

Chapter 1 (1913-1936)

Wisdom to Direct, Knowledge to Govern

'There is a prevalent notion that philosophy is a pursuit to be followed only by expert thinkers on abstract subjects, that it deals with the pale ghosts of conceptions whose domain is abstract thought, but which have no application to real life. This is a mistake... Man sees the various phenomena of life and nature, forms conceptions and ideas, and then tries to reason and to find out the relation existing between these various facts and phenomena... When man acts in this way we say he philosophises.'

(A Primer of Philosophy by A.S. Rappoport)

The above quotation appeared in the first issue of the journal, *The Philosopher*, in 1923 and it stands as the first public utterance of the Philosophical Society of England formed some ten years earlier in 1913. What do we know of the beginnings of the Society? The first issue of the journal provides some clues and it is worth being explicit about what is known.

In the first issue of *The Philosopher* we are told that 'like many another movement, the Society's growth has far outstripped its inception. Its origin being a tentative effort made by a small circle of intellectuals for the furtherance of philosophical study.' We are also told that it was 'this instinctive wish of enquiring minds to search into the riddle of the universe and to assimilate learning of the wise men past and present that brought this study circle into being.' The nature of this effort in its initial form remains unclear, although it was stated that it was terminated at the death of its founder. Who this founder was we do not know, certainly there is no record left to us, nor any mention of this person. We are told though that 'members of this coterie who appreciated the aims for which the study circle had stood created a new body with fresh constitutions yet with similar aspirations.'

Thus in 1913, a meeting was convened, primarily by the Rev. Elphinstone Rivers, (Vicar of Eltham from 1895) who was 'a prominent figure among the members of the old society in order to draw up the rules and constitution of the new scheme.' Subsequently the first general meeting of the Society was held in 1914.

What do we know of this 'old Society'? Unfortunately, at the present time really very little. Intriguingly, in 1946 the then President of The Philosophical Society of England, the Rev. Dr I. Hartill gave a speech in which he spoke about 'the Philosophical Society of 1739. How it had been revived and was so active now.' No more details however, were reported. But we do know that the Victoria Institute or Philosophical Society of Great Britain was established in May, 1865 by J.. Reddie. This organisation was established for Christians with the aim of defending revealed truth from the 'oppositions of science, falsely so-called.' To date there does not seem to be any connection between the founding members of the Philosophical Society of England and the Philosophical Society of Great Britain. However, given the high preponderance of clergy on the initial Council of The

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Philosophical Society of England the possibility of a connection cannot be discounted. Finding such a connection would of course still do little to illuminate the remarks made by the Rev. I. Hartill.

Two years after its inception, the Constitution and Objects of the Philosophical Society of England were published under the presidency of Sir William Lever and vice-presidency of Sir William Bull.

The full list of Officers of the Society for 1915 was:

Although the Society did not have its own headquarters or club premises at this time, these were stated as clear aspirations and Fellows and Members were informed that in the meantime they could join the Carlyle Club in London at reduced fees.

However it appears that due to external contingencies there were a number of obstacles to the Society achieving such ends. The war materially hampered its progress and the departure of the Honorary Secretary, John Montresor Murray for war-work really caused its collapse. It was noted that 'Mr Montresor Murray had shown great zeal and enthusiastic energy in the fulfilment of his post, and that it appeared almost impossible to fill the gap until Mr Godson Bohn, grandson of the publisher Henry Bohn, saved the position by kindly consenting to undertake the work for the remainder of the war period.' It was this new Honorary Secretary who after his introduction to the Society by the Rev. Elphinstone Rivers, was mainly responsible for advancing the Society's fortunes. In particular Mr Bohn was directly responsible for the drawing up of the rules, as well as inventing the Society's motto, Wisdom to Direct, Knowledge to Govern. He was also instrumental in bringing about a fresh start in 1922 'in order that the Philosophical Society of England may realize its ambition of creating a system of study, supplemented by the giving of prizes, the creation of study circles and the establishment of a permanent journal.' In the rather verbose words of the Society it was hoped that it would become 'a potent influence towards the recognition of the "permanent and the eternal" through a wider and more general appreciation of the value of philosophy.'

One suggestion put forward at this time was that centres of the Society should be locally established in various parts of the country. This, it was suggested, could occur 'wherever a Fellow of the Society is resident who could form a circle.' The nucleus of each centre was to consist of at least one Fellow and 3 or 4 members. Interestingly, the Society already had a system of examination for both Fellows

and Members from at least 1915 and the Constitution and Rules of 1915 noted that the Fellowship was:

... conferred on Members who, having complied with the regulations in force, have satisfied the examiners in the set subjects. The printed forms containing the subjects of examination may be obtained from the Hon. Secretary. These subjects comprise (inter alia) such works as Butler's "Analogy," Caird's "History of Religion," and Weber's "History of Analogy," followed by such well known authorities as those of Fairburn, Jevons, Clarke, Harris, Patterson and James.

For ordinary membership we are told that:

Any person is eligible for election as a member on being proposed and seconded by two members of the Council, and upon the production of a Certificate of having passed such examination as would qualify for entrance to any of the learned professions. The Council may in certain cases dispense with such qualifying examination.

As noted, to further its aims the Society aimed to establish study centres for the holding of local meetings for the discussion and reading of philosophical subjects and also, where the circle was sufficiently strong, to give local lectures. It was also agreed that the activities of the various circles would be noted in the Society's Journal, and matters of general and especial interest would be fully reported. Lectures were to be held at the Lyceum Club in London, where Members would be able to attend as Philosophical Society of England members and choose their own lecture programme.

In December 1922, Council met and decided that 'lectures should be organized and the long contemplated magazine should be produced.' From its inception the following year, The Philosopher was to be published quarterly, with 'the hope that it would provide a fitting medium for the Society's projects and endeavours.' As the first issue put it, 'the new venture goes forth on its errand of usefulness and it is hoped that through the agency of the Society's organ, a systematised expression may be given to the Society's views, and a more lively interest in its aims and doings may be engendered among its members.'

As with all ventures there was a clear recognition that the intention to publish quarterly depended largely on the encouragement and support it would receive from its members. This was the rallying cry from the Society.

Without the sirens of war the scheme for the Journal will not be able to develop on the lines laid down. But the council has a good hope that these essentials will not be lacking. For, when all subscriptions due for 1923 have been collected, it will be in a position to say with confidence "go forward." There should therefore be little reason to doubt of an assured future for this advance movement in the Society's history. Those who appreciate the value of the new enterprise will, we feel sure, hasten - if they have not already done so - to pay their subscriptions and thus ensure success to the undertaking.

The first issue which was 32 pages long with a dark green card cover, contained a foreword by the Editor, reports on lectures and papers on 'The Correlation of Science and Philosophy;' 'The Myths and Marvels of History;' the philosophy of Aristotle and the Old Testament, and 'The need of a Philosophy,' this last paper by G.K. Chesterton.

The second issue stated that as a result of various advertisements being placed in newspapers, in particular the Times Literary Supplement, demand for The Philosopher as well as membership had increased. It was also noted that the formation of local study centres had 'met with some response.' The Editorial informed that centres were being established in Preston, Earby, Yorkshire, Snodland, Cardiff, London and Toronto. Awards were to be given for the best philosophical essay by particular study circles or by an individual following a course of study and that those who achieved a sufficient standard would be invited to become Fellows of the Society.

Officers, President, Vice-Presidents and Hon. Fellows of the Society 1925

President: Vacant

Vice-Presidents:

A.W.Bickerton. A.R.S.M.

G.K. Chesterton.

Lord Gorell. OBE, MC.MA

R.W.K.Edwards. FKC.

The Maharajah of Jhalawar.

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Sir Frank Benson.

Prof. Wildon Carr. D.Litt.

Mrs. Champion De Crespigny.

Rev. Dr Richard Downey.

Lord Dunsany.

Col. Drury. C.M.O.

Sir Richard Gregory. D.S.C. F.R.A.S.

Prof. E Gardiner. D.Litt.

T. Greenwood. DPhil.

Lord Headley. President British Muslim Society

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Two more issues followed that year with articles on 'The philosophy of Aristotle', the 'Philosophy of the Miraculous', and the ontological argument for the existence of God, as well as papers concerned with philosophy in a wider context (the philosophy of emigration, socialism and its philosophical aspect, social service). A number of book reviews were also featured, something which was to become a regular feature of *The Philosopher* over the years. Thus this first volume seemed to fit exactly the aim of the Society with a mix of traditional philosophical concerns and more practical issues.

1924 saw publication of another wide range of articles, possibly even more eclectic, including papers on Tarot cards, mysticism and Swedenborg by the President of the Swedenborg Society. More traditional literary and philosophical concerns were covered with papers on Milton, Pascal and Bergson. Adverts always help to illuminate and position a publication and

the first two volumes of *The Philosopher* attracted adverts from Foyles, The Co-Mason (A quarterly devoted to mysteries and occult societies), the New Civilization Church School in Wigmore Steet and 'A plea for Animals' advertising a vegetarian guest house in Brighton.

On April 28, 1924 a General Meeting was held where it was reported that membership had doubled since 1922 to 120 Fellows. Council decided that the Society would focus its attention on lectures, its journal and its local study centres. This focus was to be one that was to continue to dominate the Society for many years.

The importance of local study centres and *The Philosopher* can be seen by correspondence to the Editor in 1924 concerning a group of working men in Yorkshire who had been attracted to philosophical study by *The Philosopher*. One of this group wrote to the Editor:

The people to whom The *Philosopher* has made its appeal here are like myself... not educated but hard thinkers and they are cognizant as to the value both of science and philosophy to religion. In my opinion, your Society will live to reap even now where it has sown the few scattered seeds of the deeper realities of thought and we, here, are glad to recognize the great service, the Philosophical Society can render to us.

Volume III (1925) of The *Philosopher* continued to present the public with a diverse range of articles and reviews. Up until this time the names of the President, Vice-Presidents and Hon. Fellows had not appeared in the journal. The December 1925 issue saw a change and a full listing of the Vice Presidents, Hon. Fellows and Council Members was given.

At the General Meeting, held on June 2nd 1926, at the Lyceum Club, Piccadilly, G.K. Chesterton was elected to the vacant position of President. Once again four issues of the journal were published covering a range of areas including Christianity and Islam, the vocational ideal in modern life, the philosophy of Shakespeare, the origins of spiritualism and ethical aspects of philosophy.

1927 saw the instigation of an annual essay prize competition which was to run for a number of years. The essay titles for this first competition being:

ˆ Who do you think the greatest philosopher and why?

ˆ Spinoza and his philosophy.

ˆ Is a philosopher merely one with a scholarly knowledge of the various philosophical systems?

The competition was to be judged by the Rev. S. E. Cottam and Mr Robert Sayle and the winners announced the following year.

Two new Hon. Fellows were elected in the summer of 1927, Prof. A Liebert of Berlin University and Rear Admiral Pirot, Commander of the French Fleet. Articles for the four issues that comprised Volume V (1927) of The *Philosopher* once again tended to interpret philosophy in its widest sense. Thus there were papers on birthstones and their talismanic virtue, the evolution of the inner self, the philosophy of success, the philosophy of Beethoven and the philosophy of speech. More traditional philosophical concerns were covered by papers on synthetic philosophy, the philosophy of Schopenhauer, St. Thomas Aquinas and Bishop Berkeley.

Volume VI (1928) of The *Philosopher* continued mixing the esoteric with traditional philosophical and theological concerns. The former were covered by such papers as 'The Sun and the Stars'; 'The Occult: Correspondence by numbers', 'The relation between music and architecture' 'Musical quality and musical consciousness' and 'Man: the great inscrutable mystery.' Philosophical and theological concerns were covered in papers on Pythagoras and Greek philosophy,

the deity in the light of philosophy and philosophy and the schools. The three prize winning essays from last year's competition were also published.

The years 1929 and 1930 saw another two volumes published with the same mix of papers. Each issue continued with the policy of including a number of book reviews and it was reported that the London study circle chaired by Miss Field continued to meet successfully. The General Meeting of 1930 saw G.K Chesterton giving the address and the Rev. W.R. Matthews being made a Vice-President.

1931 saw the first recorded lecture for the Society by C.E.M. Joad on 'Religion and Modern Science' at the Lyceum Club. This lecture was published in *The Philosopher* and, following the editorial policy at that time, was the first article of the issue. This first issue of 1931 also contained an article by Professor Sir Arthur Eddington on 'The Quest for Truth.' The second issue of 1931 saw a response penned by Leslie. J. Walker. S.J. to Mr Joad who had stated in what may be regarded as typical Joad fashion that:

Religion is a special way of apprehending the universe. Such apprehension, the privilege of the mystics is, however, a purely private and personal experience, as private and personal as toothache. As such it cannot be communicated and does not require a church. Religion in the future will increasingly take this form, and in this sense God is the coming man.

Perhaps not surprisingly Leslie J. Walker took issue with some of Mr Joad's assertions.

Issue no. 3 of that year saw the establishment of Philosophical Magazines Ltd. and the offer of shares to members.

Twenty £1 shares are still available in Philosophical Magazines Ltd. to complete the list of the first 300 allotted. We appeal to our friends who are interested in the welfare of our Society to take up individually some portion of this amount before the date of the company's first meeting.

The first General Meeting of shareholders was duly held on November 4th, 1931 at which it was suggested that £1 shares be split into four of five shillings each thereby allowing individuals and groups to club together to buy shares.

1932 saw C.E.M. Joad becoming an Hon. Fellow of the Society. The *Philosopher* continued to publish its four issues and to hold its annual essay competitions. Study circles continued to flourish, particularly the London Group. At the Society's dinner held on October 29th, G.K. Chesterton gave a speech on the need for philosophy to follow the rules of logic and non-contradiction. Speeches followed by Sir William Bragg on 'Philosophy, science and industry' and Dean Inge about the importance of older systems of philosophy. The Rev. W. Dumphreys proposed the health of the guests to which toast G.K. Chesterton replied and referred to the aim of the Society and its much enlarged influence which he stated 'might now be said to be truly international.'

1933 saw things continuing very much along these same lines. Monthly lectures were held at the Lyceum Club in London and at least one of these lectures was published quarterly in the journal. Articles continued to represent a mix of literary, spiritual and philosophical interests, with an increasing number of pages devoted to book reviews. At 'the annual luncheon', on October 24th, Prof. Jacques Chevalier, Dean of the faculty of Letters and Professor of Philosophy, University of Grenoble, spoke about how he was led to philosophy. This was followed with a paper by Sir Richard Gregory on the connection between science and philosophy.

Thus the first ten years of *The Philosopher* could be seen to be a success. The journal appeared four times each year and contained a range of articles and while some of these stretched the term 'philosophy' to its limits, there could be little doubt that *The Philosopher* was presenting philosophy in an accessible way to many people for the first time.

It is perhaps surprising then that in 1934 the journal underwent a transformation in both image and substance. The Editor, Thomas Greenwood, continued in his position and noted:

'that *The Philosopher* enters its twelfth year of publication with the bold purpose of serving as a link between those who devote their life to philosophical studies and the general public as well as the youth of the nation.'

In order to best achieve this aim the structure of *The Philosopher* was changed. To date the old structure had basically kept to a report of the lectures at the Lyceum Club one of which was published in each issue, followed by articles, book reviews and notices of the Society. The new structure would include an editorial, articles, critical essays (in-depth reviews), notices of meetings of the Philosophical Society, a section entitled 'Educational Intelligence' with information on the teaching of philosophy in universities and other institutions, notes on the Society's courses of study 'for individuals and groups' and briefer book reviews. The last issue of each year would be devoted to dissertations related to these courses.

The green cover remained but the front cover typeface changed to a Gothic style and a subtitle *A Quarterly Journal of Practical Philosophy* was now also printed. The Editor's name 'Thomas Greenwood MA, D.Phil.' was added on the cover page along with the publishers 'Simpkin Marshall Ltd.' and the statement 'The *Philosopher* is the official journal of the Philosophical Society of England'.

The first issue in this new format saw articles by Professors John MacMurray on 'Reason in Action,' A.E.Heath on 'Reflection and Common Sense' and P. Painleve on 'Civilization and Modern Science'.

The first 'Educational Intelligence' section carried information on the first issue of *Analysis*, the British Institute of Philosophy, the 9th International Congress of the Federation of Intellectual Unions to be held in Budapest, a dinner at the National Laboratory of Psychical Research and changes to philosophy teaching staff at the Universities of Cambridge and Reading.

Volume XII saw a spate of eminent contributors, among them John Dewey (Professor of Philosophy, Columbia University), the Earl of Listowel, Charles Singer (Professor of the History of Medicine, London University), John Laird (Regius Professor of Moral Philosophy, Aberdeen University), L.S Stebbing (Professor of Philosophy, University of London) and Sir James H. Jeans. Editorials for that year covered philosophy and the King's English, ethics and citizenship and philosophy in schools. This last editorial which focused on the best way of introducing philosophy into the Higher Certificate prompted a positive response from the Journal of Education which sided with the Editorial and stated that 'To influence the existing curriculum with a philosophic spirit, so far from being impossible, is exactly what is needed.'

The inside cover of *The Philosopher* included, for the first time since 1926, the full list of Vice-Presidents of which there were twenty and members of the Executive Council. Interestingly the date for the establishment of the Society was now put as 1914, a date that was to figure on all four issues before reverting to 1913 the year later. Apparently, this was not a typographical error since the council meeting of that year noted that the official coming of age dinner should take place the year after (1935). This would make sense if Council members were dating the Society from 1914 and not 1913. Why this change occurred followed by the reversion to the earlier date is not, unfortunately, clear.

The lecture programme also changed venue that year with lectures now being held at the Garden Club, Curzon Street. Lectures given that year included two on the philosophy of truth and the philosophy of religion and papers on the development of will power, young animal life, what is wealth (with lantern slides) and the philosophy of art.

On May 30th a luncheon was held in honour of M. Albert Gleizes, the distinguished painter and author of works on philosophy and art, with Professors Ernst Cassirer and Charles Singer as principal guests. The Rev. Elphinstone Rivers who was in the Chair noted that the Society 'had just come of age and that it was proposed to organize a dinner in December, for the celebration of the occasion.'

1934 then was a high profile year for the Society both in terms of articles submitted to *The Philosopher* and in terms of its lecture programme. Why this shift occurred when it did is not clear. The Editorship remained with Thomas Greenwood and the published report from the annual General Meeting does not indicate any changes or discussions about changes to Editorial policy.

High profile authors were to dominate *The Philosopher* for the next two years. 1935 saw articles by Rt. Hon. Jan Smuts (Minister of Justice, The South African Government), Professor E. Schrodinger (Berlin University), A. Wolf (Professor of Logic and Scientific Method, The University of London), G. Ferretti (Professor of Philosophy, University of Palermo), G.F.J. Temple (Professor of Mathematics, The University of London), Moritz Schlick (Professor of Philosophy, The University of Vienna) and G.K. Chesterton. Editorials for the year covered philosophy for all, the claims of formalism, 25 years of philosophy and a defence

of values. The *Philosopher* also noted the death of Mrs. de. Crespigny, Hon. Fellow, Council Member and Chairman of the British College of Psychic Science.

The lecture programme continued at the Garden Club with papers on immortality, Indian philosophy and the geological basis of modern life. 1935 also saw the Society establishing a correspondence circle ' for those who can't get to meetings and want to correspond' about philosophical matters.

High quality papers continued to be submitted to The *Philosopher* in 1936. C.E.M. Joad wrote on the claims of determinism. Professor Stebbing reported on the Paris Congress of Scientific Philosophy, Andre Lalonde (Professor at the Sorbonne) on Blondel's theory of thought, Professor G. Temple on the new picture of the universe and Sir Richard Gregory on the influence of science. Two new Hon. Fellows were elected T.G. Masaryk (the first President of Czechoslovakia) and Professor Maurice Blondel. Six new Vice-Presidents were also elected including C.D. Broad.