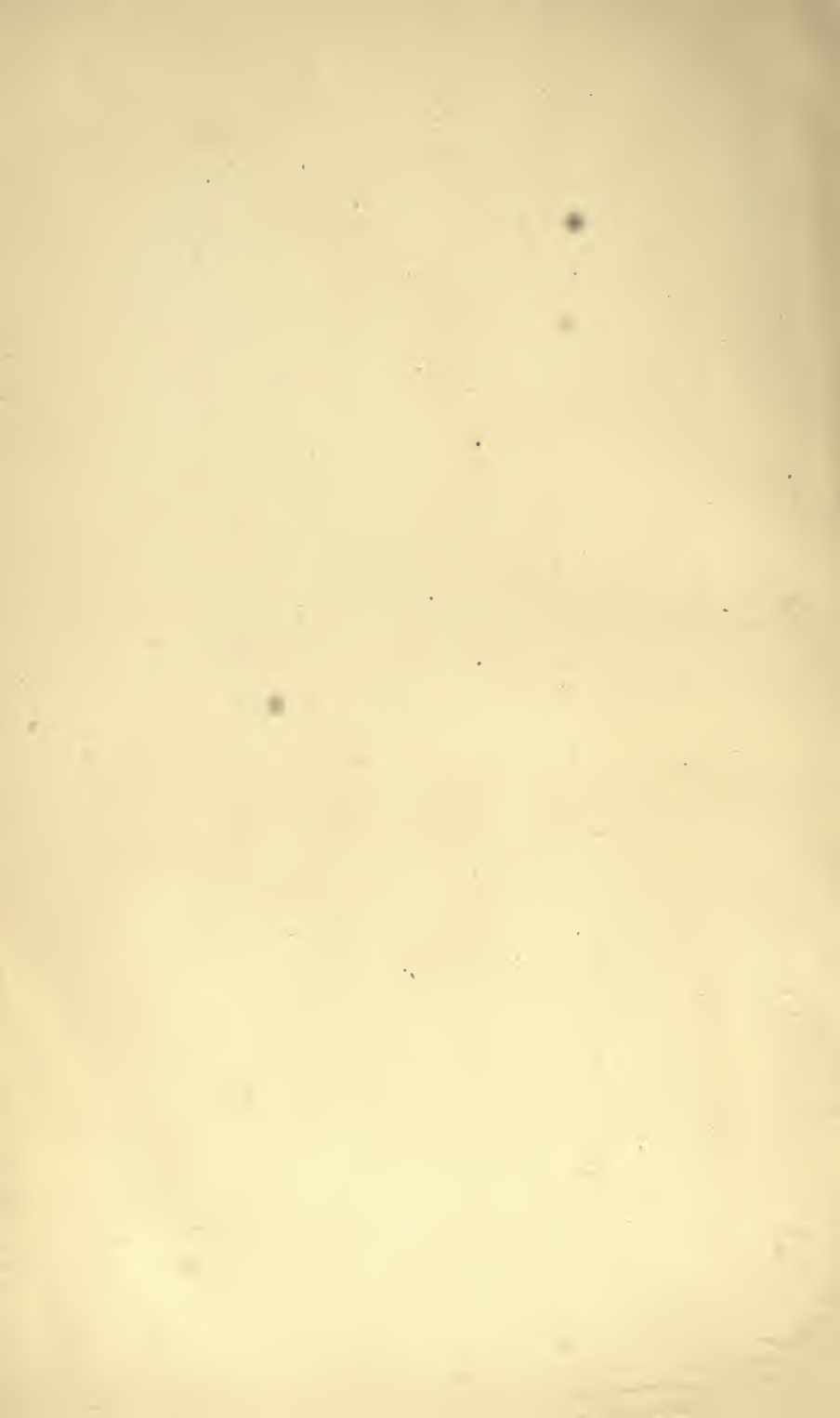




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VOL. I.



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PREFACE

TO METAPHYSICAL WORKS.



1. IT is a singular thing to see that the two words *Philosophy* and *Metaphysics* are not yet used with any constant signification. This is so true that we have recently heard certain French philosophers maintain that such words cannot be defined. If this were so, they ought to be banished from human language.

But, since they are used, it is certain that men attach some meaning to them, although not a constant one. Of this inconstancy it will be useful here to consider the reason.

2. *Philosophy* (φιλοσοφία) is a word invented by the founder of the Italic School. Cicero tells us that Leon, king of the Phliasians, having asked Pythagoras in what art he considered his worth to consist, received from him the reply that he knew no art, but was a philosopher,* and from that time on men given to the study of the most important truths have no longer been called wise men (σοφοί), as before, but lovers and seekers of wisdom (φιλόσοφοι). In these words Pythagoras gave

* *Quæst. Tusc.*, V, iij.

utterance to a most noble moral principle, whose intimate truth was universally felt. For who is the man that can call himself wise? How great is the darkness that surrounds the human intellect! How great is the ignorance that remains to mortal man, even after he has spent his whole life in meditation! How many toils, how many various baffled attempts, in many cases, how many errors have no result but a minute particle of discovered truth! To God alone, therefore, belongs the title of wise: it is a lie and an arrogance to give it to man. Hence Pythagoras, in laying bare this lie, in abasing this arrogance, laid the first solid basis for the investigation of the true, a basis which is none other than philosophical humility. But, if these terms, *philosophy* and *philosopher*, gave a better direction to science and its lovers, they did not therefore determine the matter of their investigations, and hence the meaning of these words, as far as this matter was concerned, remained vague and fluctuating.

3. *Metaphysics* was a word invented by Andronicus of Rhodes, who, when arranging the works of Aristotle, placed the books treating of being after the Physics, for which reason these books received the name of *Metaphysics* (τὰ μετὰ τὰ φυσικά—what follows the Physics). This word, therefore, like *Philosophy*, was not invented to signify any matter about which the mind might concern itself, but merely to mark the position assigned, in the collection of Aristotle's Works, to the ontological books.

4. These facts with reference to the origin of the words *Philosophy* and *Metaphysics* show with sufficient

clearness, that at their first invention they were not meant to mark the determinate subject of any branch of study. Hence, when they came to be employed as names for sciences, every one who used them was free to assign them to different sciences. In this way it came to pass that they received different significations.

5. But now, words that have attained so much currency and celebrity cannot be set aside, and yet no person of good sense can wish to see them any longer wandering about loose and lawless, like vagabonds, whose name and character no one knows anything about.

6. On the other hand, inasmuch as they were not introduced by the common world, but by the philosophic schools, philosophers alone have a right to determine their meaning. The people will be ready enough to receive the law from them, if they will but agree among themselves as to their use.

7. Influenced by these considerations, we have tried to fix the meaning of the word *Philosophy* by defining it as "the science of ultimate grounds."* We felt it necessary to determine the meaning of this word, as soon as we contemplated the UNITY of wisdom, of which philosophy is the study and love. It is, indeed, impossible to give the love of the soul to wisdom in its sublime unity, without seeing that, just because it is one, it is susceptible of a single definition, and that without this it can never be written with method and scientific form.

8. But how shall we fix the meaning of the word

* *Philosophical System*, nos. 1-9.

Metaphysics? This meaning must be such that the public, in accepting it, shall not have to depart far from the concepts which it now connects with the word: it must be such a mean between the opposite concepts attached to it, that, when the vague and uncertain use of the word is replaced by a fixed and immutable one, it shall be left with that medium signification, round which all those that have used it, have, so to speak, been circulating.

9. In times past, the word *Metaphysics* was sometimes used as an equivalent for Philosophy itself; at other times, it was used as synonymous with Ontology. Later on, when the word *Ideology* was introduced to signify the theory of ideas, it seemed as if this science was separated from the body of *Metaphysics*, and, along with it, Logic, which is a kind of corollary or appendix to *Ideology*. Hence, many text-books for school use have appeared with the title, *Elements of Logic and Metaphysics*, in which the two are contrasted. From this usage we do not wish to depart. And since *Ideology* (under which we include Logic) is the science of ideal being, *Metaphysics*, relieved of this part which turns toward the idea, will remain a word admirably suited to designate that group of sciences which treat philosophically of the theory of real beings. In this way there will be two very distinct groups of philosophical sciences, that of the ideological sciences, and that of the metaphysical sciences.

10. But with regard to this definition, there are several things to be considered.

In the first place, we must mark the difference between *Metaphysics* and *Physics*, which latter also treats of real beings.

Physics is wrongly placed among the philosophical sciences, and it is so placed only on account of the vague meaning attached to the word *Philosophy*. As soon, however, as this word is fixed to mean "the science of ultimate grounds," it excludes Physics, Mathematics, and in general all the sciences called natural, which gather the phenomena and laws of real beings without investigating their ultimate grounds. Besides this, these sciences do not extend beyond corporeal real beings, whereas Metaphysics cannot seek for the ultimate grounds of real beings, as it ought to do, being a part of philosophy, without considering real beings in all their universality, in all their completeness, and, therefore, without rising to those highest principles, those first causes which embrace all real beings. The truth is, the grounds of things are not ultimate unless they are perfectly universal and absolute. Hence, with the unity of philosophy is combined the other most noble characteristic of UNIVERSALITY.*

11. In the second place, the reader must take care not to think that, when we define Metaphysics as the philosophical theory of real and complete being, or as the theory of the ultimate grounds of real being, we mean that Metaphysics has pure reality for its object, because pure reality, separated from the idea, is not an object either of science or of cognition, as we have elsewhere shown.† Indeed, it is not even a being, but only on the way to become a being ($\mu\tilde{\eta}\ \tilde{\nu}\nu$), containing in itself no ground for itself. The ground of things is always

* See the Prefaces to the two volumes of my *Opuscoli Filosofici* (Milan, 1827-8), and to the *New Essay* (London, 1883-4).

† *New Essay*, vol. ii, nos. 406-409. *Philosophical System*, nos. 1-8.

an idea,* so that real things become objects of knowledge only when they are apprehended and contemplated in relation to the idea, through and in the idea. Bare reality is only perceived by feeling, and cannot be perceived by intelligence: it is not, therefore, by itself, an object of knowledge.†

12. The definitions which we have given of *Philosophy* and *Metaphysics* may to some seem contradictions. It will be said: If, then, philosophy is the science of ultimate grounds, and ultimate grounds are always ideal beings, how can it be affirmed that one part of Philosophy, namely, that called *Metaphysics*, embraces real things?

We reply, that *Metaphysics* does not embrace real things, which are terms of feeling, but the philosophical theory of real things (nos. 9-11).

13. Philosophy is the science of ultimate grounds. For this very reason it must treat of real things, for real

* *Principles of Moral Science*, chap. i, art. i, note.

† Hence, contingent realities, not having the *idea* in their nature, are not cognizable in themselves, as is the case with God, whose essence contains, at once, real being and ideal being.

Here we must observe that we may readily deceive ourselves, by believing that certain sciences dealing with individuals, as astronomy, which deals with the sun, the moon, and the other heavenly bodies, deal with being as purely real and subsistent. In order to see that the theory of these bodies does not stop short at their subsistence, we have only to reflect that, even if God should annihilate all the stars that are in the heavens, that theory would be none the less true. And if God should annihilate the sun and the moon, and create another sun and another moon

similar to those annihilated, astronomy would not have suffered a change of any kind. It would be as true, when applied to the newly-created bodies, as it was when applied to the previous ones, from the observation of which man derived it, although the reality of the former is not the same as that of the latter. This proves to demonstration that the material individuality, which man uses as a means and an occasion for arriving at the knowledge of these sciences, is not the object of them; it is but a mere example, in which the mind considers the theory which is valid for all similar cases. That the understanding, even when directed to real things, always terminates its act in ideas, is shown by us more at length in the *Theodicy* (nos. 617-641) and elsewhere.

things must be treated of in a theory of ultimate grounds, for two reasons :

First, because *ground* is a word whose signification is relative to that whose ground is sought, and that whose ground is sought consists in real things. Here we see that real things, as such, do not constitute the proper object of philosophy, but only its occasion and condition. Philosophy treats of them, because it treats of their possibilities and ultimate sufficient grounds.

Second, because the first ground requires a real that is coessential with it, as we have elsewhere shown,* and, hence, it cannot be fully known without the theory of that first reality which constitutes it, not as ground, but as a complete and absolute being, containing the ground of all things. Now, Philosophy must treat of this absolute reality and subsistence, as its own proper object, as the completion of this object.

14. We may now subject to criticism three principal definitions which have been given of *Philosophy*.

Some thinkers can never get away from reality. *Materialists* are necessarily bound to it, so that for them there is in truth no such thing as Philosophy, except a negative one, or, more correctly, the destruction of Philosophy. And here comes in the definition given by Hobbes, who makes Philosophy consist in a "knowledge, acquired by correct reasoning, of effects or phenomena from their conceived causes or generations, and also of possible generations from known effects." Now, since from effects alone, or from phenomena alone, without the aid of the ideal object, we can know only the proximate causes, or, more properly speaking, the laws,

* *New Essay*, vol. iii, nos. 1456-1460.

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