomena. Now, toward the end of the century, realism, supported by the evolutionary hypothesis, champions continuity, while the idealistic school is inclined to emphasize the unavoidable discontinuity of our cognition. So the schools change places in the great arena on which the battle of truth must be fought out. Whenever a point of view ceases to yield significant results, the inquiry involuntarily seeks out a new one, and thus from ever-changing points of view thought advances to clearness. The different
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schools replace one another, like runners at the ancient torch festival, but the torch remains ever the same. And if none of the schools hitherto active has fully laid bare the central core of all these philosophical problems, there is all the more reason for us to work in order that greater clearness may be shed.