

# PHILOSOPHY



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BY

NICHOLAS MURRAY BUTLER

PRESIDENT OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY  
MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS  
AND LETTERS

*THIRD THOUSAND*



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# PHILOSOPHY

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## PREFACE

THIS lecture was delivered as one of a series, the purpose of which was to present in summary and compact form a view of each of several sciences and of philosophy as these exist at the present day. In outlining philosophy, its subject-matter and its method, it was the purpose of the lecture clearly to differentiate philosophy from science, and to cut away the odd and unfitting scientific garments in which some contemporary writers have sought to clothe philosophy. Some of the passing forms of so-called philosophic thought are wholly below the plane on which philosophy moves. They are not philosophy, nor yet philosophies; they are travesties of both.

No one who has not grasped the distinction between the three orders of thinking, or ways of knowing, can hope, I think, to understand what philosophy is or what the word philosophy means. To call something philosophy is not to make it so.

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## PHILOSOPHY

ONE of the most famous books ever written, and one of the most influential — the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle — opens with this sentence, "All men by nature are actuated with the desire of knowledge." This desire of knowledge and the wonder which it hopes to satisfy are the driving power behind all the changes that we, with careless, question-begging inference, call progress. They and their reactions upon man's other wants and needs have, since history began, wholly altered the appearance of the dwelling-place of man as well as man's relation to his dwelling-place. Yet the physical changes are insignificant, great and numerous as they are. The Alps that tried the endurance of Hannibal are the same

mountains that tested the skill of Napoleon. The sea that was beaten by the banked oars of the triremes of Carthage, presents the same surface and the same shores to the fast-going, steam-driven vessel of to-day. But the air, once only a zephyr or a hurricane, is now the bearer of man's silent message to his distant fellow. The crude ore once deeply hidden in the earth, has been dug and drawn and fashioned into Puck's girdle. The words that bore the deathless verse of Homer from bard to a group of fascinated hearers, and with whose fading sounds the poems passed beyond recall, are fixed on the printed page in a hundred tongues. They carry to a million eyes what once could reach but a hundred ears. Human aspiration has cast itself, chameleon-like, into the form of noblest verse, of sweetest music, of most moving oratory, of grandest painting, of most splendid architec-

ture, of serenest reflection, of freest government. And the end is not yet.

The forces — the desire for knowledge and wonder — that have so moved man's world, and are so moving it, must be treated with at least the respect due to age and to great achievement.

The naïve consciousness of man has always told him that the existence of that consciousness and its forms were the necessary framework for his picture of himself and his world. Long before Kant proved that *macht zwar Verstand die Natur aber er schafft sie nicht*, man had acted instinctively on the principle. The world that poured into his consciousness through the senses, Locke's windows of the soul, was accepted as he found it, and for what the senses did not reveal man fashioned explanations in the forge of his imagination.

The unseen powers of heaven and earth, of air and water, of earthquake and thunderbolt, were like himself, but greater, grander. They had human loves and hates, human jealousies and ambitions. Behind the curtain of events they played their game of superhuman life. Offerings and gifts won their aid and their blessing; neglect or disdain brought down their antagonism and their curses. So it was that the desire for knowledge and the wonder of man made the mythologies; each mythology bearing the image of that racial facet of humanity's whole by which it was reflected. The *Theogony*, ascribed to Hesiod, shows the orderly completeness to which these mythologies attained.

The mythologies represent genuine reflection and not a little insight. They reveal man's simple, naïve consciousness busying itself with the explanation of

things. The mythologies were genuine, and their gods and their heroes were real, by every test of genuineness and reality known to the uncritical mental processes which fashioned them.

Change and decay, growth, life and death, are the phases of experience that most powerfully arouse man's wonder and stimulate his desire to know. Where do men and things come from? How are they made? How do they grow? What becomes of them after their disappearance or death?—these are the questions for which an answer is sought. The far-away Indian in his Upanishads cried out: "Is Brahman the cause? Whence are we born? Whereby do we live, and whither do we go? O, ye who know Brahman, tell us, at whose command we abide, whether in pain or in pleasure!" To these questions the mythologies offered answers which



were sufficient for long periods of time, and which are to-day sufficient for a great portion, perhaps by far the greater portion, of the human race.

An important step, far-reaching in its consequences, was taken when man first sought the cause of change and decay in things themselves and in the laws which appeared to govern things, rather than in powers and forces outside of and beyond them. When the question was first asked, What is it that persists amid all changes and that underlies every change? a new era was about to dawn in the history of man's wonder and his desire to know. Thales, who first asked this question and first offered an answer to it, deserves his place at the head of the list of the Seven Wise Men of Greece. After Thales the wise men of Greece left off telling tales and busied themselves with an examination of experience and with direct reflection upon it.