

# PHILOSOPHY

## THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY

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VOL. IX No. 36.

OCTOBER 1934

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### CORRESPONDENCE

#### THE PRESENT NEED OF A PHILOSOPHY

MY DEAR EDITOR,

I hope things are not so bad as Sir Herbert Samuel seems to think. Humanity would be in a truly desperate plight if it had to say, "Stop thinking about everything except what is urgent." I cannot believe that our fate is as cruel as this.

It may very well be true that far too small a proportion of eminent contemporary philosophers write about the causes of our present social discontents, or about likely remedies for them. If so, and if these particular philosophers are incorrigible, it is pleasant to know that there is a promising field for others.

I confess I am not greatly impressed by the difficulty of explaining to earnest young men and women what "epistemology" would be at, although I admit the possibility that epistemologists may have talked themselves dry.

By "epistemology," however, Sir Herbert Samuel appears to mean the analysis of "conceptions," and I am unable to decide whether his argument is that there are no such entities as conceptions, or that, although there are conceptions, "good," "evil," "value," and "colour" are not conceptions but shams. In either case he appears to be professing to offer either a truer conception or a better analysis than the wicked philosophers who do not write about urgent sociological matters.

In general I should say that I hope there is a permanent need for philosophy, and that there will continue to be many philosophies, not one only.

Yours faithfully,  
JOHN LAIRD.

ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY,  
*July 2, 1934.*

## PHILOSOPHY

MY DEAR EDITOR,

I am very interested in the letters which have appeared in *PHILOSOPHY* about the present need of a philosophy. To my mind philosophy as conceived by the layman is too abstract to be intelligible, and too remote from the affairs of everyday life to be practical. Mr. Aldrich stated that too few men of affairs care about becoming philosophers. This is true only in the sense that they do not read the current works on philosophy, and the reason for that is that the current works are usually couched in a philosophical jargon which is unintelligible to those who have not had time to familiarize themselves with the philosophical classics. Yet all men of affairs are really philosophers, for without a philosophy of life one could not be a successful man of affairs. They may not consciously have formulated a philosophy, but inasmuch as they live according to certain ideals, they are practical philosophers.

I take it that philosophy aims at obtaining a coherent view of reality as a whole, in so far as that is possible with our limited knowledge, and further, that by knowing more about reality, we may understand better how to live. For surely the important thing in this life is rather to live it than to speculate metaphysically. (Of course metaphysical speculation is necessary in order to arrive at an idea of our purpose in life.)

I agree, too, with Lord Listowel's statement that the only life really worth living is a life resplendent with scientific truth, with religious vision, with moral and artistic beauty, and that reason and love must ultimately prevail wherever humans dwell. The aim of life, then, should be to turn our creative energy, the harnessing of which is the most satisfying thing in human experience, into true and beautiful channels.

R. G. Collingwood in *Speculum Mentis* states, "All thought exists for the sake of action," and I think that this should be the test of a true philosophy. What is the good of thoughts that cannot be acted upon, or of a philosophy which is thought out but not practised? This question must often occur to the layman who tries to read many modern philosophical works.

If I am right in thinking this, then it appears to follow that the world is in need of a philosophy thought out by our great men, and capable of being acted upon; moreover, presented to the lay-reader in simple language, so as to promote thought in him about life, and to help him in living it.

Yours sincerely,

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August 4, 1934.