

A Monthly Letter – May 1, 1934

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

May 1, 1934

Dear Friend:

Nearly fourteen years have passed since I began writing and lecturing on philosophy and metaphysics. During these years I have delivered several thousand lectures and published some forty books and essays. Students of occultism, comparative religion and kindred subjects throughout the world have honored me with their support and confidence. The years have brought an ever-increasing demand for the organization and classification of my ideas and teachings so that the average person can make fuller use thereof as the foundation for a personal code of more intelligent living.

During the prosperous periods preceding the present social crisis people were so obsessed by economics that few concerned themselves with the deeper issues of life. As adversity becomes general, however, sober thinking comes into fashion. When our systems fail us, we must finally come to depend upon ourselves for security and well-being. It has been demonstrated throughout history that learning is restored in trying times and ignored during prosperous interludes.

If the philosophical doctrines which I have been promulgating were my own or had been derived from the prejudices and conceits of untrained and incompetent minds, I would have small courage for their perpetuation. It has been wisely observed that “opinionism is a falling sickness of the mind.” It is far from my intention to burden an opinion-ridden world with more ill-digested speculation. The fallacies of perverse thought are everywhere apparent and the absence of a mature mental approach to the great problems of the day is observable in every department of society. When, however, I know that the substance of my teachings has been drawn from the most mature reflections of the world’s ablest and most profound thinkers and is justified by thousands of years of test and application, I am inspired, even compelled by an inner impulse, to devote my time and energy to the dissemination of these teachings.

It is this inner conviction of the paramount importance of spiritual and philosophical education in these uncertain times which has sustained me through the numerous vicissitudes of past years. The knowledge which I have derived from my almost continuous researches into the “divine science of living” is so priceless an asset in these troubled days that I feel it a duty as well as a privilege to pass on the results of my researches as a working formula for a useful and intelligent life.

“ETERNAL REASON, CREATOR OF ALL THINGS, THE MAN THOU HATH FASHIONED
IN THY WISDOM AWAITS THE WORK THOU WOULDST HAVE HIM DO.”

The Prayer of Hermes.

The average man or woman has neither the time nor the training necessary to gather from the experience of the ages the substance from which to evolve an enlightened personal philosophy, yet such a personal philosophy is absolutely essential to the mental and spiritual well-being of the individual. A man is what he thinks. His mental attitude is the key to his code of action, and civilization is fundamentally a code of action. According to Cicero, the purpose of civilization is to bring the human family to an enlightened and cooperative state. This highly desirable condition is only possible when men themselves are enlightened.

In every age sages and prophets, philosophers and priests, have sought by example and word to educate and inspire mankind in the essentials of enlightened living. The lives of these heroic souls are perpetuated in the scriptures and classics of every nation and their words are preserved as a vast literature in the great libraries of the world. The British Museum alone has nearly fifty miles of bookshelves. Locked within its ancient volumes are the accumulated ideals and inspirations of the race. Having inherited so much of wisdom, is it not amazing that we remain so unwise? that possessing as we do so much of that which is good and noble, we remain unrefined and ignoble?

Is it strange then that a great man like DeQuincy should sit weeping in the British Museum, saddened by the realization that he could not live long enough to read all of these books and share with all the dreamers of the past their vision for human improvement? Yet DeQuincy has left us a formula, derived from his despair: "As I cannot read all books," he said, "I will read only the best!"

The first step in the organization of thought, therefore, is to reduce the complexity of knowledge to a more or less simple program and to discover from the whole philosophical literature of the race those parts which are of primary significance. He who uses this process will soon discover that beneath a vast and complex philosophical literature are a few basic principles. These principles, once grasped, equip the mind to cope with any issue with at least a fair measure of true intelligence.

The last fifteen years of my life have been devoted to an examination and classification of essential learning. During this time my research has covered over forty great systems of religion and philosophy. My purpose has been to focus the light of an ageless wisdom upon the problems of today, to discover, if possible, from those who have lived well the secret of right living, from those who have thought well the secret of right thinking, and from those who have acted nobly the secret of noble action. I believe that to some measure at least I have succeeded in this effort and that I have recovered from the obscurity of centuries the essential elements of that enlightened mode of existence which Pythagoras called the "philosophic life."

If, as Plato has so nobly written, philosophy is the greatest good which the gods have ever conferred upon men, it naturally follows that the possession of it bestows the greatest wealth that any person is capable of accumulating. The philosopher only is truly great, the philosopher only is capable of being truly good, and philosophy alone contributes that immortality which must finally be the quest of every man.

You may naturally ask what I mean by philosophy, for it is evident that my use of the word is not according to the popular concept. The word philosophy was first used by Pythagoras, the greatest of the Grecian Initiates, who is accredited with having created the term. The word itself means: Friendship for or love of wisdom. A philosopher then is one who loves wisdom, whose life is devoted to the discovery and application of truth. That which we love we serve and a philosopher is one who

loves wisdom so sincerely that he becomes its servant, obeys its laws and dedicates himself to its principles. A philosopher is not one who reads, studies or memorizes the thoughts or opinions of others, but one who so cherishes the great ideals of the race that he lives a harmless and creative life, achieving the highest axiom of the Platonists, namely.

“Wisdom is thinking **WITH** God and thinking **WITH** Nature.”

You will perceive how different this is from the modern concept, for wisdom today is interpreted to be “thinking **OF** God and **OF** Nature.”

According to the modern definition, philosophy covers six fields of mental activity, as follows:

1. Metaphysics, which includes theology, cosmology, and the nature of being.
2. Logic, or the doctrine of reasonableness.
3. Ethics, which includes morality and character and the discovery of the nature of good.
4. Psychology, which includes the whole field of mental phenomena.
5. Epistemology which is concerned primarily with the problem as to whether knowledge in itself can exist in an absolute form.
6. Aesthetics which includes the science of the reactions caused by beauty, harmony, elegance and nobility.

This classification is excellent as far as it goes but is incomplete. Every branch of learning is susceptible of division into a septenary, its parts being under the ruler ship of the seven sacred planets. The seventh branch of philosophy, not given in any exoteric classification, is **THEURGY**, a word first used by the Alexandrian Neo-Platonists. The word theurgy means “a divine work” and was defined by the ancients as “doing the work of God.” The popular translation associates the word with miracles, but it really means the science of becoming godlike and covers the actual processes by which a man becomes a philosopher, or, as the ancients called it, the disciplines of philosophy.

Thus in its seven branches philosophy covers all of the sacred and profane forms of learning and by the possession of it the individual achieves the perfection of himself. Only by becoming a philosopher in the truest sense of that term does man fulfill the purpose of his existence. Therefore it is our intention to devote the first twelve of these Student Letters to a summary of the principles of philosophy.

I believe that through these letters I shall be able to accomplish a work that has been close to my heart for many years. I want to bring to everyone who is interested in self-improvement a concise and organized picture of what constitutes a philosophic life.

We shall pass, step by step, through all of the departments of philosophy, from Metaphysics to Theurgy, interpreting each of them, not in the superficial way in which they are approached by modern scholastics, but according to the method advocated and practised by those great initiated philosophers to whom we owe all that we possess of an inspired learning.

I want you to come to look upon philosophy not as an abstract and difficult word, suggesting arduous labor, but as a simple and friendly term standing for all that is good and all that is real in knowledge. I want you to make philosophy the great work of your life. I want you to think of it as the

greatest building power in society. The mastery of philosophy is the supreme accomplishment of which man is capable and the living of philosophy is the most noble of all arts.

Accompanying this letter is a little folder containing definitions of philosophy, or possibly more correctly, definitions about philosophy. These will show the high esteem in which this royal art has been held by able thinkers of both the ancient and modern worlds. To these I want to add my own definition:

Philosophy is the perfect science and the science of perfection.

It is that branch of learning devoted to the understanding and application of knowledge. It has as its first work the elevation of the human intellect to a realization of the divine plan. It has as its final consummation the elevation of man to absolute union with Universal Wisdom.

In the process of perfecting its disciples, philosophy makes use of every known form of knowledge and he who perfects himself in its principles becomes truly divine. As religion, philosophy leads to the knowledge of God; as philosophy it leads to the knowledge of Self; and as science it leads to the knowledge and mastery of nature. In the words of Paracelsus:

“The beginning of wisdom is the beginning of supernatural power.”

In this present age theology leads to confusion and science to a hopeless unbelief. Only philosophy can bring us to the Golden Time we look for. A civilization built upon ignorance and perpetuated by ignorance is collapsing under the weight of ignorance. Only from philosophy can we derive that enlightened courage with which to face the day.

Those who have light within themselves will pass triumphantly through the difficult years which lie ahead. Philosophy overcomes doubt, it rescues men from despair, it perceives justice beneath injustice, and gives vision and a certain hope. By philosophy we can live wisely and die well. The philosopher is unconquerable. The imperishable intellect survives every destruction. The philosopher is in the vanguard of progress.

Those who perfect themselves in wisdom are called the twice-born, for by wisdom man is given a new birth. He departs from an old life with its uncertainties and limitations into a new illumined existence. Pythagoras refers to the philosopher as "the deathless soul." The world we live in today is ruled by fear—fear of life and fear of death. Wisdom alone can overcome fear. Love rules the sphere of the wise and those who have learned to love life in its deepest and most mystical sense have escaped from bondage to fear and dwell in peace with all things.

This letter is by necessity introductory. Next month we shall begin the outline of first principles with a discussion of the departments of metaphysics, and a summary of metaphysical teachings concerning the Supreme Source and development of the universe and man. I have been frequently requested to give in written form my own philosophy of life, and as far as possible I shall do this through these letters, setting forth my own belief and understanding of the whole field of spiritual and metaphysical thought.

May I take this opportunity of thanking you for the interest and support which you have shown in my work and hope that these letters will form a new bond of friendship between us. If you have friends who are interested in these subjects, or who might be led to such an interest through these

letters, may we suggest that you enroll these friends to receive the letters, thus helping to spread a doctrine of enlightenment which we feel sure will enrich their lives.

Yours sincerely,

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