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human knowledge is ordinarily classified according to the matters with which it deals. On this basis, three broad categories are distinguished: the scientific, the theological, and the philosophic. The first deals with natural phenomena, the second with supernatural. It is less easy, however, to specify the concerns of the third. Confronted by this difficulty at the outset of his *History of Western Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell writes: “Philosophy, as I shall understand the word, is something intermediate between theology and science. Like theology it consists of speculations on matters as to which definite knowledge has so far been unascertainable: but like science it appeals to the human reason rather than authority, whether that of tradition or that of revelation.” And, he goes on, “All definite knowledge—
or so I should contend—belongs to science; all dogma as to what surpasses definite knowledge to theology. But between theology and science is a No Man’s Land exposed to attack from both sides: this No Man’s Land is philosophy.”

But what are we to understand by these statements? On the face of it, Russell seems to be suggesting that the distinguishing feature of philosophy is one of method rather than substance. If this be so then we are left with two possibilities. Either there are three kinds of problem—the scientific, the theological, and the philosophical—each requiring a different method for its solution; or there are three different ways of solving a problem, and according to which we adopt we shall get a different answer.

If there are three kinds of problem, there is nothing more to be said. We must accept that this is the position and attribute failure to make progress in any of these fields to the greater difficulty of its problems. If, however, there are three different ways of solving a problem, the position is different. Now we must contemplate the possibility that failure to advance knowledge in a particular field may be due, not to its problems being more difficult, but to inadequacies in the method we customarily use for solving them. In view of the relative rates of progress in the three traditional fields of knowledge over the last two thousand years, this second possibility is not one that can be dismissed out of hand. Accordingly it would seem important to look into it further.

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Progress in knowledge depends upon the development of ideas. Starting with simple ideas—which are no more than labels for the impressions made on the mind by items of experience—the imagination proceeds, by combining them, to arrive at concepts of more complex objects or events. Then, by combining these in turn, it constructs still more complex ones. For instance, if I have the idea of gold and the concept of a crown, I can conceive of a golden crown. If I have the concept of a man and the concept of death, I can conceive of a human corpse. If I have the concept of a house and that of a ghost, I can conceive of a haunted house. All this I can do without ever having come across any of these things. For, as David Hume said, "nothing is more free than the imagination of man and, although it cannot exceed the original stock of ideas furnished by the internal and external senses, it has unlimited powers of mixing, compounding, separating, and dividing ideas in all varieties of fiction and vision."\(^2\)

To the process of concept formation, therefore, there is no end. Moreover, being a purely intellectual operation, it can proceed without recourse to further experience. Yet there is one proviso, and this is absolute. If a concept is to be credible, the ideas or simple concepts out of which it is constructed must not contradict one another. Thus, I cannot conceive of an object being in two different places at the same time.

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time. Logically speaking, such a concept would be nonsensical, and, as such, the mind rejects it out of hand.

In this respect, the method of thought of the theologian, the scientist, and the philosopher are at one. All make use of logic to process the ideas or concepts from which they start. It is not at this stage, therefore, that we should look for any differences between them. Rather it is at that which precedes this.

Broadly speaking, the initial concepts from which logical thought takes its start are of three kinds: postulates, statements of fact, and propositions. These correspond respectively to the raw materials of theology, science, and philosophy.

A postulate is a concept, acceptance of which is mandatory. As such, it determines all subsequent thought in its field. All experience is interpreted in the light of its precepts. All other concepts are accepted or rejected according to whether they are compatible with it or not.

In contrast are concepts deriving from factual observation. These differ from postulates in that they depend for their acceptance, not on authority, but on being demonstrably in accord with fact. Such are those that lie at the base of the body of knowledge we call scientific.

Propositions lie between these two extremes. They differ from postulates in that the individual is not required to accept them without question; from scientific statements in that the concepts they embody have not been subjected to a comparably rigorous process of factual verification. Their title for

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acceptance rests upon their being logically irrefutable. They are, so to speak, the end of the road where logic is concerned, in the sense that they cannot be reduced by logical analysis to anything simpler.

Looking at these three categories of concept, it will be seen that those in the first differ essentially from those in the other two. Being postulates, their validity must be taken on trust. Factual statements and propositions, on the other hand, can only be accepted if they satisfy certain requirements. In short, the concepts that lie at the basis of thought in science and philosophy are subject to human judgment, whereas those that do so in theology are not. In inquiring into human knowledge, as distinct from belief, it would seem proper, therefore, to exclude the latter from consideration.

But that leaves us with the problem of the status of philosophy as a branch of knowledge. Does it follow that because a proposition is logically irrefutable it is necessarily valid? Might not the concept it embodies be at fault, either because it fails to take account of all the relevant information or because it has been insufficiently tested against experience? If so, although the proposition in question may well serve as a basis on which to construct a logically impeccable system of thought, this may bear little relation to reality. It would seem worthwhile, therefore, to look at some of the propositions from which philosophy takes its start from this point of view. This we can best do by first considering one that lies close to the frontier between philosophy and science.

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