

A Monthly Letter – June 1, 1934

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

June 1, 1934

Dear Friend:

In last month's letter I defined philosophy as the science of essential wisdom and briefly outlined its seven parts. METAPHYSICS is the first branch of philosophy and therefore our lesson for this month will be devoted to Metaphysics.

The term Metaphysics is derived from two Greek words meaning "after physics," or "beyond those things which pertain to external nature." The generally accepted definitions of the term are derived from Aristotle, the first author to prepare a lengthy treatise under this name. Aristotle uses the term METAPHYSICS at one time as synonymous with wisdom and at another time as synonymous with theology. He also calls it the "first philosophy."

Broadly speaking, existence is divisible into two primary states, which Albertus Magnus termed "physical and transphysical." The study of the visible universe is called PHYSICS and the study of the invisible universe is called METAPHYSICS. To philosophers all visible effects are suspended from, or supported by, invisible causes and Metaphysics is therefore that branch of learning which seeks to discover and understand the unseen Causes at work behind visible nature.

Metaphysics then includes the following departments of learning:

1. The nature of Being.
2. The nature of God.
3. The nature of Knowledge.
4. The nature of Truth.
5. The nature of Energy.
6. The nature of Creation.
7. The nature of divine and human relationships.

AN EARLY PAGAN PRAYER

"May I be no man's enemy, and may I be the friend of that which is Eternal and Abides. May I never quarrel with those nearest to me; and if I do, may I be reconciled quickly. May I never devise evil against any man; if any devise evil against me, may I escape uninjured and without the need of hurting him. May I love, seek, and attain that which is good. May I wish for all men's happiness and envy none. May I never rejoice in the ill-fortune of one who has wronged me — When I have done or said what is wrong, may I never wait for the rebuke of others, but always rebuke myself until I make amends. — May I win no victory that harms either me or my opponent — May I reconcile friends who are wroth with one another. May I, to the extent of my powers, give all needful help to my friend in danger. When visiting those in grief may I be able by gentle and healing words to soften their pain — May I respect myself — May I always keep tame that which rages within me — May I accustom myself to be gentle, and never be angry with people because of circumstances. May I never discuss who is wicked and what wicked things he has done, but know good men and follow in their footsteps." -----Eusebius, an Ionic Platonist

The purpose of Metaphysics is to lead the mind from the consideration of forms and bodies to an understanding of the principles which animate these forms and bodies. The intellect which has discovered the divine essence in all things has the metaphysical viewpoint. In order that you may have a working knowledge of philosophical fundamentals it is first necessary to lay a metaphysical foundation, that is a foundation in superphysical principles. Visible nature is but a small part of existence. Although we are limited to visible nature in our present state, we can never live intelligently or think accurately until we have some understanding of that larger world which extends beyond the physical shell of our environment.

According to Metaphysics, BEING is an eternal unchanging Principle and is denominated the First Cause. Pythagoras defines God as an immeasurable and inconceivable Being whose soul is composed of the substance of truth and whose body is composed of the substance of light. Being is also termed ESSENCE and EXISTENCE, every effort being made to discover a term appropriately impersonal with which to designate this eternal energy. The modes or aspects of Being are termed Beings of which there are three kinds. The first kind of Being is called the UNMOVED and is God. The second kind of Being is called the SELF-MOVING or the gods, chief of which are the Intelligences of the celestial bodies. The third kind of Being is called the MOVED and includes all bodies and forms to which life is imparted by spirit, soul or mind — the chief of such creatures is man.

Maximus Tyrius thus sums up the matter: "There is one God, the king and father of all things, and many gods, sons of God, ruling in conjunction with Him." Thus Metaphysics teaches us that God is not a personality but rather that Divine Life upon which all things subsist and that this One Life manifests attributes which are also divine principles. These attributes are called the gods. These second gods are the agencies by which all physical life is supported. When Maximus Tyrius refers to the "risings and settings of the gods" he is referring to the ascending and descending of the stars and constellations which were regarded by the philosophers as the bodies of the secondary deities who move constantly in great orbits about the Throne of their Eternal Father.

That we may more fully understand the metaphysical approach to the mystery of First Cause, let us examine some of the old fragments which have descended to us from the great metaphysical institutions of the ancients. The monuments of the Egyptians are richly ornamented with lofty sentiments concerning Being and God. In the shrine of Nephys at Sais, Being is denominated as "All that was, is, and shall be." At Thebes, Ammon, the Father of the gods, is called "The Concealed Spirit which was from the beginning." In the Louvre papyrus, Being is described as "Goodness itself, Lord of time, who conductest eternity; and Akhnaton adores the Creator as "Beauty which, is Life."

The Greeks thus reasoned upon this Divine Mystery: According to Pythagoras, the Eternal Principle is Number and Harmony infinitely diffused. Thales had several definitions. "Being," he said, "is that which has neither beginning nor end, and is older than Time. All things are full of God. The mind of the universe is God," Xenophanes, lifting his eyes to the heavens, exclaims: "Words fail. The One is God." He further declared that the Infinite resembles mortals neither in form nor in thought but abides eternally, moving not at all, but causing all things to move. Aristotle defines the First Principle as eternal and perfect, without parts and passions, indivisible and unchanging, adding: "Bliss is the Self-activity of God."

The belief in an eternally-existing Principle, termed variously the One, the Beautiful and the Good, is the absolute foundation of Metaphysics. This Principle is termed in the Mahabharata “the Root Undying whence has sprung whatever is.”

Thus all great mystical theologies are primarily monotheistic — worshipping one supreme Principle — yet as this One Principle has produced out of Itself the immeasurable diversity which is perceptible in nature, the philosophers considered it appropriate to regard the attributes of First Cause as also divine. From this practice arose polytheism.

It is interesting to digress here for a moment and fix the meanings of certain terms. The votaries of the various religious systems of the world are divided into three classes. The first class is called CHRISTIAN, the second PAGAN, and the third HEATHEN. The term Christian is stretched to include both Jews and Mohammedans, as these three share the same original religious inspiration. The word PAGAN is defined by the dictionary as one who worships false gods. The definition later adds that a pagan is a heathen and that a heathen is one who does not belong to the Christian, Mohammedan or Jewish sects. Modern reason demands that we should understand the terms pagan and heathen in their true light. The term pagan is now generally bestowed upon all philosophic nations, Plato and Aristotle were pagans, but THEY DID NOT WORSHIP FALSE GODS. Truly speaking, a pagan is one who refuses to accept credal limitations of the Divine Essence. Pythagoras was a pagan because he was initiated into fourteen great world religions and permitted no sectarian boundaries to prejudice his mind concerning the universality of truth. The term HEATHEN implies false belief, ignorance of the nature of God, and polytheism. This term also is applied to members of any religion other than Christian, Mohammedan and Jewish. The Hindus, for example, are termed heathens. First, because their pantheon is regarded as idolatrous by Christendom; second, because their definition of God differs from the Biblical definition; and lastly, because they are polytheistic.

It follows from these definitions that all philosophers are to some degree pagans and heathens. Pagans because they respect no man-made religious limitation, and heathens because they realize that the one God controls Its creation through an elaborate polytheism—a vast order of secondary gods. Nor do the philosophers believe that these premises in any way conflict with the essential principles of the original Christian revelation.

If you are to become a truly enlightened metaphysician, you must be prepared to accept the presence of God in every element of nature and in every aspect of existence. Like the pagans of old, you must conceive the universe as full of Intelligent Principles. The old Jews bestowed upon the Creating Principle ten Ineffable Names by which Its qualities might be made known to the wise. One of these names was AL SHEDDAI which means the LORD OF HOSTS. Thus while divinity in its absolute essence is One and indivisible, man is not permitted to perceive Being in this absolute state. To mortal perception the Creating Power must always be the Lord of Hosts. This simply means that Deity is so immersed in Its creating processes that we perceive not Its unity but Its absolute diversity. Yet as surely as it is appropriate to worship Its unity, so it is also appropriate to reverence Its diversity. If men build temples to the attributes of Deity, this is not necessarily because they are unaware of the essential unity which lies behind these attributes.

As metaphysicians it is our philosophic privilege to worship and seek to understand the Lord of Hosts. We must sense the Creator as an innumerable army of Intelligent Building Agencies. Space

is filled with the individualized aspects of divinity. The suns, moons and stars which populate the firmament are divine Beings, radiant Sons of the Infinite.

As surely as space is resplendent with the Heavenly Host, so surely “the earth is full of gods.” By this statement the pagan initiates inferred that men also are heavenly beings. Man himself is part of the divine host of gods, and all creatures great and small share divinity in common. One of the old Greek masters always addressed his prayer to the God who dwelt “in the heaven and in the heart.”

We all desire to achieve security — spiritual, mental and physical. We know that security is conferred only by wisdom and only a wise man can rise above the ills the flesh is heir to. Heraclitus of Ephesus said: “Character is fate.” This is probably one of the most significant statements ever uttered by man. Our destiny is measured by what we are. If we would come to a good end we must possess a character which justifies that end. Character is made up of several factors. Chief of these is our philosophical perspective. We live upon the level of our thoughts and ideals.

If we are to elevate ourselves to a philosophical level, our first lesson is to seek to understand, at least in part, the origin of the universe and our own place therein, and to sense the sublimity of the divine plan. Contemplation of the transcendent beauties of this mystical theology will elevate our minds above those narrow and unworthy concepts which bind us to an ignoble state. It will give us a spiritual perspective by which we can live more usefully, happily, intelligently and completely. We cannot consider lightly or as merely speculative the old metaphysical philosophies, for what can be more practical or more useful than a discipline which directs our attention to the nobler aspects of life and invites us into a mystical communion with that Eternal Spirit which dwells in the furthestmost and the innermost?

In next month’s letter we shall continue our study of Metaphysics, dealing particularly with the Nature of Knowledge and the Nature of Truth.

Yours sincerely,

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