

The speculations which we are engaged in, and which have occupied thinkers notably of the British School, whom we must count as our predecessors and masters, are not of a nature to permit of a closed system of thought. They form rather a succession in which each member is a torch-bearer, carrying a little further what his forerunner has done, and leaving much to be done by followers. The principle of such a succession is different from that which underlies the great idealistic or realistic systems of the Continent, to which we must add that of Herbert Spencer in this country. Each of these systems is self-contained and complete in design, though perhaps not in execution.

Compared with the more or less exclusive character of these celebrated systems, the progress on the lines of thought which we are now following resembles much more that of the natural sciences, which grow by the addition of knowledge, and in which every honest labourer has some chance of adding his contribution, however small it may be. The history of these sciences warns us against premature generalisation: in it the accumulation of fragments of knowledge stands out very clearly from the many attempts to establish all-comprising principles and comprehensive systems. The latter, however brilliant and imposing for a time, fade away in the progress of the ages, whereas the former are stored up for the benefit of coming thinkers.

Thus the discoveries of Newton in the region of physical astronomy and of optics form corner-stones in the edifice of time; whilst the attempts made by Boscovich and Laplace to elaborate a "system of the world" embracing both the cosmical and the minutest