

THE
RELIGION OF PHILOSOPHY

OR

THE UNIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE:

A COMPARISON

OF THE

CHIEF PHILOSOPHICAL AND RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS
OF THE WORLD

MADE WITH A VIEW TO REDUCING THE CATEGORIES OF THOUGHT, OR THE
MOST GENERAL TERMS OF EXISTENCE, TO A SINGLE PRINCIPLE,
THEREBY ESTABLISHING A TRUE CONCEPTION OF GOD.

BY

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PREFACE.

(THERE is a popular dictum among priests and philosophers that God, or the First Cause, is unknowable, and yet all religions aim to teach the nature of God, and all philosophies strive to define the First Cause.)

Here is a manifest contradiction; but the questions involved are of such magnitude and require so much study that, for the most part, it is allowed to pass unchallenged.

The cultivated mind, whatever its antecedents, holds a judicial position. That is to say, the educated and thoughtful members of society are looked to, to pass impartial judgments upon questions concerning the general welfare. This impartiality is particularly necessary in philosophy, for thought is hedged about with prejudices, and almost every man represents some logical sect or school which he feels it his duty to support.

The great obstacle which religion and philosophy alike encounter, in offering an explanation of the universe, is the difficulty of finding a symbol of divine power or unity. A symbol to have any real value must represent some fact, it must be the emblem of some experience. Otherwise it is a purely negative form of speech, a mere confession of ignorance.

The symbol which philosophy proposes for divine unity has precisely the same meaning as that which religion offers. They are both emblems of mystery; they are both confessions of ignorance. In so far, therefore, as these two great spheres of knowledge, called philosophy and religion, have attempted an ultimate analysis of existence they have failed; the labor of both is incomplete.

Philosophy, however, has approached this great problem from another side: it has endeavored to build up a synthesis of knowledge; to discover the harmony or interdependence of all facts. It has endeavored to reach, by proceeding from particulars to generals, a *universal principle*.

The theorists of philosophy, commonly known as metaphysicians, impatient of this slow method, would satisfy the natural craving for a true symbol of divine unity by postulating an *unknowable principle*, an emblem of mystery, as the ultimate fact. This postulate, however, has been steadily rejected, and the great quest goes on, insisting upon a true analysis of being.

In this endeavor of philosophy to arrive at an ultimate analysis, the great practical difficulty has been to reduce the categories of thought, or the most general terms of existence, to a single principle. The speculations of all ages contemplate this puzzle of universal terms, and endeavor with untiring purpose to form, from the dissimilar parts, a divine unity.

It is to the rules and principles of this great calculation that the present work is devoted. The data employed are derived from the most respected authorities, the conclusions reached are confined to the equivalents of these data, and the argument is developed in easy stages from the beginning to the end.

To solve the metaphysical problem is to point out the interdependence of all phases of knowledge by affiliating the activity of perception with general activity, or by showing the relation of the different aspects of existence, to existence in general. This is to accomplish the unification of knowledge, which has been the aim of all philosophies and of all religions.

By what more direct way could this end be achieved than by reviewing the story of human speculation from its relative beginning in ancient Greece to the present day, by tracing the efforts made in the same direction, although more indirect, which we find in the religions of the world,

and comparing each of these organized attempts at an understanding of life with the result of an ultimate analysis?

By this treatment the story of ancient and modern philosophy is given a new interest. Instead of employing the old historical method, the nearness of the approach of each school to the solution of the problem of thought is pointed out; and the movement of the mind toward this goal is shown to be the inevitable course of human progress.

The contemporaneous systems of Herbert Spencer and G. H. Lewes are carefully reviewed and their results affiliated with the sum of philosophy. So important are the psychological and sociological questions dealt with in these systems that nearly one half of the space given to the review of philosophy is allotted to them.

The successful study of the subject of Religion is shown to be dependent upon a knowledge of the nature of language and perception. In order to separate the superstitious from the rational in belief, the history of all the great religions is examined and the generic relation of Christianity to the other faiths of the world is pointed out. As a consequence the mind and character of Jesus are subjected to established rules of historic and moral criticism. The ideals of humanity for which Jesus so earnestly contended are found to have been distinct principles in all the ancient civilizations, and it is urged that we will need, in order to realize these ideals, a higher intellectual and moral discipline than is taught by Christianity.

To the study of morality and the establishment of a true conception of God the best endeavors of the author have been directed. The enormous advantage which a just knowledge of the meaning of ultimate terms affords becomes apparent when the question of the relation of personal to general existence is discussed. The problems of ethics are completely beyond the mind that harbors the belief in a divine providence or a design in nature. These enthronements of personal existence distort all the higher logical perspectives, and a morality which depends upon such an understanding of life cannot be a true inspiration.

INTRODUCTION.

It is well known that religion, as well as philosophy, depends upon language for the expression of its truths. This seems a simple proposition, but what are its consequences? If language is the sole medium of development of the higher thoughts and feelings, in its genesis may we not hope to discover the deepest truths of life and mind?

Before the complex symbols which we call words came into use, and hence before the mind acquired the faculty of forming thoughts or extended comparisons, activities or motions were the only medium of expression between sentient beings. Language is the development of these expressive actions, and so highly complex has it become, so far removed from its rude beginnings, that it seems another order of creation, a system of miraculous origin. But when we remember that intelligence is a concomitant development with language, that thought or spirit is but a building up of words into ideas, and that these words are merely condensed memories, common experiences which have become current from tongue to tongue, is it not evident that there is no impenetrable mystery in speech, and that its product, mind, is a synthesis of simple and familiar truths?

Again, when we retrace sensibility or feeling, from which language has been gradually evolved, to its beginnings in organic life, we find no absolute demarcations; we find that all life, whether mental or physical, is interdependent.

Hence the wonders of the intellect or the soul are only wonders of complexity. The activities so intricately combined in thought and feeling are perfectly familiar to us in their simpler forms, and in the course of their development

they include no facts which are not assimilable with our experiences. But this announcement of the divine unity of life, is not a welcome one to the majority of minds; on the contrary, it is generally regarded as an attack upon an ancient privilege of the mind,—the right to declare itself incomprehensible.

Thus, in endeavoring to construct a true philosophy, we encounter at the outset a deep-rooted prejudice against those simple explanations of life which spring from a comprehension of the nature of language. When the play of thought and feeling which constitutes every thing that is spiritual in our existence is discovered to be but a refinement of organic activities, the first impulse is to look with suspicion and dread upon such a levelling of the imagination. Alarmed for the safety of its venerable myths, religion opposes the analysis of mind, and loudly proclaims against a synthesis of knowledge which will bring all facts, whether human or superhuman, into the true order of their development.

Before the power of such an analysis as this, mysticism shrinks a frightened spectre from the theatre of mind, dragging in its train all the dissembling images of an undisciplined fancy. The hierarchy of heaven and the hosts of hell, that have so long ruled over us, awake in their precipitous retreat a tempest of emotions which rise to call them back in the name of all that is holy. The light which drives these spectres away leaves those who have worshipped them almost sightless. The God which they could touch and measure with their limited thoughts and feelings has vanished in the pure light of day, and in the cold immensity they are left alone, and, as they would believe, spiritually ruined. To such as these the truth seems terrible, that life is only action, that its possibilities lie in the direction of moral achievements, that its hopes, so far as they overstep these limits, are wild and fruitless fancies.

To language, then, which is responsible for the extravagances of human belief, we must look for the solution of the

great enigma. The central truth of language is that it is an elaboration of the single principle of motion. In this fact all lines of thought and feeling converge. God is the divine unity of life, of which principle all individual existences are but limited expressions. Every event, every happening, whether human or extra-human, repeats this truth.

Mind, therefore, is the function of conditions which are far wider and deeper than human life; its images, so far as they are not true reflections of this universal order, are deceptive; its perceptions spring from the concurrence of laws which are as independent of consciousness as they are capable of explaining the whole range of mental activity.

Perception accounts for mind, not mind for perception; because perception is a simpler fact than language, and mind is the product of language. The activities of nature express conditions which are merely repeated in the processes of mind, for the simplest activity declares a truth as profound as any of the imaginings of the intellect. In this sense, and only in this sense, nature perceives itself, intelligence is universal.

But man would appropriate the principle of life and knowledge to himself. He would affirm that the infinity and eternity of relations, of which humanity is but the passing form, are subservient to his existence; that every thing happens in reference to himself; and, as the great currents of nature toss him about in his struggle at self-maintenance, he builds a world of phantom beings supposed to be independent of natural processes in order to keep his theories in countenance. As the history of the race progresses, and the mastery of ignorance increases, this burlesque of nature moves further and further into the background of thought, for, as our view of cause and effect is widened, fewer and fewer inconsistencies appear demanding to be clothed in these unearthly forms.

The discovery of the nature of language imparts to us the true knowledge of life. It discloses sensibility and feeling (which are but forms of motion) as inarticulate perception, and thought as an organic activity.

Language is the first fruit of social life. For ages, gestures or expressive motions were employed to eke out the indefinite meaning of words, and where the faculty of speech did not exist or was but slightly developed, gestures have constituted of themselves a rude language. It is the growth of definiteness in language which marks the progress of humanity. In the delicate and intricate articulations of thought we have the only instrument by which man can establish extended relationships between himself and the universe. Thought is not a thing apart from language; the spirit of a race breathes in the words and sentences which have grown up to express the common life, and in the simple laws which govern this development we find written the nature of the thinking being. The nature of a being, its origin and destiny, are revealed in the relations it bears with surrounding life. To adequately express such relations a definiteness of speech, hitherto unattained, is the first requisite; for how are we to weigh in the balance of the mind such fine proportions of thought unless the values of the terms we employ are first clearly distinguished?

The mind, then, is an activity which illuminates existence, exalting the delicacy and range of human relations, and giving to each individual that spirit of universal sympathy which we call morality.

Religion and philosophy are ever offering us symbols of existence, promising clearer views of life. But when we find that these symbols do not harmonize, we are told that there is an innate disorder in the uttermost regions of knowledge, that all analyses lead at last to impenetrable mysteries. And yet the universal measure of success in thought is the establishment of order in the place of disorder, of definite knowledge in the place of mystery. Does it not seem as though this explanation were but a subterfuge?

Ever since man has been able to state categorically his beliefs concerning life and nature, the problem of Motion has occupied the highest place among his thoughts. The effort to solve this problem can be traced in an unbroken thread

from the dawn of philosophy to the present day. The categories of thought in which this problem is stated form the burden of all metaphysical speculations, and the reduction of these categories to the simple fact of Motion gives us the solution of the metaphysical problem.

In the more vague and emotional sphere of religion the same problem is unconsciously dealt with. The First Cause, the most general principle, the one God, or the highest among many gods, is the burden of all theological reasoning. As the attributes of deity become more refined; as they exchange, through the agency of thought, the anthropomorphic or personal for the divine or most general, their identity with the aspects of motion becomes evident; for the Infinite and the Absolute mean simply space and time, the objective and subjective aspects of Motion.

The principle of universal gravitation or the absolute interdependence of all things can be applied to mind and speech. All words centre about a single word, all activities, inorganic, organic, and superorganic, are strictly serial and interconnected; they are indivisible excepting in so far as they yield to classification. In a word, the activities of the mind, and of nature, are forms of motion and can be expressed in terms of its aspects, space, and time. Applying this rule to language we find it impossible to frame a sentence without employing a verb, the symbol of action, and all the parts of the sentence are but modifications of this action expressed in terms of place and time.

This generalization, apparently so simple, is of transcendent importance. It is fatal to every superstition and every form of mystery. It defines the limits of language and the nature of perception, for it shows that thought is in reality but action.

To establish so important a conclusion as this, analysis alone will not suffice. The analysis must be accompanied with a synthesis which shall join the culture of the past with that of the present and show that the unification of knowledge is the natural consequence of the intellectual and moral development of the race.

This means that we need a new religion—a religion which shall appeal to the reason as well as to the emotions; which shall establish not a divine mystery, but the divine unity of life and mind.

In Greece, thought was first emancipated from feeling; and true to the myth of the goddess Athenæ, reason sprang into the world a complete being armed *cap-a-pie*, ready for action. Before this, thought had been involved with feeling in religious sentiment; it had asserted its supremacy in many individuals and in many ways, but it had never obtained its freedom and established itself as an independent power in the world. This logical sovereignty, which was so firmly established in ancient Greece, has lasted through many vicissitudes to the present day. In the meantime society has developed to such an extent, that its other great forces clamor for an equal recognition. Feeling becomes louder and louder in her protestations of equality with the intellect. Her plea is that morality is not the function of the mind any more than of the organism, of reason any more than of slowly acquired habit; that the will is not a purely logical phenomenon, but that its energies spring from and disappear in the labyrinths of sentiency; that in a word, there is a logic of feeling as well as a logic of signs, and the intellect is the companion of the heart, not its despotic ruler. Thus the despotism of reason is disputed, and we have the extraordinary spectacle of philosophy—ay, even metaphysics—disproving the unreasonable pretensions of an alleged “pure reason” and winning success by the subjugation of these pretensions.

The Pythagoreans were the first who attempted a complete classification of the facts of the universe. Their effort, though feeble, was in the right direction; for the first principle of perception is analysis, or classification; and knowledge can never be unified until an ultimate or complete analysis has been performed. Aristotle repeated this effort, and inscribed his celebrated ten categories of thought.

The history of thought has moved on, through the inter-

ruptions of the decline of the Greek and Roman states, and the lethargy of the Dark and the Middle Ages. The light of Islam threw a pale glare upon the thought of Greece, but it soon faded out. Then the scholastic age ushered in the revival of learning, and the arena of intellectual war was reopened in Europe. Many and fierce have been its conflicts. Descartes and Spinoza followed upon the wrangling of the Schoolmen, and established great systems of original investigation. Bacon anticipated this effort, and opened the career of logic in England. Then Kant reared his unequalled monument of Idealism in Germany, his example being followed by an army of the most thorough and devoted students the world has produced. It was in Germany that the exclusive sovereignty of the mind reached its zenith, when Kant declared that all reality was subjective, that Mind was the cause of the universe. Against this audacious tenet Science entered a protest, which soon assumed the proportions of a great impeachment; and the psychologists of England superseded the idealists of Germany in the world of thought. The study of mind as the function of an organism was the form which this protest first took. It needed but a Darwin to show the perspectives of organic life, and a Spencer to point out that the individual was but a single link in the continuous chain of life and mind, for this great movement, supported by the best scholars on the Continent, to produce a silent revolution in knowledge.

The world, then, has fully entered upon a new era of thought. But whether this thought is to be the sole enjoyment of a few, or is to become the common property of a great civilization, is a question which time must decide. If it is to become general, the reform of knowledge must penetrate to the very foundations of society; which means that the religious and the intellectual faith of the multitude must be pledged to a single power or government. To accomplish this, a new civilization must arise, and whether it can arise out of any thing short of the ruins of the old, is the question which presses upon our age.

The civilization to which we belong bears, by common consent, the name of Christian. It has been brought to us in developed forms by different nations. Among us it has grown up into a new nation, different from any thing, in some respects greater than any thing, that the world has yet seen. But a rational view of history shows a certain monotony in our experiences which forbodes evil. For if we are passing through the same forms of development that past civilizations have experienced, what right have we to expect a better or a higher fate? With Roman principles of law and government, with Grecian love of the intellectual and the beautiful, with the Scandinavian worship of freedom, and the Semitic worship of God, we lack but one element of a great national life, which is morality. If Christianity could secure for us this greatest boon, we should be safe; but does it, can it, fulfil this all-important function? Morality is not merely the expression of the sentiments, or beliefs, of an individual or race; it is the *type of its life*. Its advocates must not, therefore, appeal to faith or to reason alone; they must appeal with equal force to both.

Christianity is a religion of faith. It is admitted far and wide, and among its most devout followers, that it cannot sustain itself against the keen analysis of science, or the commanding synthesis of history, but that it depends upon faith for its life. The question then arises: Is this a safe religion for our age? Can we afford to bring up children, in a world teeming with intellectual energies, under any thing less than the broadest and highest logical discipline?

In advocating the Religion of Philosophy, there seems little hope of success. All imaginary advantages are on the side of the Religions of Faith. These religions do not scruple to hold out the promise of rich rewards in another world, for services and belief,—of æons of blissful existence for the faithful; nor do they hesitate to threaten the unbelieving with punishments too dreadful to be described. The Religions of Faith monopolize all the popular incentives to morality. As a consolation for the misery resulting from

the still unmastered passions, they emphasize the temporal character of human happiness, and contrast it with joys which they say are eternal. To the weary they promise rest; to the bereaved, reunion with the dead; to the poor, plenty; to the sick, health. All these obligations are accepted upon faith. Their redemption is postponed until the empire of time and space shall have passed away.

Philosophy takes none of these advantages; it stoops to no such disingenuous methods. It sounds the alarm of a fleeting existence, it teaches the dire limitation of personal life, it identifies time with eternity, and matter with infinite space. It teaches that as there is no *absolute* death, there is no absolute personal life; that the absolute means time, or the *unchanging*, and that individuality is transient and ever-changing. It teaches that cause and effect are but different aspects of each event, and that there is no need of a supernatural power to entail the effects of conduct, for they are inevitable. It appeals to nothing but the most impersonal sympathies as the incentive to morality; and yet it affirms that morality is the only real success of life. Thus without a single pretext of authority, except the voice of conscience pleading through the experience of ages the cause of humanity; unenforced by mysterious fears, unsustained by ecstatic hopes, it confronts the gorgeous imagery, the superb organization, the venerated associations of the Religions of Faith, and demands that their creeds shall be brought into harmony with the discoveries of science and history, that their promises shall be limited to their responsibility and their knowledge, and that their moral teachings shall be made to appeal to the highest nature of man.

With these reforms, and nothing less, will philosophy be satisfied. To the realization of this ideal will all its efforts be bent. And should the materials of our civilization prove unequal to the tension of these principles, it will become the mission of Philosophy to deposit among its ruins the germ of a higher life.

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