

# LIFE AND FINITE INDIVIDUALITY.

TWO SYMPOSIA :

- I. BY J. S. HALDANE, D'ARCY WENTWORTH  
THOMPSON, P. CHALMERS MITCHELL,  
AND L. T. HOBHOUSE.
- II. BY BERNARD BOSANQUET, A. S. PRINGLE-  
PATTISON, G. F. STOUT, AND VISCOUNT  
HALDANE.

*Edited for the ARISTOTELIAN SOCIETY with an  
Introduction.*

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By arrangement with the original publishers, those pages of the original edition that contained Abstracts of Minutes, Lists of Members, etc., or advertisements, have either been omitted or left blank in this reprint. Details regarding these have similarly been omitted from the Contents pages.

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## INTRODUCTION.

THE two Symposia which are combined in this volume were written independently of one another for discussions at the Joint Session of the Aristotelian Society, the British Psychological Society, and the Mind Association, held in London on July 6th and 7th, 1918. The papers, as originally issued to members for the discussions, are published in the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol. XVIII. They are republished in response to a generally expressed desire that they should be available in the form of a special volume, and in order that the reply of the opener of each Symposium to the criticisms of the later papers, which initiated the general discussion at the meeting, may be included.

The two Symposia were contributed without any idea of their being combined under one title in one volume. The unity expressed in the title "Life and Finite Individuality" is an afterthought. It seemed, however, to those who took part in the two discussions, that, in a quite definite sense, each problem was complementary to and threw light upon the other. The problems are, of course, approached each from its own particular standpoint, yet they are closely allied, for it is impossible, even in thought, to dissociate the problem of the true nature of finite individuality from the problem of the true nature of life.

The purpose of the Aristotelian Society Symposium is to bring together opposite, divergent, and diverse answers to some vital question of philosophical controversy in a definite manner. The opening paper is designed to state a thesis, and the second paper an antithesis, and these are followed by other points of view. The first paper is therefore written first, and submitted to those who are invited to make reply to it or to criticise it.

The Symposium, "Are Physical, Biological, and Psychological Categories Irreducible?" was suggested by two recent books, each dealing with the author's own experimental research, which appeared to throw new light on the nature of the phenomenon of life, and to indicate new directions in which theory of life must seek formulation. At the same time, they seemed to raise a distinct issue, and also to illustrate divergent tendencies.

The first book is Dr. J. S. Haldane's *Organism and Environment*.\* This contains an account by Dr. Haldane of his experiments in connexion with a research into the physiology of breathing, experiments of extreme delicacy and considerable diversity, all of which he contended demonstrated to the point of absolute conviction that life is not the phenomenon of a functional process dependent on, and conditioned by, structure, brought about by the synthesis of material constituents. Wherever and in whatever form we meet life, its distinctive characteristic, he contended, is that a normal constant is maintained amidst a disturbing environment, and to this function structure is always and altogether subservient. He argued that this proves conclusively that mechanistic interpretation, which means the defining of life in terms of physical structure, is impossible.

The second book is Professor D'Arcy W. Thompson's *Growth and Form*.† This is a minute and careful study of the morphology of organisms. The argument leads to the conclusion that all interpretation of living forms of life, inasmuch as it implies explanation of structure by adaptability to function, is necessarily mechanistic. While leaving the problem of life itself, in its actual nature and origin, outside or beyond the region of scientific investigation, the author contends that, in all manifestations of life in organic forms, "purpose" can

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\* Yale University Press, 1917.

† Cambridge University Press, 1917.

be and must be interpreted in terms of mechanism, or, rather, that purpose and mechanism are not different facts demanding different interpretations, but one and the same fact regarded from different standpoints.

The Symposium, "Do Finite Individuals Possess a Substantive or an Adjectival Mode of Being?" was suggested by Professor A. S. Pringle-Pattison's book on *The Idea of God*,\* and the terms of the question are a quotation from that book. The chapter in which the passage occurs is devoted to a criticism of Professor Bernard Bosanquet's doctrine, expounded in his Gifford Lectures, *The Principle of Individuality and Value*.† The Symposium raises a fundamental metaphysical problem and also a logical problem of some complexity. The metaphysical problem concerns the nature of the finite subject of experience. Is it no more than externally related to other subjects on the same level of self-existence, or is it inherently dependent on more ultimate wholes? The logical problem concerns the subject of the judgment. Can the subject of experience in his individuality be the ultimate subject of a proposition, or is all predication ultimately of reality or the absolute? Is the categorical form of judgment always resolvable into the hypothetical?

The problem in the second Symposium is not therefore merely analogous to that in the first; it is, in fact, identical with it when taken in its concrete and universal form. In the first the argument turns on the question, Are we to regard function as prior to structure and structure as dependent on function, or *vice versa*? In the second the argument is concerned with the status of the individual. Has the finite individual a substantive existence, in external relation to other finite individuals, and can we conceive all such substantive

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\* *The Idea of God in the Light of Recent Philosophy*, by A. Seth Pringle-Pattison; Clarendon Press, 1917.

† *The Principle of Individuality and Value*, by B. Bosanquet, Macmillan and Co., 1912.

individuals in external relation to God? Or, is the finite individual adjectival in his nature, dependent on his internal relation to higher forms of reality? Is reality one in the qualitative sense, the whole manifesting itself in the individual parts?

It will be seen, therefore, that, in the second Symposium, we are discussing in regard to monadic relations the same problem which in the first Symposium we are discussing in regard to atomic relations. Can we, by exhaustive knowledge of the constitution of an organism, discover the source and ground of the living process it undergoes? Can we, by exhaustive knowledge of an individual subject of experience, discover the source and ground of his individual nature?

A main purpose in the arrangement of these Symposia, and in combining physical and biological with metaphysical problems, is to break down the false distinction between science and philosophy. It is a distinction of modern origin, emphasised in the great era of scientific discovery which is the outstanding feature of the nineteenth century. It is based on the idea that there is a clear demarcation between fact and theory. Science is supposed to be concerned with fact, and to pursue a method which involves observation, experiment, and description in pure and absolute simplicity, and to eschew theory and hypothesis in so far as these are intellectual speculations which transcend the particular facts of experience. It leaves to philosophy the discussion of first principles and ultimate data, which it tends to regard as an unsubstantial realm in which there can be no certain knowledge. Philosophy, also, has been only too ready to accept the distinction, hoping thereby to disencumber itself of practical, mundane, economical concerns. The well-known instance is Hegel's gibe at the "makers of philosophical instruments." The modern concept of philosophy is bringing us to the recognition that this divorce between science and philosophy is wholly unnatural. Observation and description

are not science. Without hypothesis and theory science cannot move, and is without expression. The great Newton, who placed the maxim, *Hypotheses non fingo*, at the head of his *Principia*, and supposed he was laying the sure foundation of all future science in simply describing what he observed, could he revisit us, would find mathematicians describing his description of the universal framework as the Newtonian hypothesis—and not implying thereby either dishonour or discredit. There is but one reality—our present life, which carries in it its history, and is making itself. We may abstract special aspects of it, and justify, on practical and economical grounds, the clear-cut divisions of the special sciences, but there is one identical object, however we present it, whether in the manifoldness of physics or in the unity of metaphysics—life, the essential nature of which is history, not unchangeable, immobile, matter.

The scope and limits of the volume do not permit of including the criticisms from other standpoints which were made at the general discussions of the Symposia. I can only put on record that at the discussion of the first Symposium the standpoint of mathematics and physics was represented by Professor A. N. Whitehead and Professor J. W. Nicholson: of neurology by Dr. Leslie Mackenzie and Dr. G. F. Goldsbrough; and of biology by Mr. Brierley.

Mr. Arthur J. Balfour presided and took part in the discussion of the second Symposium. The standpoint of modern philosophical realism was represented by Professor S. Alexander and that of pragmatism by Dr. F. C. S. Schiller.

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