

To suppose that the advocates on the other side meant to take issue on this proposition would be to assume that they did not know what they were saying. The conclusion forced upon us is that though men spend their whole lives in the study of the most elevated department of human thought it does not guard them against the danger of using words without meaning. It would be a mark of ignorance, rather than of penetration, to hastily denounce propositions on subjects we are not well acquainted with because we do not understand their meaning. I do not mean to intimate that philosophy itself is subject to this reproach. When we see a philosophical proposition, couched in terms we do not understand, the most modest and charitable view is to assume that this arises from our lack of knowledge. Nothing is easier than for the ignorant to ridicule the propositions of the learned. And yet, with every reserve, I cannot but feel that the disputes to which I have alluded prove the necessity of bringing scientific precision of language into every demand of thought. If the discussion had been confined to a few, and other philosophers had analyzed the subject, and showed the fictitious character of the discussion, or had pointed out where opinions really might differ, there would be nothing derogatory to philosophers. But the most suggestive circumstance is that although a large proportion of the philosophic writers in recent times have devoted more or less attention to the subject; few, or none, have made even this modest contribution. I speak with some little confidence on this subject, because several years ago I wrote to one of the most acute thinkers of the country, asking if he could find in philosophical literature any terms or definitions expressive of the three different senses in which not only the word freedom, but nearly all words implying freedom were used. His search was in vain.

Nothing of this sort occurs in the practical affairs of life. All terms used in business, however general or abstract, have that well-defined meaning which is the first requisite of the scientific language. Now one important lesson which I wish to inculcate is that the language of science in this respect corresponds to that of business; in that each and every term that is employed has a meaning as well defined as the subject of discussion can admit of. It will be an instructive exercise to inquire what this peculiarity of scientific and business language is. It can be shown that a certain requirement should be fulfilled by all language intended for the discovery of truth, which is fulfilled only by the two classes of