

## THE BRITISH INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY

*(Incorporated under the Companies Acts 1908–1917 as a Company not for Profit but limited by Guarantee.)*

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## INSTITUTE NOTES

### ANNUAL MEETING

The Ninth Ordinary General Meeting of the Institute was held at University Hall, 14, Gordon Square, London, W.C. 1, on Wednesday, July 4th, at 5.30 p.m. After the unanimous adoption of the Annual Report and Statement of Accounts, short addresses were given by the President, Sir Herbert Samuel, and Professor John Macmurray.

### ADDRESS BY SIR HERBERT SAMUEL

Members of the Institute will see from the Annual Report that its finances are in a somewhat more satisfactory condition than was the case a year or two ago; yet the situation still gives rise to some concern, and the financial position will not be firmly established until we are assured of a considerably larger income through a substantial increase in our membership. If all our members would be good enough to consider whether among their acquaintances there are not some persons who, by their interest in philosophy, would be suited for admission to this Institute, and would suggest their names to the Director of Studies, they would be rendering a useful service.

The Editor of our JOURNAL invited me some months ago to open a discussion on the present position of British Philosophy, and I accepted that invitation with some trepidation. I felt, however, that if I wrote anything at all, it should be of a somewhat provocative character, calculated to arouse controversy. I spend my life in an atmosphere of controversy, and, after all, controversy is not a bad thing. A nation which is without it is a dead nation, and an Institute which is without it may soon become somnolent. Yet I confess that I opened the subsequent number of the JOURNAL with some

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anxiety, for I thought it very possible that those who replied to my letter might fall upon me with indignant ferocity and rend me in pieces. On the contrary, I found myself very kindly treated. Dr. Collingwood, speaking with his great authority, expressed a general agreement; and if Mr. Aldrich and Lord Listowel were more critical, they were at the same time very tolerant. I think, indeed, that there is a growing agreement with the point of view which I expressed, that philosophy must keep itself in close relation with life, with the world of common-sense. It may be that we are at a turning-point in British philosophy, going back to earlier tendencies and away from Kantian methods. We may indeed be returning, so far as the subject-matter allows, to the Baconian methods, which have proved so brilliantly successful in the sphere of science. As Dr. Collingwood says, these tendencies are clearly manifest in the work of the two greatest of our living philosophers, Professor Whitehead and Professor Alexander, as well as in the work of General Smuts.

I would give an example to which I have briefly referred on a previous occasion. Philosophy has always concerned itself with the problems of Space and of Time. Each has received prolonged and separate examination, and it has been sought to relate each to the other. Now intervenes a new fact. Rutherford and other physicists have discovered by laboratory methods that the atom, which, as its name implies, was thought to be an entity that was indivisible, consists, in fact, of infinitesimal units of electricity in violent motion. Although it is, of course, true that we do not know what electricity is, and although it is also true that later researches may possibly find some flaw in the electron theory of matter, still the proofs that are offered are so convincing, the experiments have been so repeatedly confirmed, that thinkers are bound to accept the theory as a working basis. Now this discovery was unknown to the Greek philosophers, though apparently dimly foreseen by some of them; it was, of course, unknown to Descartes; it was unknown to Kant. It creates for philosophy a new position. It appears that in the physical world a thing not merely *is* but *happens*. Whitehead expresses this in a simple sentence: "The event is the unit of things real."

The result to philosophy must be that any attempt to treat Time and Space as separate entities is futile. The one cannot, by any possibility, be separate from the other. At the heart of the physical universe there is motion, electric units of various kinds in rapid movement. Motion means that *this* is *here* at one time and *there* at another time. You cannot have motion from here to there without this time and that time.

When matter was regarded as inert, it was possible to conceive Extension apart from Time. A piece of rock, for example, was the same ten million years ago and might be the same ten million years hence; for it "Time stands still." But when we accept the kinetic nature of matter, we realize that the rock essentially is not the same from one ten-millionth of a second to the next.

Space without Time is impossible in the real universe; just as length and breadth is impossible without thickness. We can draw geometrical diagrams on a sheet of paper and say that they are contained in length and breadth without thickness, but we know very well that if, in fact, we remove the thickness of the lines of ink and the thickness of the paper they would disappear. The conception is, in fact, what Vaihinger calls "a fictional abstraction."

There can be no Extension without Time; and similarly, there can be no Time without Extension; for if there were no extension, and therefore no motion, nothing would happen, nothing would exist, and consequently there could be no duration. If, therefore, you were to eliminate either Time or Space and thereby make movement impossible, the universe would disappear,

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and with it physics and metaphysics, philosophy and the philosopher. This has been clearly shown by Alexander in his great work, *Space, Time and Deity*. The conclusion is that Space-Time is the only subject-matter for philosophers, and that discussions which are pursued and books that are written on other lines must necessarily be both a waste of space and a waste of time!

This Institute must of course be eclectic; it contains men and women belonging to all schools. I should be sorry indeed to suggest that we should pass a resolution at this Annual Meeting to some such effect as "It is desirable that philosophy should base itself on actuality rather than on pure ratiocination," yet I do entertain a personal hope that it is rather in that direction that its activities will tend.

### ADDRESS BY PROFESSOR JOHN MACMURRAY

I am glad that this opportunity to express my own sense of the function of this Institute finds me able and anxious to support the plea of our president for a philosophy that is practical and concerned with concrete problems. The existence of the Institute is itself a sign of an awakening consciousness of a need for philosophy in the general public, and in philosophers of a need for the public. Its function is to bring the philosopher and the ordinary citizen into co-operative alliance. This is an extremely difficult task, even when it is undertaken with the greatest good will on both sides; and we shall need courage and patience if it is to be carried through.

Philosophy itself is inherent in the human situation. It is not an invention; nor is it the expression of a limited need which arises in certain people in face of certain special problems. It is always and everywhere fundamental to human life. Every man, every society of men, has its philosophy, though for the most part it is implicit rather than systematically reasoned. It is created by being lived. It is worked out in action through the pressure of the continuous necessity for social adjustment. When the tempo of social change is slow enough for these adjustments to be made gradually and instinctively, the mass of mankind will remain unconscious of any pressing need for a conscious formulation of the philosophical structure of their social life. But there come times, like our own, when the rate of change makes social adjustment difficult and harassing to everyone concerned, so that we are all forced into consciousness of the philosophical structure which determines the shape and the direction of our life in society. At such times the demand for philosophical understanding becomes widespread, and the concrete and practical issues which are the core of philosophy emerge clearly and force themselves upon our attention. In this we find both the origin of the British Institute of Philosophy and the key to its natural function.

Philosophers, whatever else they may be in virtue of their common humanity, are technicians. The special genius of the philosopher consists in an unusual capacity to devise means of intellectual expression through which the fundamental structure of human experience can be formally and adequately thought out into common language and so made communicable. All techniques are, of course, means to an end, and the technique of philosophy is no exception. It is the indispensable technique for large-scale social adjustment whenever this has to be consciously and deliberately undertaken. But all technicians are liable to become so absorbed in the development of their technique that it becomes an end in itself. They are apt to forget what the technique is for, and what are the concrete and practical problems which it is devised to solve. Like the pure mathematician, who is also creating a technique,

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the philosopher is apt to become absorbed in the elaboration of abstract devices for the analysis and statement of all problems to which his technique can apply, until he becomes unwilling and even unable to apply it to the contemporary philosophical problem. For there always is a contemporary philosophical problem which is *the* problem to which the technique should be applied. Or like the poet, who is the master of another technique of expression, he is apt to find himself with a tremendous capacity for expression, but with nothing particularly important to express by means of it. Tennyson is reported to have remarked at a dinner-party on one occasion, "I am undoubtedly the greatest master of the English language since Shakespeare. Unfortunately I have nothing to say." In this lies the difficulty which faces the Institute of Philosophy. The public that looks to the Institute knows in a vague and rather dumb fashion what it needs expressed, without possessing the technique for its expression. The trained philosopher has the technique, but is apt to be unconscious of what it is urgently necessary to express and to be understood by means of it. How are these two sides of the philosophical situation to be united in harmonious co-operation?

Here is our problem as members of this Institute. I know that it is not easily to be solved. But there is one thing that often inspires me with hope. This country has not yet made its positive contribution to the history of European philosophy. It has revealed its philosophical tendency in a series of notable philosophers. But their work has always been, in its large effect, critical and destructive. There have been two major periods of European philosophy in modern times. The first, originating with Descartes, was created and dominated by the clear mathematical analysis of the French intellect. The second we owe to the romantic genius of the great German thinkers of whom Hegel was the culmination. Between the two periods, as the transitional figure, stands Immanuel Kant. That second period is rapidly drawing to a close, if it is not already over. The third period, which is beginning, will be dominated by a set of problems which have a peculiar affinity with the temperament and philosophical tendency of the British people, and they will only be solved by philosophers who are surrounded and supported by a social consciousness which demands their solution and which provides the public co-operation which this Institute exists to foster. Of these things I feel reasonably certain. And that feeling provides me with a reasonable hope that the British Institute of Philosophy may yet play an honourable and not unimportant part in bringing the unconscious philosophy of this country to that consciousness of itself and that self-expression which will usher in a new era of European philosophy.

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LECTURE COURSES for the Michaelmas Term: Session 1934-35:—

"THE STATUS OF THE SELF IN REALITY," a course of six weekly lectures by W. G. Maclagan, M.A., Ph.D. (of Oriel College, Oxford), on Fridays at 5.45 p.m., at University Hall, 14 Gordon Square, W.C.1, beginning October 19th. Fee for the course, 12s. 6d. Members free.

"PSYCHOLOGY OF SENSE-PERCEPTION AND MEMORY," a course of six weekly lectures by Professor Beatrice Edgell, on Mondays, at 5.45 p.m., at University Hall, 14 Gordon Square, W.C.1, beginning October 15th. Fee for the course, 12s. 6d. Members free.

"INTRODUCTION TO SPECULATIVE PHILOSOPHY," a class by the Director of Studies, on Wednesdays, at 5.45 p.m., at University Hall, 14 Gordon

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Square, W.C.1, in the Michaelmas and Lent Terms, beginning Michaelmas Term, October 17th; Lent Term, January 16th. Fee for the Session, £1 1s. Terminal, 12s. 6d. Members free.

The Evening Meetings for the Michaelmas Term of the Session will be held at University College, Gower Street, W.C.1, at 8.15 p.m., on the following dates:—

Tuesday, October 16th: Presidential Address. The Rt. Hon. Sir Herbert Samuel, G.C.B., G.B.E., M.A., M.P.

November 13th: "The Biological Status of Pleasure." H. W. B. Joseph, M.A., F.B.A.

December 11th: "The Intellectual Element in Aesthetic Appreciation." Mr. Roger Fry.

### OBJECTS OF THE INSTITUTE

The British Institute of Philosophy exists to bring leading exponents of various branches of Philosophy into direct contact with the general public, with the purpose of satisfying a need felt by many men and women in every walk of life for greater clearness and comprehensiveness of vision in human affairs.

**Further information and forms of application for membership may be had on application to the Director of Studies, University Hall, 14 Gordon Square, London, W.C. 1.**

[*Suggested*]

### FORM OF BEQUEST

I bequeath to THE BRITISH INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY the sum of ..... free of duty, to be applied to the purposes of that Institute, and I declare that the receipt of the Honorary Secretary, or other proper officer for the time being of that Institute, shall be a sufficient discharge for the same.