



A presentation

The Impact of Freemasonry

By

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The best part of freemasonry is the balance between what it is and what it isn't

Freemasonry is a collection of great ideas that focus on the universal nature of mankind. It is a blend of arts and sciences; ethics and fact. It defines the limits of religion and politics adding a further dimension that focuses on the way people connect.

We are apparently overwhelmed by the depth of those ideas. Even a superficial aspect of our philosophical core is daunting. Generation by generation, we have become populated by nice men, tied together by rudimentary knowledge.

Great ideas that do not influence our thinking and way of life are opportunities wasted. But a life lived is relatively short. We know the measure of a life well lived as a mason is that he saw all men as equal and lived an ethical life.

It is difficult to understand how ideas can shape the course of a man's life if he does not understand or use them. In fact we might allow, an act of serendipity might cause that to happen. But certainly, we could not expect serious minded men to accept that premise.

It was this pressing question that caused me to write; with the intent to make some miniscule amount of a masonic principle accessible to those who have wanted to understand but have found. It is the engine of masonry to this. It is unconscionable to do otherwise.



Freemasonry is a third option of human organization. Religion and politics are each based on distinction and differences that define a group of those who believe versus those who believe otherwise. This thinking tends to separate one group of people from another. This phenomenon was highlighted in the history of Britain and Europe when people were persecuted over the way they worshiped. Nations went to war of such differences. People were told what to believe and how to practice that belief. These beliefs could be contradictory over the course of one lifetime when a monarch was deposed or died to be replaced with a King or Queen who had a different faith.

The blurry line between faith and politics became obvious to philosophers and scientists. These were people who had learned to use observations to prove and validate ideas. This was the start of rational thought. What was apparent to these observers was the vulnerability of people to the influence of church and state leading to displacement and persecution.

History has often described freemasonry as a threat to social order. I believe it is because freemasonry provides an alternative way to think about church and state by focusing on what people have in common. How a person defines their sense of higher power means little to us. How each person worships is a personal matter, again of no significance to us. Their sense of state is irrelevant.

In this way, freemasonry is the antithesis of power and authority.

The impact of this thinking is to stabilize communities and countries. Freemasonry believes that it is important to maintain civil order, to work diligently, ensure the protection of basic human rights and care for those who have suffered misfortune. The order rewards work and harmony.

Freemasonry provides an opportunity for self improvement. The key is the adoption of the ideas of fraternity and universality. When we greet, we do so as equals. In this way, a freemason sees through barriers of language, race and culture. When such a man experiences the sense that all men are basically similar, he acts with social confidence that mitigates against conflict and encourages friendly discourse. This live-and-let-live attitude is infectious.

Freemasons know that to experience the deepest satisfaction in life, it is absolutely necessary to do things for other people. At the highest level of achievement, is doing for others anonymously. Of course the community benefits, completely unaware we are driven by selfless motives trying to improve who we are as people.

The world becomes smaller and more familiar.

Freemasonry is an order that has appeal to thoughtful, reasonable people. In this way, it is a beacon. It is a way of thinking that forms into a lifestyle. Masonic principles exist only when they are expressed in action and in all aspects the individual comes to his own conclusions, in his own time.

When our leaders are overcome by human frailties, it is important for men of character to show that doing the right thing is not dependent on authority or celebrity. The Craft teaches that we must rely on our own judgement and live an ethical life regardless. The Craft teaches us that the right action may not always be the easiest.

This is not always popular so we draw on lessons from history to maintain a consistent focus.

In due course it is our nature to search for meaning. This is particularly obvious because the Craft was shaped on a very curious collection of esoteric, accepted wisdom that formed when civilization was emerging.

And the greatest mystery, the one that tells us about our place within the Universe and the properties of our very existence is revealed in the foundations stones for everything masonic: The Hermetic Teachings.

James Campbell Brown, in his *History of Chemistry* tells us a series of early Egyptian papyrus books is attributed to Hermes Trismegistus *who may have been a real savant, or may be a personification of a group of writers.*ⁱ He is identified with the Greek god Hermes and the Egyptian Thoth or Tuti, the moon god, recorded as ibis-headed with disc and crescent of the moon. It is said that Hermes influence can be found in the Pythagorean tradition as well as the Orphic, Delphic and Elusenien mysteries.ⁱⁱ In the

middle ages, with the growth of speculative masonry, Hermetic Freemasonry was being practiced. One would want to believe if the workings of Hermes are essential to freemasonry then in order to be of any influence they must be taught and learned. We know this is not the case. It should cross our mind to ask how such valuable lessons have been ignored. I would suggest the answer lies in the way we are taught to treat the *Book of the Work* as holy writ. Masonic history itself reveals this is clearly not the case. The Book of the Work has been subject to many changes, too many to get into here, but one example is the three degrees. It wasn't until 1813 and the union of the Moderns and the Antients that the three degrees of craft Masonry were fully separated. ⁱⁱⁱ

Let me suggest, though it is often treated as something that happened before we were born, freemasonry has never been about glory days, trapped in amber but. has been and continues to be a dynamic, living, forward moving process. The science and history that formed the constitution of Anderson and Desaguliers in 1723 continue to evolve into the 21st Century.

It is impossible to be influenced by ideas unless those ideas are known and understood. Please let me share seven of the primary principles. After hearing each, they need to be argued, challenged and debated before being fully understood. In days gone by this was accomplished in a friendly robust dialogue as we began understanding the difference between truth and opinion.

Freemasonry functions within the field of philosophy and I would argue each mason has a right to be conversant in the basics.

Philosophy is the study of general and fundamental problems, such as those connected with existence, knowledge, values, reason, mind, and language. It is distinguished from other ways of addressing such problems by its critical, generally systematic approach and its reliance on rational argument. The word "philosophy" comes from the Greek φιλοσοφία (*philosophia*), which literally means "love of wisdom". ^{iv}

These are ideas that resonant and will need you to find a suitable time to linger over them to “discover” how they speak to you.

The Seven Hermetic Principles forming the basis for the entire Hermetic Philosophy.

1. THE PRINCIPLE OF MENTALISM
2. THE PRINCIPLE OF CORRESPONDENCE
3. THE PRINCIPLE OF VIBRATION
4. THE PRINCIPLE OF POLARITY
5. THE PRINCIPLE OF RHYTHM
6. THE PRINCIPLE OF CAUSE AND EFFECT
7. THE PRINCIPLE OF GENDER

1. The Principle of Mentalism: The All is Mind. Everything that we perceive as the material world, all life, all energy, all matter is spirit. This is unknowable and indefinable and may be considered and thought of as A Universal, Infinite, and Living Mind.
2. The Principle of Correspondence: This principle embodies the truth that there is always a correspondence between the laws and phenomena of the various planes of Being and Life. "As above, so below; as below, so above."

The ancient Hermetists considered this principle as one of the most important mental instruments by which man was able to pry aside the obstacles which hid from view the Unknown.

3. The Principle of Vibration: *Everything is in motion; everything vibrates; nothing is at rest. Students of particle physics familiar will find an uncanny similarity with this truth and String Theory offered to reconcile quantum mechanics and relativity theory.*
4. The Principle of Polarity: *Everything is dual; everything has two poles; everything has its pair of opposites. E.g. Thesis and antithesis are identical in nature, but different in degree; opposites are the same, differing only in degree; the pairs of opposites may be reconciled; extremes meet.*
5. The Principle of Rhythm: *Everything flows, out and in; everything has its tides; all things rise and fall; the pendulum-swing manifests in everything; the measure of the wing to the right is the measure of the swing to the left; rhythm compensates.*
6. The Principle of Cause and Effect: *every Cause has its Effect; every Effect has its Cause; everything happens according to Law; Change is but a name for Law not recognized; there are many laws of causation, but nothing escapes the Law.*
7. The Principle of Gender: *Gender is in everything; everything as the Masculine and Feminine Principles; Gender manifest on all planes.*

Consider the dimensions being described and then consider Euclidian in relation to fractal^v geometry. Hermes orients and connects us to the larger universe and everything in it. This renders us accountable as part of not external to all that is. In this way, impact of freemasonry is an awareness of physical and metaphysical dimensions.

But we live with this knowledge striving to conduct ourselves as gentlemen. We would hope every freemason would be a man of impeccable manners and poise. Our familiarity with history even teaches us ways to live well to achieve this good life. In the Epicurean state of *ataraxia* (tranquility) one does not avoid desires, but one is not bothered by the inability to satisfy one's desires either, thus we remain centered.

In this personal and social way, the impact of Freemasonry is its simplicity; live in harmony, live honestly, perform random acts of kindness, be satisfied and strive.

What benefit is this knowledge if it is not accessible? What point is there to the insight and knowledge of the Craft if we are unable to express a principled life to those around us because we are not well schooled? Of course the answer is obvious. We cannot.

Some are drawn to freemasonry by the social connections of a fraternity. Others find the opportunity to exercise the higher forms of charity for which freemasonry has been known. Yet others search in what is seen and not seen; the metaphysics. We come to these tasks each with an individual history. It is unavoidable that striving for truth and perfection we must face great and deep challenges of personal adjustment to fully embrace the life style of freemasonry.

It is an incredibly difficult task to live a simple, good life. Which path is truth? Which is opinion? Around us, others are doing much the same. That is how we communicate- by watching behaviour. How a person acts, tells us their nature.

Is it then selfish or selfless to ask ourselves, how it is possible to live in harmony and avoid conflict?

Now that you have absorbed the lessons of Hermes and understand the molecular connection of all matter, all minds, now that you are comfortable accepting we live in an imperfect world, before I leave you let me try to redeem myself for taking advantage of your good nature, to share some old school ideas on a good life from the Hellenistic Philosophies; elusive keys that open solutions to harmony:

The way of the Stoic, The Skeptic and The Epicurean. ^{vi}

The Stoic in us, knows the world is dangerous and prepares to meet his end each day. The point of the stoic is that life is risk and harsh allows him to brace himself for the blow so he lives confident that he is prepared for anything life may occur.

The Skeptic- this side of our character informs us that life is uncertain. Any idea put to us may be accurate, or not so no reason to be in conflict with the speaker. Since he is not capable of divine thought all ideas may be right, or not. The skeptic lives accepting that he can never be sure of anything.

Yet the epicurean tells us something else entirely engaging. He feels able to agree with a particular point of view, however also able to weigh the evidence for the opposite point of view. He knows there is more than one way to look at things. He does not approach ideas as right or wrong, but in partials.

If one brings to mind the strings of Hermes, that within each function is contained the opposite it makes conflict irrelevant. Think of a life without conflict- where you are at

ease in a world of conflict and yet have your own views and opinions. Would that be a better life?

If we know these skills, in a way we carry a responsibility to skillfully avoid conflict in our lives. Without conflict? Accepting?

This begins to speak to what I believe is the point of freemasonry, the source of the evasive happiness.

Think about the effect of behaving with tolerance, never needing to be in conflict because of a way of thinking that you have practiced, that embraces and explores opposing ideas and then think about the influence that attitude would have on you and the people around you.

Freemasonry is an opportunity, but it is difficult to translate symbols and allegory and then find the traction within those ideas to change. The better educated we are in the ways of freemasonry, the better equipped we are to understand and apply the philosophy of our fraternity, I put it to you that the effect is one of self-confidence.

For people to achieve at a high level of performance, one must be confident. Confidence in itself is an outcome based on trusting and being trusted; trust based on accuracy and communication.

The science of human interaction has taught us that one of the most appealing aspects of human nature, that draws in and comforts people is confidence; not arrogance, nor dominance; not wealth but insight.

When a man lives with such insight, humanity becomes familiar and he is accessible. Being familiar with the stranger, we begin greetings others even the enemy not with suspicions but with an open mind. The masonic secret is this experience. The secret causes us to act with humility and live a life of self-confidence knowing all the while, the unassailable power of a principled, insightful life.

Whether a man knows, understands and applies the philosophies, is not clear until he is measured by his own history. It is within the community of freemasonry that we begin to test ourselves to use what we have learned not because it is expected, but because it isn't.

Even the many who are unworthy of the true knowledge create the necessary challenge for us. This I truly believe is the nature of freemasonry from the inception.

The best part life and clearly the potential of freemasonry have not been achieved. That lies just over the horizon. A culture of learning is the way.

Thank you. Dg

ⁱ History of Chemistry: From Earliest Times to The Present Day. London J&A Churchill. 1913

ⁱⁱ <http://www.golden-dawn.com/eu/displaycontent.aspx?pageid=115-hermetic-tradition>

ⁱⁱⁱ Freemasonry- The Reality, Tobias Churton Lewis Masonic 2007 Pg 98

^{iv} <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy>

^v The Fractal Geometry of Nature, Benoit Mandelbrot, 1982

^{vi} How To Live. A Life of Montaigne in one question and twenty attempts. Sarah Bakewell. Chatto & Windus, London 2010, pg 109