

## PHILOSOPHY AND BLUE LODGE MASONRY

A Presentation to the Arizona Academy of Freemasonry  
April 5, 2009, at Prescott, Arizona  
by Bro. Gene Hutloff  
Senior Warden, Arizona Research Lodge #1, F.&A.M.

### Preface

This presentation comes to you courtesy of Most Worshipful Brother Rex Hutchens, who was originally scheduled to deal with the topic at hand, but who was called to other duties. It is testimony to Bro. Rex's charity and forbearance that he has entrusted this presenter with the task of carrying on in his place.

### Purpose

The rational objective of this presentation shall be to demonstrate the advantages of philosophically approaching Freemasonry.

The experiential objective shall be to encourage Freemasons to investigate the underlying assumptions of the rituals and lectures of the Craft.

The essential question guiding this discussion shall be: How might philosophy improve our understanding of the tenets of Freemasonry?

### Introduction

Before embarking on a discussion of philosophy, it might be well to hurry through an unavoidably superficial overview of how, in somewhat modern terms, those who practice the discipline of philosophy depict their craft.

Philosophers assign the great questions of life to one (sometimes more) of three categories: questions having to do with reality (*ontology*), questions having to do with knowledge (*epistemology*), and questions having to do with values (*axiology*). It is not at all unusual for a question to object to being placed in one category, and to struggle to be put in another. Sample questions which have over the ages taken up more or less permanent residence in these categories are: What exists? (*ontology*). What is True? (*epistemology*). What is good? (*axiology*). Since the time of Socrates and Plato, philosophers have disagreed on the answers to questions such as these. It might be humbly suggested here that the entire history of philosophy (at least since Plato) consists of one philosopher proposing and another philosopher disposing, by way of criticism, of the first philosopher's proposition.

A favorite example of the above is Descartes proposing an essentially dualistic existence in order to explain "thinking" as a proof of existence; and Spinoza challenging the necessity of dual existence as the ground of thought or consciousness. Spinoza's challenge resulted in the great philosophy bearing that philosopher's name. All of which leads us to the overarching distinctions by which one or another philosophy is identified.

A philosophy may be ontologically characterized as *monist* or as *dualist*. The monist will answer the question "What exists?" by saying, "One and one only." A dualist will answer the same question as, "Two, a *material* One, and a *spiritual* One (The term *mind* is often used by dualists in place of spirit).

Besides these basic two schools, some modern philosophers have tried to give themselves some latitude by declaring themselves to be *pluralists*, to the everlasting contempt of the monists and dualists. There is, however something of value in pluralism, as we shall discover when we attempt to put together philosophy and Freemasonry.

One last point: In modern philosophy, the principal contention is between those philosophies which are designated as *naturalist*, and those which are designated as *idealist*. Modern philosophies claiming to be based on *science* tend to be naturalist, with no ontological place permitted for mind or spirit. Any other philosophy which makes allowance for the existence of mind or spirit is, by definition, idealist. It will come as no surprise that most Masons find idealism to be congenial to their fondly held sentiments.

### Masonic Philosophy, Philosophy of Masonry

Two of the principle sources consulted in the preparation of this paper (Haywood and Pound) seem to be of two minds about Masonic philosophy or, if you will, philosophy of Masonry, *i.e.*, that there is no such thing as a Masonic philosophy; and there *is* such a thing as a philosophy of Masonry, at least under certain conditions. Harry Haywood comes close to both affirming and denying when he writes

*All of Masonry constantly revolves about a few great ideas. These ideas confront one at every turn – what becomes more familiar to an active Mason than such words as “Brotherhood,” “Equality,” “Toleration,” etc., etc., -- so that the youngest Entered Apprentice need have no difficulty in getting at them. If he does get at them, and if he learns to understand them as Masons understand them, they will help him greatly to gain that comprehension and inclusive understanding which we have been calling the philosophy of Masonry* (Haywood, p. 17). And again,

*A study of the philosophy of Masonry is not the study of philosophy; the Masonic student as such has little interest in Plato and Aristotle, in Neo-Platonism, Mysticism, Scholasticism, Rationalism, Idealism, Pragmatism, Naturalism, etc. Masonry touches upon the circumference of each of these and the other major philosophical systems, no doubt, but there is no such thing as a Masonic philosophy any more than there is such a thing as a Masonic religion. We speak of a philosophy of Masonry in the same sense that we speak of a philosophy of government, or industry, or art, or science* (Haywood, p. 18).

This is confusing, to say the least. The “sense that we speak of a philosophy of government, *etc.*,” is actually quite precise and technical. Each such field has its own peculiar lexicon of terms, its own internal structure, and its own standards for achievement. Advanced study in the philosophy of any one of these disciplines leads to a Doctor of Philosophy degree (Ph.D.), or at least it used to. Furthermore, Haywood speaks, in the former quote, of the terms of the philosophy of Masonry as things to be understood “as Masons understand them.” And precisely how, one might ask, do “Masons understand them?” We are left to wonder.

For all that, Haywood is an engaging and provocative teacher; and *The Great Teachings of Masonry* is a superb text for Masonic education. There is hardly a topic related to Masonry which does not have a chapter devoted to it. All in all, there is quite enough to be gained from “touch[ing] upon the circumference” of the several philosophies alluded to in the latter quote to occupy the most ardent seeker after Masonic light.

In one of his more affirmative moments, Haywood states

*“Lectures on the Philosophy of Freemasonry,” by Roscoe Pound, of the Law School of Harvard University, is the book wherewith to begin a study of the Philosophy of Masonry in a technical and systematic manner* (Haywood p. 155). And indeed it is; Pound, master classicist, philosopher, and jurist, is more than a match for the field of our inquiry. Beginning with a survey of leading Masonic philosophers of the past – Preston, Oliver, Krause, Gould, and Pike – Pound sounds the challenge to modern Masons to seek, in the present era, a philosophy which resonates with the perennial aims of Freemasonry.

At this point, a word or two about the state of philosophy in the early twentieth century, and how it got there, might be appropriate. German philosophers dominated the field, and they were engaged, for the most part, in responding to the propositions of Kant, Hegel, or both. Kant and Hegel were both idealists, but each of a different sort. Kant developed a moral philosophy independent of all but reason. Hegel, on the other hand expressed his idealism in terms of his theory of history. As the ages rolled on, according to Hegel, the ideal world (God) would express itself one way (thesis), and then, in the course of time, another way (antithesis). The two would contend with one another, with the outcome being the cosmic emergence of a new version of the ideal world (synthesis), which would then signal the emergence of yet another antithesis to contend with the synthesis (now transformed into the new thesis), and so on through the ages of ages until such time as the great cosmic idea might come to fully know itself. Events on earth, naturally, mirrored the contest of the ideas in heaven (referred to as the Hegelian dialectic), hence the times and tides in the affairs of men, also known as history. It was to the neo-Hegelians that Roscoe Pound would direct his attention in his quest for the most Masonic of modern philosophers, regardless of whether that philosopher was a Mason or not. Two receive special mention in *Lectures on the Philosophy of Freemasonry*, Friederich Paulsen and Rudolf Eucken. Of the two, Pound quotes Eucken most frequently, so we shall accord him our attention for the purpose of our exercise, to follow.

Pound had certain criteria to which candidates for Most Masonic Philosophy had to conform. Those criteria were:

- (1) *Its metaphysical creed will either be idealistic-monistic or else pragmatist-pluralistic(?).*
- (2) *Its psychology will be voluntaristic rather than intellectualistic; that is, under the influence of modern biology it will insist upon giving an important place to the will. It will have faith in the efficacy of conscious human effort.*
- (3) *What is more important for our purpose, its standpoint will be teleological. (Paulsen explains this as “purpose governs life.”) In other words, the philosophy of Masonry will be treated as a part of practical rather than of pure philosophy.*
- (4) *It will have its roots in history* (Pound, pp. 86-87).

Subsequent to examining several philosophies of the early twentieth century – Absolute Idealism, Immanent Idealism, Naturalism, Socialism, Aesthetic Individualism – Pound settles on Personal Idealism (also referred to as Practical Idealism) as the most useful for Masonic purposes, especially as found in the work of the neo-Hegelian, Rudolf Eucken (Pound, pp. 88-95). Included in today’s handouts is Eucken’s “Naturalism or Idealism,” the lecture which he delivered upon receiving the Nobel prize for literature in

1908. It is a useful epitome of Eucken's philosophy of life, and will serve our purpose for the brief exercise awaiting us.

It was MW Rex's idea that we might examine the philosophical triads in the lecture of the Fellow Craft degree – Three Great Lights, Three Great Supports, Three Principal Tenets – for hints or suggestions for developing an inquiry into the underlying principles of Blue Lodge Masonry. For the sake of ease, we shall exclude from our discussion the first two mentioned, on account of their symbolic nature or figurative language. The remaining triad, the Three Principal Tenets – Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth -- will do very well for our purposes, their terms being of the intellectual and abstract sort which invite philosophical discussion. Our plan shall include a brief comparison of Harry Haywood's treatment of the tenets alongside that of Rudolf Eucken.

### Brotherly Love

Haywood appears to be struggling with the question of whether man is inclined to reach out to his brother because they are both merely parts of nature and, therefore, both in the same boat, as it were, each being a part of the other's environment; or whether the desire to become an ever more social being originates in a spiritual human dimension, from which nature is independent. In other words, does man extend brotherly love to his fellows as an act of will (idealist); or because it is but his nature, and he just can't help himself (naturalist)?

*There is no way in which a man can set out to become a social being, because he is **already** a social being, and can never be anything else. Sociality is an organic fact, built into the nature of man and of man's world, from which a man can no more escape than he can escape from his skin* (Haywood, p. 85).

In contrast to Haywood's seemingly naturalist view of the matter, Eucken offers the following:

*As long as we regard man simply as being next to us, there can be no inner community of mutual love* (Eucken, "Naturalism or Idealism," p. 3). It is this "inner community of mutual love" which Eucken posits as the fundamental unit toward which all human endeavor should strive, the ultimate goal being the creation of a yet higher Civilization. It is this idea of Civilization, as the goal or end toward which history should move, which so captures the attention of Roscoe Pound, which he finds so suggestive of Masonic ideals (Pound, p. 101). Eucken further extends brotherly love beyond the merely social, to include that part of life made up of learning, of moving from a sense of strangeness to a sense of knowledge.

*Nowhere is the process of making the seemingly strange your own as marked as in love, the highest relationship of two individuals.* (Eucken, "Naturalism or Idealism," p. 4)

### Relief

MWB Hutchens often quotes Albert Pike as saying that charity without philosophy is mere alms-giving. Alms-giving may be characterized by thoughtlessness and perfunctoriness, or by sentiment; never, though, by rational moral choice, proceeding from the inner life of man. Yet, here is Haywood, sentimentally looking back to a past which may have never been, to explain Masonic charity:

*The Lodge is nothing other than a substitute for the old-fashioned small community life wherein neighbor was so tied to neighbor that there was no need of associated charities, social centers, or employment bureaus* (Haywood, p. 135). Although there is a proper place in this world for feelings of affection, pity, and compassion, all too often true charity stands waiting until the private sentiments of individuals can be appealed to by the depiction of this or that pathetic circumstance. Masonic relief includes, but is not limited to, sharing material wealth; it includes sharing the achievements of a civilization in which each and all men contribute a part. Great, as well as humble, acts of charity bearing the true Masonic stamp might well resonate with the following observation by Eucken:

*This world is not a private world; the good, true, and beautiful are not peculiar to each individual. We live in a common world and the individual achievement is valid for all and becomes their possession. In this consists the greatness of [the] new world. The new life of the individual more and more finds his true self and abandons his limited point of departure. Mere self-preservation becomes increasingly less satisfying.* (Eucken, "Naturalism or Idealism," p. 4). In other words, it is a Masonic duty to build the ideal of Relief into the institutions of our civilization.

### Truth

The idea of truth conventionally makes its home in the category of epistemology (knowledge). A customary philosophical mistake is to confound truth with reality (ontology). Indeed, truth is not unrelated to reality; it simply is not the same thing. The Philosophy 101 definition is something like, "Truth is what is known about reality." At issue is *how* truth is known. The naturalist establishment in academia allows for no other way of knowing truth than by experiencing nature through the senses; no sensory experience, no knowledge; no knowledge, no truth.

Idealism not only allows for the independence of nature from human knowledge, it requires it. To the Mason, there could be no moral improvement without the increase of moral knowledge; and that increase takes place within the inner life of man – not just an individual man, but all who are engaged in the moral and intellectual elevation of civilization, that temple made both with and without hands, aiming toward a noble future to be enjoyed by all.

Hayward, here, seems stuck with a naturalistic notion of truth:

*Mankind can never discover the whole of truth. Always and always it opens before us, like an ever-receding goal; and evermore must we continue to seek it, even as the Masonic candidate, helped in such ways as is possible, and amid many obstacles, gradually through the darkness makes his "progress" from station to station, from degree to degree, seeking light, and more light, and that mystic Word which is truth itself* (Haywood, p. 146). This is the *life as a laboratory* model so beloved of the naturalists. Roscoe Pound would probably point to Eucken's vision of truth as more Masonic.

*Our concepts could not have formulated the independence of nature unless thought had emancipated itself from sensual impressions, and through analysis and new synthesis created a new view of nature. This re-creation was caused by the search for truth and the desire to identify with things as they are and thus to bring about an inner expansion of life* (Eucken, "Naturalism or Idealism," p. 2-3).

So ends our exercise, our short lived trial marriage of philosophy with Blue Lodge Masonry. It is suggested that this same exercise be attempted with other treasures from the vast store house of Masonic ritual, lectures, and charges.

### Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has touched on the subject of philosophy in general, and how it might relate to Craft Masonry in particular. It remains to be proven by experience the extent to which applying philosophical discipline to the examination of the principal tenets of Freemasonry assists in making good men better. Since the philosophy of practical idealism favored by this presenter demands action as well as words, time will tell whether or not the message of this forum finds its way into the Masonic education programs of the several lodges represented here today. Continued dialogue and sharing of materials is encouraged. Please send questions, comments, and requests for additional copies of this paper, as well as the Nobel prize acceptance speech by Eucken to [genhutloff@hotmail.com](mailto:genhutloff@hotmail.com).

### Principal Sources Consulted

Eucken, Rudolf: "Naturalism or Idealism," Nobel Lecture (March 27, 1908); <http://nobelprize.org>

Haywood, H.L.; *The Great Teachings of Masonry*; Richmond (1971), Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Co.; ISBN-0-88053-041-3

Pound, Roscoe; *Masonic Addresses and Writings*; New York (1953), Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Co.; ASIN-B0000EEP36

### Additional Reading

Boyce Gibson, W.R.; *Rudolf Eucken's Philosophy of Life* (1912); Kessinger, hard-cover edition, 2008; ISBN-10:1436510872

Eucken, Rudolf (Meyer Booth, tr.); *Collected Essays of Rudolf Eucken* (1914); Kessinger, hard-cover edition, 2008; ISBN-10:1436533767

Mead, G.R.S.; "Eucken's Mystical Activism," from *Quests Old and New*; Kessinger, hard-cover edition, 1997; ISBN-10: 0922802793

Paulsen, Friederich (Frank Thilly, tr.); *Introduction to Philosophy*; Kessinger, hard-cover edition, 2006; ISBN-10:05481144699