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MONTHLY LETTER

Devoted to Spiritual and Philosophical Problems -- by Manly P. Hall

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Dear Friend:

The fifth department of Philosophy is termed Epistemology, and is devoted to the essential nature of knowledge itself. It is the province of Epistemology to distinguish between absolute and relative truth, and to examine the validity of the premises upon which the assumption of knowledge is based.

The existence of an absolute knowledge to be comprehended by any individual entity is a mooted problem. Man is a partially evolved animal creation, enjoying certain animal extensions of consciousness, but also circumscribed by certain animal limitations of consciousness. The human organism has achieved to no ultimates of refinement, therefore—is it possible for a structure, itself greatly limited, to serve as the medium for the transmission of final perfect conclusions? In other words, is an imperfect man capable of perfect wisdom?

There are at least two sides to every question. Epistemology may be approached from several angles. To the inspirationalist, man is capable of at least momentary extensions of consciousness beyond the normal limitations of his organic quality. Such

flights of realization are denied by the rationalist who maintains that each man's perception is limited by the quality of his perceiving part.

To the average person it might seem that the rationalist has the better of the argument, for there is a certain reasonableness in his conclusion. But the inspirationalist is also supplied with an admirable amount of supporting testimony. He can advance numerous incidents of illumination and transcendental extension of consciousness to support his contention that, by a certain divine dispensation, some men perceive a fuller measure of the Universal Plan than is accorded to the average individual.

Nearly all of the world's greatest philosophers have been hesitant to approach the problem of ultimate knowledge. The wisest men of all time have approached wisdom with the realization of their own unworthiness. There is considerable concord among the sages in this respect. Buddha refused to discuss the nature of divinity, declaring the glory of First Cause to infinitely transcend the human capacity to understand. Confucius acted upon the same premise. Mohammed attempted no detailed

A PRAYER

"Teach me today, my Father, to forget the worries and wrongs of yesterday. Help me with a clearer mind and conscience to remember the duties and responsibilities of today. May thoughts of love, cheer and happiness crowd out all of the disappointments that went out of my life with the setting of yesterdays sun."

interpretation of the Universal One, Its substance, or Its activities. Socrates declared the examination of the divine attributes to be singularly unprofitable. "To define God is to defile God" summarizes the Classical approach.

As the ancients regarded Deity as identical with wisdom, and coeternal with the principle of truth, their attitude towards Epistemology can be inferred from their attitude towards God and First Cause.

While it was pretty generally accepted that the finite cannot grasp the Infinite, it did not necessarily follow that man was incapable of extending his consciousness beyond the limitations imposed by the animal existence. In the ancient Mysteries, inspiration inferred an extension of consciousness, but not necessarily a grasp of ultimates.

Thus a man may become relatively all-knowing and yet be comparatively ignorant when estimated in terms of Absolute truth. Plato was one of the wisest men who ever lived; his intellect greatly exceeded that of the ordinary man. This does not infer however that Plato possessed absolute knowledge, or that his consciousness extended beyond the vista proper to man. Plato died with the books of Sophron under his head. He died studying. His quest for knowledge was identical with the impulse to live. His complete dedication to the achievement of wisdom was rewarded by a high measure of mental excellence. Yet Plato himself would have been the last to even infer his own perfection. The wisdom which he possessed probably revealed to him most of all the vastness of Truth and the incapacity of the human mind to ever comprehend it.

Epistemology opens an interesting field of operative philosophy. It explains the failure of science to accomplish the high measure of good which knowledge and skill should accomplish. Epistemology points out that the scientist himself is the weakest element in science. The numerous delicate instruments which man has evolved as aids to human research have small intrinsic virtue. Their value lies in the aid which they give to limited human perceptions. The scientist uses these instruments to bridge the interval between himself and the universe. With the microscope he unites his consciousness with the infinite diversity of minutiae; with

the telescope he diminishes the optical distance between himself and the star. The laboratory with its numerous delicate mechanisms is itself an apology for the evident insufficiency of man. Sad to relate, intricate machinery cannot think. Although it can contribute a certain measure of increased vision and comprehension, it is only useful to the degree that it supports a consciousness and a rational intellect.

If the measure of what we think with is the measure of what we think, then the scientist himself is the vital factor in science. All the progress of science must be measured by the intellectual progress of the scientist.

Some of the East Indian systems of philosophy have evolved intricate theories concerning the substance of knowledge. These theories are neither truly inspirational nor rational, but belong to a curious metaphysical positivism. These premises involve: The acceptance of a supreme, unchanging, unconditional, eternal state of Truth, identical with spirit and God—all terms regarded impersonally. This Absolute knowledge, though undefinable to the concrete perceptions, has at least the limitations of permanence and unchangeability. Metaphysically speaking, it is qualified by the condition of "being." Thus it may be approached as having certain distinct boundaries. Or, men may depart from the fullness of it, thus inferring that it possesses condition.

In the Eastern systems of Absolutism, it is regarded as possible—through the annihilation of personality, individuality, and all moral, mental and physical polarity—for the human being to achieve union and identity with Absolute Truth, through special metaphysical disciplines.

While this viewpoint may seem to differ entirely from Western concepts of Epistemology, the differences are more imaginary than real. The Eastern mystic does not presume that the imperfect mind of man is capable of thinking perfect thoughts. He surmounts the difficulty by ceasing to think, and permitting Universal Wisdom to flow through him. Thus the mind cannot know Universal Wisdom by itself, but may serve as an instrument for the perpetuation and manifestation of that which trans-

cends itself. Thus, for example, the horse probably has no understanding of the purposes of the man who rides or drives it, but still the horse is an instrument for the achievement of the man's purposes. It cooperates even without understanding.

This is not only good Eastern metaphysics; it is excellent Christian theology. In the days of ecclesiastical glory, what Christian would have dared to presume that he understood either God or the Cardinal? Other men might question why; his duty was to do and die. Religion, it seems, has always assumed that men could be instruments in the accomplishment of divine purpose, although the substance of that purpose transcended their estimation.—Thus, the prime requisite of religious well-being was faith, not only in the substance of things unseen but in the truth of things unproven.

To the rationalist faith is the acceptance of the undemonstrated or the undemonstrable. Thus, faith assumes the presence of a Divine Plan behind world affairs, remonstrating this plan by recourse to history, which undoubtedly reveals in no uncertain terms the ultimate triumph of virtue over vice and justice over injustice. The rationalist, though perfectly willing to accept history and to acknowledge the necessity of certain codes of human relationships, denies that these demonstrate any absolute wisdom at the root of life. He offers as a substitute human behaviorism, with its biological and psychological chemistries. To the rationalist, therefore, the circumstances arising from human action may be accepted not as consequences of absolute law but merely as relative conditions arising from human characteristics.

The inspirationalist dominated ancient and medieval thought, but the rationalists, realists and neo-realists predominate in the modern school. There is always a question as to whether realism increases in an industrial era, or whether an industrial era increases during an age of realism. In our opinion, philosophy must precede practice, for individuals do not proceed along lines inconsistent with their preferences or beliefs.

To the Darwinian type of thinker, mind grows up with man, and there is no intellect in the universe apart from or superior to evolving material

creatures. Civilization is the socializing of the human mind. Industrialism, the industrializing of the human mind. The experiments of culture are the mind groping for reasonable courses of action, and mind coming of age in man. This all sounds well, and the realist is rather proud of his euphony and his dictum.

The inspirationalist, conversely, following the Orphic and Platonic tradition, perceives mind as a super-essential principle which has existed in a perfect state throughout all eternity. Thus, man grows up to wisdom. Wisdom does not grow up in man. By certain courses of thought and action, the individual elevates himself to union with the various attributes of reason. Inspirationalism infers a monarchy of mind; rationalism a democracy of impulses. The universe, to the rationalist, is governed by a parliament of opinions; mind makes the law. According to the inspirationalist, the world is governed by a hierarchy of divinely enlightened Beings make the man.

The Platonic doctrine of Ideas postulates the unfoldment of life according to certain patterns or archetypes established in the Divine Mind. According to this doctrine, the processes of evolution are molding the universe into a likeness which has existed for uncounted ages in the universal consciousness. The doctrine of Ideas may certainly be interpreted as signifying that progress is moving towards an already existent goal. True, this goal is materially intangible. But, as an end towards which all life is moving, this goal becomes worthy of the most profound consideration.

Plato's theory of Archetypes would certainly justify the development of Epistemology as a practical department of philosophy. If Epistemology could only establish the prophetic import of archetypes it would solve one of the greatest problems of human existence—namely, destiny. To the Middle Academicians, destiny was more than merely culminative. Destiny did not depend entirely upon the accident of action. Law determined the end; man only devised the means to the accomplishment of that end. If the doctrine of Archetypes is accepted and justified, a tremendous field of speculation is opened.

Accepting a certain natural consistency through-

out Universal action, it would follow that nature would contain numerous Archetypes—patterns of numerous purposes. Quite in accordance with such a doctrine, the Cosmos may be regarded as being Itself the objectification and fulfillment of a vast Archetype in which the perfect relationship and ultimate state of all beings are already clearly defined. This ultimate state and perfect relationship of all natural organisms and their consequences, might be regarded as constituting a body of absolute fact, absolute wisdom, and absolute law, beyond which no recourse is conceivable.

Most of the great Mystery Schools of the older world held opinions consistent with the Platonic idea. They taught growth by intent and not by accident. They envisioned man growing into a destiny which had been prepared for him while the worlds themselves were being formed. PROGRESS WAS A MOTION TOWARDS CONSISTENCY WITH ARCHETYPES. Man became nobler and more illumined as the interval between himself and the pattern of his perfection grew less. To the Greeks happiness was peace between man and his pattern. If an individual lived in a manner utterly inconsistent with the archetype of his species, that man suffered from an inharmony set up by this inconsistency. It is not what a man does that causes him to suffer—it is the inharmony between what he does and what he should do that causes suffering.

If we regard Absolute knowledge as the perfect comprehension of the pattern or Idea of being, then Epistemology determines the measure of man's ability to perceive the purpose of himself. We cannot agree with the materialist, or the behaviorist, that progress is achieved solely through the accumulation of actions and attitudes. Yet presuming that a purpose-pattern actually does exist, how can the average individual become aware of it? By what disciplines and developments can man distinguish the true reason for himself and segregate the real values of his life? If Epistemology is directly concerned with the intrinsic factors of knowledge, it must be equally concerned with the use-value of such conclusions as it may reach.

Having thus briefly summarized some elements of the philosophy of knowledge as generally considered, let us now approach the matter in a more

esoteric manner. Let us try to discover what Epistemology means to the student of mystical philosophy who desires to use all the tools of wisdom in the perfection of his character.

In the initiations of the Dionysians, man is represented as composed of a confused mixture of spiritual and material elements. The human form was molded from the blood of Bacchus and the ashes of the Titans. By the blood of Bacchus was inferred the spiritual life principle, and by the ashes of the Titans the elementary substances of the inferior or material world.

The ancients expressed this in the simple formula: form is a compound arising out of the mingling of spirit and matter. All forms must necessarily contain a certain proportion of spiritual and material agencies. It is decreed by the Universal Archetype that in the ultimate the spiritual part of each form must increase in domination over the material parts, until spirit or consciousness transmutes matter into soul, and finally absorbs even the soul itself so that only spirit remains, triumphant over the illusions of inferior nature.

Such a doctrine presupposes that the spiritual part of man is itself an aspect or fragment of the Divine Spirit and the Divine Mind. As the Divine Nature includes among its attributes Absolute wisdom, it would follow that the divine part of man is itself all-wise and all-knowing. Socrates and his pupil Plato both accepted this tenet as the key to human salvation. Socrates did not believe that any man could be taught inasmuch as all men contain within themselves a divine wisdom which cannot be increased. Education therefore, as the word itself originally inferred, is a process by which wisdom is drawn out of man.

Every man's true teacher is his own higher Self, and when the life is brought under the control of reason, this higher Self is released from bondage to appetites and impulses, and becomes priest, sage and illuminator. Plato expressed the same idea in the words: learning is only remembering.

Plotinus, the great Alexandrian neo-Platonist, regarded the higher spiritual nature of man as a more or less complete individuality, an Over-Self. In our

(Continued in Supplement)

Some Philosophical Fragments

Supplement to Students Monthly Letter

Dangers of New Thought -- Metaphysics and Psychology

THE FIRST PRINCIPLES OF SUPERSCIENCE

BY MANLY HALL

THERE are in nature certain forces capable of molding human consciousness into the directions outlined by one who is capable of becoming master of said forces. There are certain methods outlined by the gods themselves, by following which man may learn to govern the expressions of these subtle and invisible forces of the superphysical worlds and make them active in modern world affairs. A person capable of manifesting these energies and making them work for him to any prescribed extent is called a Magician, or more correctly a Magus, or a juggler of natural law. A person who passes through the school outlined by the powers that be, and who gradually comes into these powers is called first an adept, and later an Initiate, who takes his place among those who dedicate their newly acquired powers to the service of humanity.

The Masters work slowly but those who finally acquire after, not weeks but years and ages, of conscientious application and purification, these great forces, can be trusted with them and seldom fail to make the proper use of them. There is only one way of preventing the misuse of power which is the great danger that confronts one who has recently come into a position of authority, and that is, that with the coming of the power itself there must be also born in man a realization of responsibility, and an understanding of nature's plan equal to the power that is his, so that consciously and willingly the soul will dedicate that force to the service of

good. Power brings egotism to the young and responsibility to the old. Nearly all who spend a few years in modern Metaphysics come out broken in mind and body, self-centered egotists, who do not know where they are mentally, have lost all desire to work and wander from one teacher to another searching for knowledge until at last the insane asylum or the state grave-yard claims them. They no longer have the power of thinking for themselves and follow like little puppies every one who has a peculiar opinion.

THE FIRST GREAT DANGER—OPINIONS

Opinions are not facts. But the majority of Metaphysicians express them as such and there is no earthly need for such an attitude. All are students together, the teacher and the follower, and when the instructor dogmatically states that this is so and that is not so, or the Bible meant this, and not that, he speaks with authority on a subject about which he has no information save an opinion, which to him may be reasonable but not to anyone else. The great wisdom of the world is not in the hands of super-opinionated persons. Nor does it come by hunches. It has its representatives in the world but they are not gushy persons or rattlebrains but silent dignified teachers whose message is true because they have lived every line of its rules themselves.

The ancient wisdom does not need to be proven, it proves itself upon application. But the endless contradictions which confront the students of metaphysics can never be proven or accepted by thinking individuals. If metaphysics would admit that it is an open forum for opinions and nothing else the public would be protected, but each of the scores of contradicting philosophers that compose it claim to have the truth, the whole truth and nothing but

the truth, proving this claim by trying to teach their own ideas to others who are sincerely seeking, not for ideas but the base rock of common sense upon which to build a permanent structure. Looking over a series of advertisements put out by teachers along this line during the last few years, I am going to correct some of them for you. The first one says:

"Let me show you how to be a success." It sounds good, but an analysis of the party of the first part will show that the individual DID NOT KNOW HIMSELF but had some ideas on the subject. If his ad had been honestly written, it would have read something like this: "I have some ideas about success. I do not know whether they will help you or not, but you have my permission to come and hear me talk about them."

Another one reads something like this: "The Fourth Dimension Found" by John Doe. "Come and hear this remarkable speaker, etc." Here again fancy is passed off for fact. John hasn't the slightest idea what the fourth dimension is but he claims to have had a vision, the source of authenticity of which he knows nothing. His advertisement should read like this: "I BELIEVE that I know what the fourth dimension is. Come and hear me express my OPINION ON THAT INTERESTING SUBJECT."

Two crimes are committed by these thoughtless persons who would be useful servants of the Masters if they were not so self centered. The first is, that they slander the reality and daily disgrace the spiritual truths that they claim to serve. The second is, they prevent the human soul from attaining the truth by leading him astray into the avenues of personal opinions which they are pawning off as facts.

Day after day individuals and organizations come to me, trying to impress me with the value of their ideas and the divine inspirations behind their cults. They express themselves fluently on subjects they know nothing about and then wonder how it is my soul is so clouded that I cannot see the divine wisdom of their soul or the magnificence of their opinion. Their whole scheme is an idea or maybe their interpretation of someone's else idea. They finally decide that I am wrong. Maybe I am, but out of the hundreds of opposing doctrines it is rath-

er delightful to find a wrong one. None of them will admit that they are in error—that is to the public—but if the public were mind readers they might discover something.

WHEN THE TEACHERS DISAGREE, WHAT SHALL THE PUPILS DO? If someone would find an answer to this question, the Metaphysical problem would be solved, and several other occult problems with it. Joseph's coat of many colors must have had something to do with New Thought. But what is the poor student to do when each teacher that comes along is inspired by the same God, or at least claims so, each teaching a different message, each claiming theirs to be better than any of the others, no two agreeing even on fundamentals and each claiming to teach the truth. When he does make a choice, he has nothing to guide him but speculation and some inducement of the most questionable spiritual nature. Is there any wonder that mere men's heads go round and round and that they finally go insane while trying to unravel the mystic maze that claims to lead to heaven but is much more often a blind alley leading into someone's pocket.

The world is filled with these wanderers, who do not know which way to turn. They have taken the only possible course, they have cut away from all these dissenting factions and are stumbling along as best they can. Their lives have been absolutely ruined and they are far worse off than they were in the days when they were still in the orthodox churches. They wander around like lost souls waiting for a God who never existed, save in someone's opinion, to care for them and protect them. And society as a mass must play the part of a God of another man's mind and care for these poor souls who have been robbed of their earthly possessions and individual minds.

(To be continued)

(Continued from Monthly Letter)

previous letter will be found a more complete exposition of this idea. On at least three occasions Plotinus was "lifted up to union with his God" and in those "blessed moments" the philosopher perceived a measure of truth vastly more satisfying than

the small knowledge that is our common lot.

This will naturally bring up another question. If there is an absolute knowledge in the world, if there is a supreme wisdom locked within the soul of things, what is the intrinsic nature of that knowledge? Is it merely an extension or fullness of our material learning or is it a knowledge entirely apart, distinct from sciences and philosophies?

For example, does "cosmic consciousness" infer absolute knowledge of particulars or is it more a realization of the sufficiency of generals? What, in short, is the relation between Universal knowledge and the finite sciences? Would illumination result in the biologist becoming master of every secret of biology? or of the chemist becoming proficient in every mystery of chemistry? Would "cosmic consciousness" bestow technique? Would a man, lifted for a moment into the Universal Reality, be able to play any musical instrument while in that condition if he had never previously practised upon any instrument? How should we interpret the Scriptural promise that if we seek first the kingdom of truth and righteousness, all other things shall be added unto us?

This problem is more pertinent than it may at first appear. Many people believe that if they can achieve a mystical extension of consciousness they will become all-knowing and escape from the drudgery of effort.

Euclid told the king of Egypt that there was no royal road to learning. Does this statement contradict the Platonic doctrine of an all-wise Divine Self?

It has been my experience in meeting people interested in metaphysical subjects to find that "cosmic consciousness" is most usually interpreted as a perfection of knowledge, and that he who possesses it becomes immediately master of all worldly wisdom. Thus we have people searching for "cosmic consciousness" to cure toothaches, lift mortgages, to overcome stuttering, or to gain proficiency in law, medicine, art, literature and music—and even the crafts. We find "cosmic consciousness" also cultivated in the hope that it will remove the sting of suffering and disappointment, so that a person who has lost everything may gain content with nothing

—or perhaps the stimulus necessary to retrieve his fortunes. Although thousands of metaphysical students in all parts of the world are striving for "cosmic consciousness," as they please to call it, very few of them have read Plato sufficiently to grasp the significance of the old doctrine.

The spirit is not necessarily wise in the things of the body. It is, rather, all-wise in the things which pertain to the spirit. According to the Egyptians, men are lifted up to God through the body of Serapis, and always extensions of consciousness infer the elevation of the individual. He is lifted up to truth. But if a man be lifted up to truth he is not at the same time going to be elevated above the sphere of matter. We cannot accept the idea of "cosmic consciousness" directing the affairs of the material man. We can acknowledge that to an individual, who has been accorded a glimpse of cosmic truth, the concerns of physical existence become comparatively unimportant.

Cosmic consciousness did not remove the hemlock cup from Socrates, but it removed the concern over death. Cosmic consciousness did not prevent Pythagoras from being burned to death with his disciples—a martyr to the highest cause of truth. But it conferred upon the great Samian sage a power to transcend all the limitations of the flesh by the magnificence of inward realization. Cosmic consciousness did not prevent Buddha from lying down by the Indian road at last to die, but it enabled this great Arhat to release his conscious soul from the Wheel of the Law. Although Plotinus was consciously united to his God, he died of the infirmities of the flesh as do all men. Cosmic consciousness did not prevent a long and languishing illness but it gave him the fortitude to bear all things and to face eternity with a good hope. Cosmic consciousness did not spare St. Francis of Assisi the sufferings which are the lot of mortal men. The infirmities of his frail and insufficient body gained their victory over the flesh, but the soul of the Seer had found its peace in the universal concord within and beyond.

If we acknowledge, then, that all these great, good and noble men, who accomplished the realization of the Great Plan, possessed this "cosmic consciousness" of truth, we must also acknowledge that

in every case this consciousness was used entirely to enrich the inward spiritual existence and never to profit the outer life. Realization gave strength to bear, courage to endure, but never implied immunity from physical disaster.

Considering the lives and writings of numerous mystics in every civilization, past and present, it becomes evident that the inner wisdom which is possessed by the soul and is derived from the Universal Good should not be regarded as pertaining to human institutions but purely to the concerns of the inner life. The spiritual part of man is of undetermined age. For billions of years the spiritual germ has evolved through incalculable conditions, until at last it has emerged to its present state. Before man extends an infinite horizon; the whole spiritual existence of man must be measured in terms of the Infinite, even as the physical existence is measured in terms of the finite.

It must naturally follow that the divine consciousness of man must be directed to the vast problems of real existence. Cosmic consciousness existed long before the discovery of arts and sciences. These noble institutions which have stood in society for several thousands of years are merely passing incidents in the vast panorama of divine purpose. Whether a man lives or dies is of very little importance. Whether he masters a language, which at most will only be spoken for a few hundred years, is even less important. His community standing is nil from a cosmic standpoint. In fact, nearly everything we are interested in is unimportant except for that passing moment during which it transpires.

How irreconcilable, therefore, are the small purposes of our daily existence and the vast purposes of our spiritual being! Cosmic consciousness infers these vast purposes. In the realm of It, "you" and "I" cease. Our gains and losses are absurdities. The cosmic vista stretches out through a thousand millennia of activity. Any form of knowledge which is satisfying to our present state is convicted of insufficiency, merely because it satisfies.

This does not mean that we should not continue to improve ourselves, but it does distinctly mean that we should recognize ourselves as existing in two distinct conditions of being. The first of

these conditions we shall call our present material state which is terribly important for three-score years and ten, and completely absorbs the attention of the average individual. Our second condition is an immeasurable cosmic existence, extending infinitely throughout time and space. It is very difficult to reconcile these two conditions. The greater can never be brought down to the lower; and the ascent to the greater is rendered difficult by many misunderstandings and illusions.

From the standpoint of Epistemology, we must therefore distinguish between knowledge in its Universal and particular aspects. Universal knowledge is the realization of cosmic identity. It is man's knowledge of the at-one-ment of himself and life. It is real knowledge, transcending statistics and classified data. This universal knowledge is released through the heart, as supreme conviction, under certain circumstances which are called "mystical experiences."

The second form of knowledge is particular and is limited to the matters of this life. It is conditioned and circumscribed. The achievement of it is an arduous experiment in remembering. There can be no absolute physical knowledge because all physical conditions are relative and impermanent; all material things change and are conditioned by circumstance.

The material man, devoted to the quest for knowledge, grasps at the fleeting form of fact, seeking to hold some exactness upon which he can found dogma and doctrine. But facts are ever illusive. The great spiritual facts of life which belong to the sphere of Absolute truth are meaningless and useless to a mind and consciousness unprepared to receive them. Thus, from our small and inadequate point of view, we accept material superstitions as truths and ardently defend our own attitudes. At the same time we reject as superstitions the cosmic truths of life and call men visionary and impractical who seek the inner mysteries of existence.

Yours sincerely,

Manly P. Hall