

THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW.

THE ETHICAL PROBLEM.¹

TO communicate thought as it lies in the mind of the thinker to other minds is proverbially difficult. The difficulty is increased if the ideas to be communicated are heterodox in the sense of diverging from lines commonly followed. In that case, the person who delivers an address on a philosophical subject is likely to meet with an attitude of suspicion if not of active hostility on the part of his hearers. The thought he strives to present is an unwelcome guest, like some belated traveler who on arriving at an inn is told that the rooms are already occupied, and is admitted reluctantly if at all.

Among philosophers, however, one ought to be able to count on a more generous hospitality. At any rate I plead that a chamber in your minds be assigned to the guest thought I am introducing to you, that this chamber be cleared for the time being of any adverse occupants that may be in possession of it, and more especially I earnestly request that the argument I am presenting be considered *en bloc*, in all its length and breadth, and that your salutary criticism be deferred until it has thus been provisionally received.

To prevent possible misunderstanding of my purpose I state the Ethical Problem, as I see it, to be that of reconciling the spiritual equality of man with the inequalities that exist in human society. Further, that a 'solution' of the problem does not mean a panacea or a recipe, by which an ideal state of society shall be created out of hand, but a line of development along which society may gradually advance in the direction of the Ideal.

¹ The President's Address to the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association, December 29, 1928, at Philadelphia.