

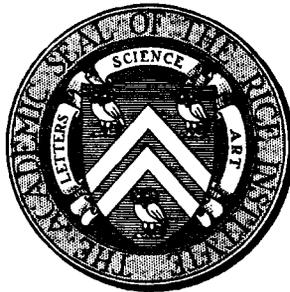
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Rockwell Lectures on Religious Subjects
by William Ernest Hocking



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FOREWORD

OUR Western world has been investing in science with increasing zeal for upward of three hundred years. It is not alone pleased with this investment; it begins to regard it as its main stay, perhaps its all-sufficient security for the future. In view of the cumulative achievements of science, we fully understand the enthusiasm with which a new journal in the field of social science estimates its rôle in our present situation:

Our culture is whirling in the maelstrom of irrational forces: they must be brought under control. There is only one power to attain this goal, the same power that brought under control the elementary forces of Nature, of wind, falling water, steam, electricity; and is about to unchain the limitless forces of atomic dissociation. The stupendous rise of American technique in agriculture and industry is due exclusively to science . . . There is not the least reason to assume that the same general law is not valid for social technique in the organization and government of society, just as well.¹

At this same moment there is a tendency abroad to hale science into court to give account of its total cultural effect. There are those who trace to its influence a subtle but pervasive lowering of the dignity and meaning of life, by interpreting human behavior and its total frame in terms of inanimate necessity. There are others who fear that frail humanity has already more science than it can be trusted to use well.

Toward this tendency men of science have mixed feelings. They recognize the appalling situation which confronts mankind when the powers placed by science at human disposal fall into the hands of men of ill-will or of pure unmoral group-egoism. But they assert that this misfortune is not

¹Professor Franz Oppenheimer in *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. I, No. 1.

Foreword

one for which science is in the least responsible. It is not for science either to rid the world of unethical men, or to enclose the sphere of its own spread so that only the honest shall have its benefits. Many are not a little resentful that any question should be raised as to the net worth of the social incidence of science. Knowledge is inherently good; and the more truth man masters the better. The moral problem, including the problem of human dignity—whatever that means—must be dealt with by other hands.

In my judgment, neither the sole-trust of the sociologist, nor the accusation, nor the resentment is justified.

Not the sole-trust, for there is very fundamental reason to doubt whether the methods which have accomplished so much in physics are pertinent in their entirety to man or society.

Not the accusation, for it is both illogical and unjust to hold science responsible for achievements or failures in the field of values, which field it has never adopted as its own.

Nor yet the resentment, for our situation is far too serious for any but the most objective consideration. It often happens that a valuable corporate effort long continued has certain cumulative effects, of a wholly incidental order, unforeseen and unintended by its workers: such effects deserve the same careful appraisal as the original undertaking; and such an enquiry may reveal errors or unnecessary assumptions of method, whose correction may astonishingly free both science and society.

No one should be more eager to make that survey, and no one should be able to make it more dispassionately, than the scientist himself, in his capacity as philosopher. Pending that deed, perhaps some philosopher initiated into the spirit of science may render an interim work of interpretation.