

## THE BRITISH INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY

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## INSTITUTE NOTES

### SUMMARY OF PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS.<sup>1</sup>

On November 17th Sir Herbert Samuel gave his Presidential Address to the Members of the Institute at University College, London. The title of his address was "Wars of Ideas."

Quoting from a recent utterance of the Foreign Minister of Spain, Sir Herbert said that "future wars are likely to be the conflict of two sorts of ideas, two mentalities, two different conceptions of life." "In the past," he continued, "... there have also been wars of ideas, e.g. the wars of the Reformation, and the wars of the sovereigns against France as propagandist of the principles of the Revolution." But on the whole, he thought, it would have seemed a generation ago as if these wars were a feature of bygone days.

At the present, however, he went on, "a possible alignment of nations to the Left and to the Right is gradually shaping itself, and it may be some event will suddenly cause that alignment to become definite, with disaster as the outcome. . . . In many countries the deep-seated and widespread unrest has assumed various forms—communist, revolutionary, anti-religious, internationalistic. This group of movements finds a philosophy ready to hand in that of Karl Marx. These evoke counter-movements and enlist powerful support. They bring together many of those who defend the principle of private property, or those who believe in a religion and are attached to a church, or those who regard a patriotic devotion to one's own country as

<sup>1</sup> The Address will shortly be published as an article in the *Nineteenth Century*.

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a higher virtue than internationalism, and of those who simply wish to preserve stability and the existing order." This second group, he added, "if they wish for a philosophy, find it in Hegel, Fichte, Nietzsche, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Croce, Bergson. It has taken definite shape in the creeds of Fascism in Italy and of National-Socialism in Germany."

"At the basis of Fascism and National-Socialism," he suggested, "is the depreciation of intellect and the exaltation of intuition" or "what has been called the 'Retreat from Reason'." The doctrine of both is "that it is not necessary to be sensible, but only to be strong."

Moreover, "Fascism and National-Socialism are frankly militarist. . . ." With them "it is no longer an agreed matter that war is to be regarded as in itself a bad thing. Rather the philosophy of Fascism and National-Socialism raises the question whether to rid the world from war is desirable in principle."

A third distinctive mark of both National-Socialism and Fascism is in Sir Herbert's view that they accept the Hegelian conception of the State, as the 'divine idea as it exists on earth.' "Italian Fascism in its Charter of Liberty asserts that the 'Italian nation is an organism with a being, and also a means of action, superior to those of the individuals, whether separate or grouped, of which it is composed.' In other words, the individual exists for the sake of the State, not the State for the sake of the individual." And "from this theory of the nature of the State, it is no long step to the principle of personal leadership and the cult of the hero."

"On the Marxist side," again, he continued, "there is at the base the revolt against social inequality and against penury in the presence of abundance and widespread luxury. The remedy is sought in the overthrow of private ownership in land and in all the means of production; in the abolition of class distinctions; in the destruction of liberal constitutions; and in the establishment of dictatorships in the hands of the leaders of the proletariat."

"Both schools," he concluded, "adopt much the same attitude with regard to Liberty." Sir Herbert then went on to distinguish four aspects of Liberty, viz. "(1) national liberty—the freedom of one's country from foreign rule; (2) political liberty—the freedom of society from government by a despot or an oligarchy; (3) personal liberty—the freedom of the individual to think, speak, and act as he wills, subject to the equal rights of others; (4) economic liberty—freedom for the ordinary man from the restrictions imposed by poverty, overwork, bad government"; and said that whereas, "to enjoy complete liberty one must possess all four," . . . "we see in Germany and Italy and other Fascist countries on the one hand, and in Russia on the other, vast numbers of people acquiescing without demur in the sacrificing of political and personal liberty: they do it with the hope of making secure their national independence, or lessening hard economic restrictions."

Having thus outlined this new alignment of warring ideologies, Sir Herbert proceeded to a critical examination of their underlying doctrines.

"This is not the occasion," he said, "on which to attempt a discussion of the relations between intuition and reason. Both reason and intuition are of the essence of the mental activity of man, and it is unprofitable to discuss which of the two is 'the higher.' . . . There is no sense in saying that 'Reason is sovereign' . . . and there is no sense in saying that 'In the last resort we are bound to follow our intuitions.' . . . "Intuitions in the province of morals are termed the dictates of conscience. But conscience may err. . . . Further, one man's conscience will give direction in one way, his neighbour's in the opposite." . . . "It is true, of course, that reason also may err. . . . But there is this difference between the mistakes of reason and those of

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intuition. The former can be detected and remedied by the processes of reason itself. . . . Intuition does not provide for its own revision."

Turning to militarism, Sir Herbert underlined that "the contention that the principle of evolution justifies it has been refuted again and again by Scientists as well by philosophers. . . . So far from promoting the survival of the fittest, it is precisely these that war kills off. The other contention that wars are inevitable because the fighting spirit is innate in human nature is again only a reversion to the irrational."

Of the conception of the totalitarian State Sir Herbert made short work. "The State," he declared, "is nothing, after all, but a number of men and women organized for certain purposes and common action."

"To surrender political and personal liberties" would mean that we had "to hear on the radio, or to see at the theatres or cinemas only such things as authority might think suitable . . . that our country at any moment could be thrown into war, without any of us being allowed to know the truth about the issue, or being able in any degree to influence the course of events in advance." . . . Moreover, "under a dictatorship whether Fascist or Communist . . . no one is free to speak out plainly. If anyone differs from the dictator, he runs the risk of being dismissed from office, or imprisoned or killed. . . . Intrigue takes the place of open discussion and decisive vote." That this suppression of free thought would be especially a threat to religion, Sir Herbert thought was obvious.

"There remain," he said, "the respective principles of Fascism and of Communism with regard to the ownership of property." This problem, he thought, "is at bottom a question of the right division between the functions of the individual and the functions of the State or other corporate bodies. Opinion," he suggested, "seems tending to the conclusion that it is impossible to lay down any definite rule *a priori*. Many considerations have led a practical people here in Great Britain to move cautiously step by step. Different methods have been adopted to fit different cases. . . . The solution need not be found in the application universally and rigidly of a single principle, whether individualist, socialist, or communist."

In the last part of his address Sir Herbert Samuel asked the question as to "what are the broad policies that should be pursued . . . such being the great issues that confront our times?" His suggestions were briefly the following. After having uttered a warning against a tendency to pessimism, which in his view would not be justified, since "all over the world there is a marked progress in social conditions," he stressed the fact that in the first place "there is no reason to limit ourselves to a choice between Fascism and Communism. In the second place," he continued, "we may reject the political philosophy that bases itself on intuition." "In regard to education," he maintained further that "it is clearly incumbent upon the Governments of those countries which enlist the support of the mass of the people, not to allow the education of the coming generation, and not to allow military preparation and efficiency to be the monopoly of the advocates of force, nor those who are the guardians of better ideas to be content with a high-minded unpreparedness, leading to a noble-hearted defeat. If all the force in the world is to be on the side of militarism," he said, "the cause of peace would be in a bad way." "To maintain a national spirit, sane, sober, unaggressive," he added, "is not to oppose internationalism, but to complement it."

Sir Herbert summed up his speech as follows: "The policy which may after all ward off the danger of wars of ideas is, then (a) a searching analysis of the conflicting ideas themselves, and the exposure of what is foolish in them; (b) an insistence upon persuasion rather than force as the ruling

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principle, and the maintenance of force sufficient to ensure that; (c) a sane nationalism, which should be the servant, and not the enemy, of an enlightened internationalism; (d) constructive measures of social progress; (e) finding a new inspiration in the equality of citizenship, in the achievements of science, and in a religion which (putting truth in the first place) will satisfy the spiritual emotions without offending the intellectual conscience."

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LECTURE Courses for the Lent Term, Session 1936-37:—

"REASON AND UNREASON IN THE MODERN WORLD," a course of six weekly lectures by Professor W. G. de Burgh, on Fridays at 5.45 p.m., at University Hall, 14 Gordon Square, W.C.1, beginning January 22nd, 1937. Fee for the course, 12s. 6d. Members free.

"OUTLINES OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY," a class by the Director of Studies, on Wednesdays, at 5.45 p.m., at University Hall, 14 Gordon Square, W.C.1. The class will be resumed in the Lent term on Wednesday, January 20th. Fee for the course, 12s. 6d. Members free.

The EVENING MEETINGS for the Lent 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, January 19th: "Progress and Spiritual Values." Professor Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan.

Tuesday, February 16th: "The Modern Gospel of Unreason." Professor W. G. de Burgh.

Tuesday, March 16th: "Should our Rulers be Biologists?" N. J. T. Needham, Ph.D., Sc.D.

### 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.

With this broad educational purpose in view, the Institute—

- (1) Provides at suitable times in the day and evening courses of lectures by leading exponents in the more important subjects coming within the scope of Philosophy. All branches of Philosophy are represented—Ethics and Social Philosophy, the Philosophy of Law and of the Sciences, of the Fine Arts and of Religion, as well as Logic and Metaphysics and Psychology. These lectures are free to members.
- (2) Issues a quarterly philosophical journal (free to members).
- (3) Proposes to form a philosophical Library.
- (4) Gives guidance and assistance to individuals in their philosophical reading.
- (5) Encourages research in Philosophy.
- (6) There are Local Centres of the Institute at Bangor, Cardiff, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle and Durham, and Sheffield.

**Further information and forms of application for membership**

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may be had on application to the Director of Studies, at 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 sufficient discharge for the same.