The Purposes of a Philosophical Association [1]
J. E. Creighton (1902)

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IN thinking of a fitting subject upon which to address you on this occasion, I had at first planned to consider two or three fundamental problems which seem to me to be pressing themselves upon our attention, in one form or another, in all the philosophical discussions of the present day. What I had hoped accomplish was, merely by way of orientation, to discuss the significance of some of the recent contributions to these subjects, and to raise the question whether or not an agreement has not been tacitly reached, which will warrant a restatement of these problems in a new and perhaps more fruitful form. It was largely, though not wholly, an increasing sense of the difficulty of the task, and of my own incompetence, which led me to abandon this plan. For, in addition, as the time of meeting drew on, and it appeared that the papers were to be so numerous and so inclusive in character as almost to constitute an embarrassment of philosophical riches, it seemed better that I should choose a subject of a somewhat different nature, but one which I felt it to be important that should in some form be presented for consideration at this our first meeting, the question of "The Purposes of a Philosophical Association."

In general, when one knows what one wants to do, there is no great advantage, I think, in sitting down and deliberately counting up reasons. But, in the present case, where there are many [p. 220] individuals concerned, it will undoubtedly promote mutual understanding, and increase intelligent interest in the affairs of the Association, to raise explicitly the question regarding the purposes of the organization and the advantages which it offers to us. There is a certain danger that one may unconsciously come to put too low an estimate upon these advantages, and so fail to appreciate the more serious side of the matter. One not infrequently hears it said that the main purpose of these gatherings is social, to meet one's colleagues personally, to renew old friendships and to form new ones. This is certainly a feature of the meetings which no one will be inclined to underestimate, and the indirect results of such personal intercourse are often of genuine scientific importance. There is a danger, however, if the social advantages are exclusively emphasized, that certain consequences may ensue which would inevitably tend to weaken the influence of the Association and destroy its effectiveness. In the first place, the members may come to feel that they are in no way responsible for the programme, which is after all unimportant, furnishing as it does only an excuse for meeting. And, in consequence of this feeling, they may, when it is not perfectly convenient to attend the meetings, resolve to remain at home, perhaps with the complacent consciousness that in so doing they are not sacrificing anything more, essential than their own pleasure.

It is the conviction that these are not merely imaginary dangers that has led me to invite you to reflect for a little on some of the ends which may be realized through the Association; and, incidentally, upon the responsibilities that we have assumed in becoming members. I wish, however, to preface what I have to say with a remark or two, which may prevent misconceptions regarding the meaning and scope of my discussion. In the first place, I would ask you not to suppose from my remarks that ii regard the new Association as a kind of universal panacea for all the ills from which philosophy suffers. An association can only act as one cooperating agency among others, or, at most, prove a stimulus to the forces which are essential for progress in philosophical work. And, secondly, I do not intend to discuss the question of the proper scope of a

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philosophical association, the [p. 221] particular means which it should employ in order to attain its ends, but simply to attempt to indicate what I believe these ends to be.

The most striking characteristic of all modern scientific work is found in the fact that it is the result of conscious cooperation between a number of individuals. This feature has always characterized to some extent the efforts of those who have attained real results in the search for truth, but it has become more conscious and more prominent during the present generation. It is important to remember, however, that even those pioneers of modern thought whom we usually picture to ourselves as wrapped in solitary cogitation did not work in independence of their fellows and contemporaries. When Descartes retired to Holland in 1629 to work out his new system, he thought it necessary to keep in touch with the scholars of the time through Father Mersenne, and from time to time to request their criticisms of his views. Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding grew out of meetings and discussions with a number of friends. Even Spinoza, who is often regarded as an absolutely solitary thinker, was in constant communication with a circle of scientific friends, and carried on occasional correspondence with some of the most noted thinkers of his day. In 1660, the Royal Society of London was founded, after having existed for a number of years as an informal club. In 1700, Leibniz founded the Academy of Sciences at Berlin, and a few years later organized a similar society at Vienna. In addition, I may mention the extensive scientific correspondence of the pioneers of science in all departments as evidence of the important role personal intercourse played in the development of modern thought. From these and other facts which might easily be cited, it is evident that the necessities of cooperation and mutual help in scientific work were more or less completely realized at an early date. In all of these circumstances, we can discover the effort of the individual to free himself from the idols of the cave, by appealing to the reason of his fellows to confirm or correct his own subjective opinions. It is the realization of the necessity of a more extended as well as a more systematic and intimate comparison of views among workers in the same field that has led to the multiplica-[p. 222]tion of scientific associations and organizations in the present generation.

Philosophers have been slower than their fellow workers in inaugurating any movement to secure this end. They have, however, been largely occupied with a different, though somewhat similar, undertaking. In philosophy, it is perhaps more essential than in any other held of inquiry that one should build upon the work of one's predecessors. This is a truth that philosophical students of the present day have realized pretty thoroughly. Indeed, in recent years it has been a frequent reproach that the study of philosophy has reduced itself largely to a study of the history of philosophy, that the interest in systems of the past has displaced that in constructive problems. There is perhaps sufficient truth in this charge to prevent us from denying it unqualifiedly: there is a tendency in every kind of undertaking to mistake the means for the end. In general, however, it may be said that the total absorption of the present time in historical questions is more apparent than real. Moreover, philosophy has certainly gained much from the detailed historical investigations of the past generation. This gain does not chiefly lie in the additional scholarship and critical acumen which such investigations involve, but rather in the fact that it makes possible a more adequate comprehension of the genesis and meaning of our own problems. It is only through an understanding of the history of the past that we can rightly appreciate the questions that press for an answer at the present time, and know in what terms they can be intelligibly formulated and answered. It is well to remember, then, when we grow impatient with historical studies, that these are not investigations which this or any other generation can put behind them and have done with. The effort to gain a truer appreciation of the thought of the past will always remain an essential part of philosophical study. To undertake to philosophize without an accurate and sympathetic knowledge of the development of philosophical conceptions is not only vain and fruitless, but it is hopelessly to lose oneself, and to commit intellectual suicide. The character of many books that still appear year by year on philosophical subjects, written frequently by men [p. 223] of ability and of reputation in other fields, but in utter ignorance and disregard of the history of philosophy, illustrates and justifies my statement.

It is not less study of the past that we need, but, doubtless, a more intelligent and discriminating study. And this means a study of historical systems in the light of our own problems. Facts without ideas are simply confusing: knowledge of the details of philosophical systems without any insight into the inner meaning of things, or ability to distinguish between the external form and the vital essence, is certain to bewilder rather than to bring enlightenment. Perhaps in this historical and evolutionary age, when the continuity between the thought of the present and that of the past is so strongly emphasized, there is some danger that in the study of the history of philosophy we may

continue to busy ourselves with problems that are either outworn, or at least presuppose in their formulation conceptions that are hopelessly antiquated. It is necessary to recognize that there is a dead as well as a living past, that many of its problems, in the form in which they were stated, have been superseded, because they rest upon principles and assumptions which the drift of things has shown to be untenable.

And this brings me to the main proposition which I have here in view. The history of philosophy is only intelligible when read in the light of present-day problems. Not only is it true that, from a strictly philosophical standpoint, the study of the thought of the past can never be anything more than a means to the better comprehension of the problems of the present time, but, in itself, the former remains to a large extent incomprehensible except as its disputes and questionings are brought into relation to our own problems, and interpreted in their light. It is, of course, necessary to keep in mind the danger of doing violence to historical fact by construing a past system wholly in terms of conceptions which belong to a later time. Nevertheless, if we would understand the systems of the past, we must read them as the records of the thoughts of men who were struggling with the same stubborn questions which concern us. It follows then, I think, that it is only one who has pondered on philosophical [p. 224] problems for himself who can intelligently study the history of philosophy. To undertake to carry on such studies in an external and purely pragmatic fashion would be to adopt a method which would certainly defeat its own ends. If either historical or constructive work in philosophy is to prove fruitful, the two sides cannot be separated, but must be carried on in close connection, the past being used to reveal the present to itself, and the present to unlock the secrets of the past.

It does not seem too much to assume that the meetings of the Association will not be without influence in promoting the study of the history of philosophy in general. Moreover, since the interest of such meetings is likely to be largely centered in the actual problems of the present time, we may perhaps hope that there will be a tendency to bring these studies into closer and more intimate relation to our own philosophical standpoint. But it is more particularly in promoting and facilitating the interchange of ideas between the philosophical workers of the present day, who are scattered throughout this part of the country, that the Association will find its main function. In every department of investigation the conviction seems to be growing that intellectual companionship and cooperation are essential to real progress. The underlying assumption is that it is necessary in scientific work to combine forces and to work, not as a number of isolated individuals, but as a social group of cooperating minds. We have learned that to isolate oneself intellectually is to render one's work unfruitful; that there is in every generation a main drift of problems within which we must work, if we wish to contribute anything to the common cause.

We have seen, however, that the facts compel us to admit that the insufficiency of the isolated individual and the consequent necessity of cooperation have not been so clearly realized by philosophers as by workers in almost every other department of knowledge. And, as a result, we have perhaps missed to some extent both the feeling of comradeship and also the courage and enthusiastic confidence that springs from working shoulder to shoulder with one's fellows. The main reason for this tardiness on the part of philosophical thinkers to recognize as clearly as [p. 225] their scientific brethren the need of cooperation lies in the nature of the subject itself. On account of the extent of the field and the difficulty in obtaining a synoptic view, one may regard the line of investigation pursued by one's neighbor as completely erroneous and directly opposed to one's own, though, in reality, it furnishes exactly the facts which are necessary to correct and complement our own defects and one-sidedness. Another reason doubtless is found in the fact that philosophical theories, like theological tenets, are so closely related to what is most intimate and fundamental to our personal nature, and, consequently, so suffused with emotion, that it is difficult to be tolerant and fair with those who differ from us. This feeling has not only divided philosophers into schools, but has frequently led them to ignore entirely the work of their opponents, or to regard them as perverters of the truth with whom they can hold no commerce. Other influences, such as university or individual rivalries, may of course also operate to prevent unity and sympathetic understanding among philosophical thinkers. But there are many signs, of which the formation of this Association is but one, that there is a growing consciousness on the part of philosophers of the necessity of coming to understand even those from whom they differ, and of recognizing in them allies and helpers in the common cause. I wish to point out in a little more detail why such cooperation is necessary, and also to give some reasons for believing that the personal intercourse afforded by the meetings of the Association may aid very effectively in promoting this end.

Before proceeding in this direction, however, I may be allowed to refer to an objection which my previous statements may seem to have left out of account. It may be held that at the present day printing has taken the place of personal communication, that books and periodical literature adequately fulfill the functions which I have been claiming for the Association, and that, therefore, the latter is in no sense essential. To this it may be added that any association must consist of a limited number of men, from a restricted area of country; while if one knows three or four modern languages, one can by reading share the best thoughts of the leaders of the philosophical world. The objec-[p. 226]tion would have weight only if it were claimed that the meetings of the Association could in any degree excuse members from the necessity of following the thoughts of contemporary writers, as these are found in current books and magazine literature. It is not as a substitute for current literature, but as a supplement to it, that we may hope that the personal intercourse afforded by the Association will prove useful. Perhaps it is not too much to assume that those who offer papers will feel it necessary to present their theories in relation to the most recent discussions of the subject. But, in addition to this, there are undoubtedly certain advantages essential to philosophical work to be derived from personal association and intercourse, which are scarcely obtainable in any other way. I now propose, at the risk of some repetition, to consider some of these advantages in more detail.

In the first place, then, it can scarcely be doubted that philosophy, of all species of scientific inquiry, is that which demands, in order to be fruitfully prosecuted, the closest and most intimate intellectual relations between a number of minds. This is true for a variety of reasons. One of the most obvious of these is found in the fact that in these days we have abandoned the attempt to deduce a philosophy of the world from fundamental first principles, by means of deductive arguments, and have frankly adopted the inductive method of procedure. I do not, of course, mean by this that philosophy, or any other branch of inquiry, confines itself to induction in the narrower sense of the word, but merely that, in common with all the sciences of the present day, it sees that its starting point and basis must be the facts of experience. When this is granted, it becomes at once evident that the data of the philosopher are so complex and many-sided that, working by himself, he is certain to fail to take account or properly estimate some facts of importance. Again, he must approach these facts through his own individual mind, that is to say, with the particular set of concepts furnished him by his own education and reflection. But it is essential that philosophy should work regressively as well as progressively: it must criticise its presuppositions, and cannot, as do the other sciences, take its standpoint for granted. Now it is evident that [p. 227] no single individual can look, as it were, in all directions at once. He has then constant need of criticism, of supplementation, and of having objections forced upon his attention. It does not seem too much to say that this need can be most effectively supplied through personal intercourse with others. For when objections and opposing views are backed by the immediate presence of one's neighbor, they cannot easily be ignored. Moreover, after a man's views have ceased to be fluid, and have assumed the rigidity of cold print, he is not in the same degree open to criticism, or so likely to benefit by it.

The advantages of social cooperation in philosophical study were most completely realized in the Greek schools, and particularly in the school of Socrates and those of his immediate successors. In the Socratic method of inquiry, as it is represented to us in Plato's dialogues, a number of persons combine in the search for philosophical truth; and to the result the most various classes of men, cultured young aristocrats of Athens, tradesmen, sophists, men of affairs, and inexperienced youths, are made to contribute. Dialectic, as described and illustrated by Plate, is essentially the method of critical induction, the method of analyzing facts to discover conceptions, and of testing conceptions in the light of new facts. Of course, the method is the same in principle whether it involves a literal talking back and forth, or takes the form of self-criticism, or of a comparison of views with the printed theories of other men. No one would maintain that in modern times dialectic in its literal and original meaning can take the place of either of the other forms of criticism, in the sense of rendering them unnecessary. But, for the reasons I have already urged, it still remains an important and necessary supplement to less insistent forms of criticism, and, at its best (that is, where the objections of the critic are carefully thought out), it has the power to supply something which the other forms wholly lack.

It is perhaps only a corollary from this to state that, for the majority of men at least, intellectual contact and personal intercourse with their fellow workers in the same field are essential conditions of complete sanity of view. There are a number of [p. 228] circumstances, inherent in the nature of philosophical study, which render it easier to lose oneself in subjective fancies in this field than in the realm of the objective sciences. And to this we must add that nowhere is a lack of sanity more

absolutely fatal. I have already spoken of the abortive philosophical results of even able thinkers when they write in ignorance of the history of the past. Isolation from one's contemporaries, however, is equally injurious, and brings in its train idiosyncrasies and peculiarities which lower, if they do not altogether destroy, the value of the individual's work. To be insane in the full sense of the word is just to lose connection with one's fellows, to fall away from the objective and rational order of things, and to be possessed by subjective fancies and illusions. For a philosophical thinker to stand apart from the thought of his own age, to refuse to see anything of importance in the work of his contemporaries, or to condemn their results as entirely perverted and erroneous, is to imperil not only his own usefulness, but his philosophical sanity as well. This does not mean that a philosopher must follow the crowd, and not as an independent thinker protest against what he regards as wrong methods and erroneous results. No! Rather on occasion he must be ready to cry, Athanasius contra mundum! But then he must be ready, like Athanasius, to fight it out, and to fight it out with an open mind. To stand completely aloof from "this wicked and perverse generation" in which one lives, to regard one's fellow workers as "mostly fools," in addition to the moral consequences which it entails, both reacts injuriously upon one's scientific effectiveness, and also tends to destroy one's scientific sanity. This tendency to isolation in philosophical work seems to me not wholly unknown even at the present day. I have doubtless set before you the extreme case and spoken of the extreme penalty. But I cannot doubt that nearly every one has at some time, and to some extent, suffered intellectually from this tendency. The most obvious and perhaps the most indispensable means of grace is the printed page, an open-minded study of the printed work of our fellows. It is true, however, that this study is induced and its value enhanced by personal intercourse with the writers. Moreover, it must be [p. 229] added that whenever personal acquaintance is possible, it is perhaps the most effective means of promoting intellectual sympathy and understanding, and of making clear to workers in the same field their unity of purpose, and the mutually complementary nature of their results. One may ignore or almost totally misunderstand the published views of another man; but when these are reinforced by the living personality they cannot so readily be either ignored or misunderstood. It seems to me essential, then, if philosophical thinkers are to preserve their full measure of intellectual sanity, that they should, at more or less frequent intervals, be penned up and forced to listen to the views of their fellows, and, so far as possible, forced to understand and appreciate these views.

If we still go on to consider the matter from the standpoint of the members who compose the Association, there is a further point which may be urged. The problems of philosophy are vastly difficult and complex. We are sometimes told that they are insoluble, and that we spend our strength for nought. There are even distinguished philosophical scholars who say that all metaphysical theories are subjective dreams -- necessary, indeed, to beings such as we are -- but altogether outside the pale of objective and verifiable fact. Though the individual struggles bravely against this conclusion, the difficulties and perplexities of the subject tend to exercise a paralyzing effect upon him as he faces his problems alone. Realizing the magnitude of the task and his own insufficiency, he is apt to lose heart and to cry, 'who am I that I should try to read these riddles.' It is not necessary to dwell upon the evil effects which this loss of courage and enthusiasm entails upon the individual both as a man and as a member of society. The remedy is to be found in the development of the consciousness of one's intellectual community and partnership with one's colleagues. The task which seems too hard for the individual appears in a different light when he regards himself as a member of a body of organized workers. The sense of comradeship, of working with others for a common end, which is brought home to one most forcibly by personal contact, arouses enthusiasm and friendly [p. 230] emulation that issue in a courageous determination on the part of individuals to play their role and contribute in some way to the accomplishment of the common task. It is the development of this feeling of intellectual fellowship and cooperation that is the most hopeful sign of all scientific work at the present day. It is also to a large extent the source of the inspiration which animates all modern investigation and scholarship. No one would maintain that this spirit is less essential in philosophical work than in other fields of inquiry. Nevertheless, I think that it is not too much to say that there does not yet exist in philosophy, either the external organization for cooperation that has already been set on foot in the natural sciences, nor even the intimate feeling of fraternity which binds together the workers in many of these fields. Just what is possible in the way of establishing external means of mutual help, I am not now prepared to discuss. But meeting together for a common purpose will undoubtedly aid in developing that sympathy and understanding which must be the basis for all plans of external cooperation.

These consequences, I think, may, to some extent at least, be expected to follow as incidental results of the existence of the Association. They can scarcely be said, however, to be included in the

ends at which the Association should deliberately aim. The main purpose which we should conscientiously set before us, it seems to me, is to promote and encourage original investigation and publication. It does not, indeed, seem unreasonable to assume that this end also will in some measure be realized indirectly through the stimulus and inspiration afforded by the meetings. But, in addition, I think that it is possible for the Association consciously and deliberately to do something toward the promotion of this result. This does not necessarily imply the setting of prize questions, or the employment of any external agencies whatever. But the efficiency and helpfulness of the Association in this respect will depend upon the spirit in which it does its work. By setting a high standard, and demanding that the papers presented shall represent the best work and most original thought of those who offer them, by keeping before us as the main purpose of the organization the advancement of philosophy, this [p. 231] Association may do much both to inspire and direct original work. Above all, it may become an important agent in creating the atmosphere and furthering the spirit which are essential to scholarly research. And this is a matter of the utmost importance, for the atmosphere and the scholarly inspiration are what are most needed. The conditions in American academic life which are unfavorable to original scholarship have often been made the subject of comment. The majority of the members of this Association are teachers, who can undoubtedly plead as an excuse for their unproductiveness the demands of what one of our German colleagues has happily characterized as, die zeitraubende und kraftabsorbirende academische Lehrthätigkeit. But however unfavorable the conditions are, they are not likely to change greatly in our day, and we cannot maintain that they entirely excuse us from producing something. Indeed, in general we recognize this obligation, and keep on hoping that next year or the year after we shall find time to do something worth while. In the meantime, the fact remains that, with a few notable exceptions, the philosophical scholars of America are comparatively unproductive. Can this Association do anything to change this state of affairs? It all depends, as I have said, upon the spirit of the Association itself. If we do not take the meetings very seriously, if we meet in an easy-going way to listen to papers which were written to read and do not represent any real research or deep thought, we may have 'a pleasant and profitable time' (as they say at the teachers' meetings) but we shall not do anything to promote American philosophical scholarship.

I have said that the promotion of philosophical scholarship and research is the only object capable of affording a purpose common to all the members of the Association, and an interest which is likely to be serious and lasting. And in this connection I should like to express my opinion that it would be a mistake to make the discussion of methods of teaching philosophy a coordinate purpose, or even to introduce papers on this subject into the programme of the meetings. Even if the membership of the Association were composed wholly of teachers of philosophy, which will never, I hope, be the case, the meetings should not, [p. 232] it seems to me, be occupied with the consideration of such secondary and subordinate topics. This opinion is based not merely on the personal feeling that the discussion of methods of teaching philosophy is in itself rather a stupid way of wasting time, but on the conviction that even in our capacity as teachers it is courage and inspiration to attack problems for ourselves, to go to firsthand sources and so actually discover by our own efforts what we teach to students, that is the one thing needful. In dealing with university students one may surely be allowed to tell one's story in one's own way. The important thing is that one shall have something of one's own to tell, something in the importance of which one thoroughly believes, and which has cost real effort to discover. It seems to me, then, that it will be an advantage in every way for the members of this Association to forget, so far as possible, their profession during the days of meeting, and to come together simply as human beings interested in philosophical investigation and scholarship.

It may not be inappropriate to the present occasion to call attention to the standing of philosophy in the learned world as a specialized subject of inquiry. If we look at the country as a whole it does not seem too much to say that philosophy does not enjoy the general recognition, even among educated men, that is accorded to many of the other sciences, nor is the philosophical teacher and writer universally conceded to be a specially trained scholar whose opinions in his own field are as much entitled to respect as those of the physicist or biologist in his special domain. In many colleges and universities the place of philosophy is only grudgingly conceded. It is regarded as a more or less useful handmaid to theology, or perhaps to education, but its scientific status as a real and independent subject of investigation is tacitly or explicitly denied. Again, men wholly unschooled in the subject frequently feel themselves competent not only to write philosophical books and articles, but they not infrequently exhibit the greatest contempt for professional philosophers, and confidently proclaim their own short and easy answers to the riddles of the universe.

If we admit that this general attitude towards philosophy exists, [p. 233] it becomes necessary to seek for the causes through which it has arisen. I shall not attempt to furnish any exhaustive enumeration of these causes. To some extent the explanation may be found in the fact that the problems of philosophy arise only through reflection, and are, therefore, not at once evident to the outsider. One cannot point to definite phenomena of sense as the subject matter of philosophy, as is possible to do in the case of physical sciences. The whole inquiry consequently seems to the unreflective person mysterious and fantastical. In addition to this inherent difficulty, however, philosophy has undoubtedly been injured in public esteem by the subordinate and ancillary position which it so long occupied in this country. The result of making philosophy the handmaid of theology is always the same -- philosophy, so fettered, degenerates into empty logomachies and lifeless definitions and justly becomes a byword and reproach among real thinkers. If at the present time philosophy has again raised its head as a free inquiry, it nevertheless still continues to suffer as a consequence of its former empty character and subordinate position.

It is, however, fruitless to dwell upon this subject if we propose to deny that we are ourselves in any measure responsible for the present condition of affairs. But it is impossible, I think, to avoid the conclusion that if philosophy does not occupy the place in public esteem which properly belongs to it, the fault must lie to some extent with its present representatives. There are two indictments which may, with some show of reason, be urged against professional philosophers. In the first place, it can scarcely be said that as a class they display the same zeal in original investigation, or the same scholarly devotion to their subject that is exhibited by many other groups of scientific workers. The result is that outsiders are not quite convinced that philosophers are in earnest, or that they believe in the seriousness of their own work. But secondly, and principally, the educated outsider withholds his recognition from philosophy, because he believes that it has been barren of real results. Now, in spite of frequent murmurs about 'Philistinism,' this demand for practical results is not in itself unreasonable. It is unreasonable [p. 234] only if the results demanded be of a kind that from the very nature of the case philosophy cannot supply -- as, for example, a worldly wisdom like that of the Sophists, or short and simple answers to ultimate problems. But philosophy must bake some bread; it must, like the other sciences, minister to human life. This demand cannot be escaped by the plea that philosophy concerns itself with the theoretical, not the practical, aspect of affairs. For we cannot divorce the intellectual and the practical, or say that one is for the sake of the other. Intelligence, when it is complete intelligence, is itself practical; and the will of a rational being is also intelligence. One cannot escape the conclusion that a lack of practicality in philosophical results indicates a corresponding defect upon the intellectual side, a failure to grasp the significant facts, or an occupation with isolated minor points while cowardly shirking the main issues. In no other way can we explain the charge of unfruitfulness which is so insistently brought against philosophy. Is it not true, for example, that during the present generation we have debated too exclusively the question whether or not we can know reality, and discussed historical problems in too abstract a fashion? At any rate, the general feeling of the time may perhaps be taken as evidence that the representatives of philosophy have not convinced the public that their results are capable of becoming vital and directing influences in the spiritual life of the individual and of society at the present day.

It is not necessary at this point to discuss the question of how the status of philosophy may be affected by the formation of the Association, or to attempt to forecast the influence which the meetings may have in this direction. It is of course true that the efficiency of philosophy, not merely in scholastic circles, but also in the wider life of society, must be to us a matter of concern. Neither can we be indifferent to the standing of philosophy in the learned world and in the esteem of the general public. But any action of the Association toward the promotion of these objects must be indirect, resulting from the effect it produces upon its members. I shall therefore pass at once to another question.

It may be expected that the existence of a separate organiza-[p. 235]tion for philosophy will serve as a means of communication with those whose main interest is in other departments of knowledge, and that it will thus prove a link in the federation of the sciences. The meetings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science on the first week of the year will soon, it is reasonable to suppose, grow into a still larger convocation, which will embrace not only workers in the natural sciences, but representatives of every specialized field of inquiry. No one can doubt that the results of such wider organization will be in every way beneficial. It will broaden the outlook of workers in special fields, and bring home to their minds the necessity of integration as well as specialization, in order that human knowledge may become actually one science or systematic whole. It is because of

our interest in such a broader federation, that I think we should be careful not to restrict the proper meaning of the term 'science,' or allow the word to be monopolized by the naturalists. But whatever may be thought regarding the possibility or advisability of this wider scientific fellowship, my fellow members will, I am sure, unanimously agree with me in the statement that it is especially desirable that our relations should be close and intimate with the American Psychological Association, to whose courtesy philosophical interests in the past have owed so much, and by means of whose fostering care the present organization has grown up. The community of interest which obtains and must always continue to obtain between philosophy and psychology, as well as their historical association, would suggest the mutual advantage of holding common meetings from time to time as may be found convenient.

The question of the relation of organizations leads me to a final word regarding the relation of philosophy to other fields of inquiry. This is a large subject to introduce at this point, but what I have to say relates to but a single aspect of it, and may perhaps be most directly stated in the following way. Philosophy must recognize that the task for which it stands cannot be accomplished by forsaking its own standpoint, and adopting that of other sciences in the attempt to imitate their procedure, no matter how fruitful or successful these methods may appear to be [p. 236] when applied in other fields. Philosophy has its own special standpoint and data, as well as its own special purpose, and nothing but confusion can result from any abandonment of these. This imitative tendency on the part of philosophy, the desire to affiliate with the science which appears most fruitful, or for the time has 'got the voice for excellence,' has shown itself over and over again during the last three centuries, and is still operative. In the seventeenth century, mathematics, as the ideal of the completely demonstrative science, exercised its fascination over the minds of philosophers. This influence was not confined to continental rationalists like Descartes and Spinoza, but furnished an empirical thinker like Locke with his ideal of knowledge. Indeed, it is interesting to note that just as at the present day there is a tendency to limit the term 'science' to knowledge that adopts the form of the sciences of nature, so Locke restricts the word to knowledge that can present itself in the demonstrative form of mathematics. After mathematics, mechanical physics and biology have in turn attracted many philosophical thinkers, and led them to seek to adapt their data to one or other of these standpoints, claiming that in so doing they were rendering philosophy truly scientific.

But since the data of philosophy are different from those of the physical sciences, it is never possible without violence to force upon them conceptions which were framed to comprehend facts of a totally different order. The facts of experience cannot be dealt with as if they were physical phenomena, or biological processes. It is a fundamental principle of all science that the nature of its subject-matter must dictate its method of procedure and the concepts by which it is to be interpreted. The causal principle of connection, for example, is not an empty form that is indifferent to its content and can be transferred without change of significance from one field to another.

My excuse for dwelling upon these well-worn propositions is that there seems to be an uncertainty in some quarters regarding the business of philosophy, which attempts to cover its own confusion by a blind faith that if we are fervent in protesting our love for natural science, and our determination to follow the road that it has marked out, all will go well. Statements that 'the philosopher must take his stand upon the results of natural sci- [p. 237] ence,' that 'he must put on the breastplate of natural knowledge,' and the like, may conceivably possess a sense in which they are true, but as commonly understood they are misleading and mischievous. Facts, in the form in which they are delivered to him by the naturalist, have in themselves no special significance for the philosopher. Nor can he use them as the foundation stones of his system. The philosopher must look at the facts, from his own standpoint, he must read them in the light of his own concepts, and cannot accept a formulation of them which is confessedly one-sided and abstract like that of natural science. Philosophical science is not 'natural' science, and cannot 'accept its facts' from the latter. To do so would be to put 'psychologism' and 'naturalism' in place of philosophy. But philosophy, to be philosophy at all, has to humanize its facts, that is, to look at them from the standpoint of complete and self-conscious human experience, for it is only from this standpoint that a meaning for them can be found. The philosopher is thus essentially a humanist rather than a naturalist, and his closest affiliations are with the sciences that deal with the products of man's thought and purposive activity. In his relation to natural science, he is concerned less with the facts regarded objectively than with the thinking operations by which these facts were obtained. He does not adopt the standpoint of natural science, but transforms it utterly, and gives to natural facts a new interpretation in terms of conscious experience. Similarly, the abstract view of nature as a whole which the physical naturalist furnishes, has to be humanized by philosophical interpretation, which construes the facts differently, finding in

nature the congeniality with the mind of man through which alone it is intelligible. And, on the other hand, the philosophical standpoint necessitates a different account of the facts of mind from that given by the psychological 'naturalist.' The merely subjective standpoint of the latter cannot be taken as starting-point any more than the merely objective standpoint of the physicist. Just as philosophy humanizes the physical facts by viewing them in relation to mind, so it also objectifies subjective facts by viewing them as functions through which the individual realizes his unity with nature and with his fellow-men.

Notes

[1] Read as the Presidential Address at the first annual meeting of the American Philosophical Association, March 31, 1902.

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