

## MASONIC PHILOSOPHY, WHAT IS IT?

BY

IRA GILBERT, PM, PDDGM

When studying the history of the philosophy and symbolism in the ritual of the blue lodge degrees, it should be understood that there is a division inherent in our studies. First of all there is the history of the Grand Lodge system. Albert Gallatin Mackey divides this study into two parts. The first is the pre-historic. This is the history for which there is no written or archeological evidence of the truth or falsity of the facts. An example is the landmarks of Freemasonry. The second part is the historic. This takes place where there is written or archeological proof of the facts. There is the belief that the Grand Lodge system which was given legitimacy by the formation of the English Grand Lodge in the year 1717. It is believed that the antecedents of the first speculative Masonic Grand Lodge were in the medieval lodges of the operative stone masons charged with building the magnificent gothic cathedrals and castles in England.

When we speak of the history of our ritual, Mackey states as follows, "So long as its traditional legends are confined to the ritual of the Order, they are not appropriate subjects of historical inquiry. They have been invented by the makers of the rituals for symbolic purposes connected with the forms of initiation".

In a discussion of philosophy, the first thing to be accomplished is to define just what is meant by the term philosophy. In one book *Philosophy, Who Needs It*, the author defines the term philosophy as being the study of the fundamental nature of existence and of man's relationship to that existence. The philosopher went on to state that a man's choice is not to have a philosophy, but which philosophy to have.

At this point a broad statement must be made. For all Masons, Freemasonry is a way of life. It may be summed up in six words. These are the Masonic Tenets of Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth. We must then look to the Masonic motto of Faith, Hope, and Charity. In these six words what follows serves as an explanation of the philosophy of Freemasonry.

In a discussion regarding the Philosophy of Freemasonry, the noted jurist and Masonic author, Judge Roscoe Pound suggests three areas of inquiry. The first area is "What is the nature and purpose of Freemasonry as an institution? For what does it exist? What does it seek to do? What ought Masonry to be? For what ought it to exist? What ought it to seek as its end?"

The second area of inquiry is "What is and what should be, the relation of Freemasonry to other human institutions, especially those directed to similar ends? What is its place in a rational scheme of human activities?"

And finally, "What are the fundamental principles by which Masonry is governed in attaining the end that it seeks? What ought the principles of Freemasonry be?"

The lessons of the future must be learned from what occurred in the past. As the saying goes, there is nothing new under the sun. In order to reach answers to these questions, we need to look to the philosophies that preceded Freemasonry.

What is the purpose of Freemasonry? The end of all action and philosophy, whether of the individual Mason or the fraternity collectively, is the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. There can be no difference between what is for the good of one and the good of all. H. L. Haywood, in his book *Great Teachings of Freemasonry*, put it best when he wrote, "As things now are we men and women have not yet learned how to live happily with each other, and there is a great lack of human

charity under the sun. Why can't we learn to know ourselves and each other and our world in such wise as to organize ourselves together into a human family living happily together? That, it seems to me, should be the great object of Freemasonry". This philosophic thought is as applicable today, as it was when first written.

As I stated at the beginning of this article, "There is nothing new under the sun". Let us not examine how early philosopher contributed to the philosophy of Freemasonry as it is today.

Before quoting from the early philosophers, it should be stated that philosophy is not a group of statements written in stone. Philosophy should be understood in terms of current times. A valid philosophic system should stand the test of the ages, being as suitable today, as it was when Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, and others were the philosophy of the day.

Aristotle stated, "Good character is the indispensable condition and chief determinant of happiness – the goal of all human doing." Many Masonic writers have stated that Freemasonry's goal is to make good men better, that is the building of good character in men.

Aristotle drew no distinction between man as an individual and man as a citizen. The Masons who were the founding fathers of our Nation picked up this distinction. Many of our founding fathers were Freemasons. It is not a stretch of the imagination that Masonic philosophy entered into their actions. As was stated above, it is one of the principles of Masonic philosophy that their goal is happiness. This was embodied in one of the great statements is that "We are endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights, those of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Aristotle, in his treatment of Ethics, stated that the formation of character is based on Moral Education. This stated that the qualities that fit a man for life in an organized, civic community and what makes him a good citizen are the essence of his psychology. These principles are also the basis of the psychology of Freemasonry.

These main beliefs were not always the case. There was a period of time in the history of our fraternity where a distinction was made between those qualities, which made the average man, and those that treated Masons as being only from the elite. When the first speculative Grand Lodge was formulated, the leaders came from the ruling class. When lodges from Ireland and Scotland tried to come within the framework of Freemasonry, they were rebuffed because they were mainly made up of workmen in the trades who were not among the elite class.

This caused a schism in our brotherhood. There was then formed two Grand Lodges, the Moderns and the Ancients. It was not until much later that the two lodges resolved their differences and joined as the United Grand Lodge of England.

There is an organization entitled, The Masonic Restoration Society who believes that Masons should be among the elite. This is based largely on the philosophy of Maimonides. Maimonides thought that philosophy should only be for those who were able to understand it. This reserved philosophy for the more educated and intelligent.

But Freemasonry is for all men, not only those able enough to be among the select few. Freemasonry is an egalitarian fraternity, accepting all creeds, and abilities, so long as they have a belief in a Supreme Being.

We return, then, to the three questions of Judge Roscoe Pound regarding the philosophy of Freemasonry. Judge Pound answers these three questions as follows.

1. What is the end of Masonry and for what do we exist as an organization? He states that the purpose of Freemasonry is to transmit to posterity those principles wrought by our Founding Fathers and to pass them on to us.
2. What is the place of Masonry in a rational scheme of human activity? Judge Pound stated that Freemasonry is an organization of human effort along the universal lines of an effort to preserve and promote civilization. This goal is to be accomplished without being hampered along lines of caste or creed, but in an atmosphere of universality.
3. How does Masonry achieve these ends? The answer proposed is that civilization should be predicated by insistence on the solidarity of humanity and the preservation of the tradition of human solidarity and of universality.

This then, is what the psychology of Freemasonry teaches our brethren. The purpose of our brotherhood is predicated on the qualities of character that produces the most happiness for the individual and for society. This is what has allowed Freemasonry to become the oldest fraternal organization in the World.

We have discussed what the psychology is. Now we must determine if this psychology is needed. Ayn Rand believed that the road to success is paved with self-dealing and selfishness. It is the psychology of Freemasonry that the road to success is paved with Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth. It is paved with concern for our brethren not the selfish concerns of the individual. This, then, is the secret of the survival of our brotherhood.