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What is Darwinism?

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WHAT IS DARWINISM?

This is a question which needs an answer. Great confusion and diversity of opinion prevail as to the real views of the man whose writings have agitated the whole world, scientific and religious. If a man says he is a Darwinian, many understand him to avow himself virtually an atheist; while another understands him as saying that he adopts some harmless form of the doctrine of evolution. This is a great evil.

It is obviously useless to discuss any theory until we are agreed as to what that theory is. The question, therefore, What is Darwinism? must take precedence of all discussion of its merits.

The great fact of experience is that the universe exists. The great problem which has ever pressed upon the human mind is to account for its existence. What was its origin? To what causes are the changes we witness [Pg 2] around us to be referred? As we are a part of the universe, these questions concern ourselves. What are the origin, nature, and destiny of man? Professor Huxley is right in saying, "The question of questions for mankind—the problem which underlies all others, and is more interesting than any other—is the ascertainment of the place which Man occupies in nature and of his relation to the universe of things. Whence our race has come, what are the limits of our power over nature, and of nature's power over us, to what goal are we tending, are the problems which present themselves anew and with undiminished interest to every man born into the world." [1] Mr. Darwin undertakes to answer these questions. He proposes a solution of the problem which thus deeply concerns every living man. Darwinism is, therefore, a theory of the universe, at least so far as the living organisms on this earth are concerned. This being the case, it may be well to state, in few words, the other prevalent theories on this great subject, that the points of agreement and of difference between them and the views of Mr. Darwin may be the more clearly seen.

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The Scriptural Solution of the Problem of the Universe.

That solution is stated in words equally simple and sublime: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." We have

here, first, the idea of God. The word God has in the Bible a definite meaning. It does not stand for an abstraction, for mere force, for law or ordered sequence. God is a spirit, and as we are spirits, we know from consciousness that God is, (1.) A Substance; (2.) That He is a person; and, therefore, a self-conscious, intelligent, voluntary agent. He can say I; we can address Him as Thou; we can speak of Him as He or Him. This idea of God pervades the Scriptures. It lies at the foundation of natural religion. It is involved in our religious consciousness. It enters essentially into our sense of moral obligation. It is inscribed ineffaceably, in letters more or less legible, on the heart of every human being. The man who is trying to be an atheist is trying to free himself from the laws of his being. He might as well try to free himself from liability to hunger or thirst.

The God of the Bible, then, is a Spirit, infi [Pg 4] nite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, goodness, and truth. As every theory must begin with some postulate, this is the grand postulate with which the Bible begins. This is the first point.

The second point concerns the origin of the universe. It is not eternal either as to matter or form. It is not independent of God. It is not an evolution of his being, or his existence form. He is extramundane as well as antemundane. The universe owes its existence to his will.

Thirdly, as to the nature of the universe; it is not a mere phenomenon. It is an entity, having real objective existence, or actuality. This implies that matter is a substance endowed with certain properties, in virtue of which it is capable of acting and of being acted upon. These properties being uniform and constant, are physical laws to which, as their proximate causes, all the phenomena of nature are to be referred.

Fourthly, although God is extramundane, He is nevertheless everywhere present. That presence is not only a presence of essence, but also of knowledge and power. He upholds all things. He controls all physical [Pg 5] causes, working through them, with them, and without them, as He sees fit. As we, in our limited spheres, can use physical causes to accomplish our purposes, so God everywhere and always coöperates with them to accomplish his infinitely wise and merciful designs.

Fifthly, man a part of the universe, is, according to the Scriptures, as concerns his body, of the earth. So far, he belongs to the animal kingdom. As to his soul, he is a child of God, who is declared to be the Father of the spirits of all men. God is a spirit, and we are spirits. We are, therefore, of the same nature with God. We are God-like; so that in knowing ourselves we know God. No man conscious of his manhood can be ignorant of his relationship to God as his Father.

The truth of this theory of the universe rests, in the first place, so far as it has been correctly stated, on the infallible authority of the Word of God. In the second place, it is a satisfactory solution of the problem to be solved, — (1.) It accounts for the origin of the universe. (2.) It accounts for all the universe contains, and gives a satisfactory explanation of the marvellous contrivances which abound in living organisms, of the adaptations of these or [Pg 6] ganisms to conditions external to themselves, and for those provisions for the future, which on any other assumption are utterly inexplicable. (3.) It is in conflict with no truth of reason and with no fact of experience. [2] (4.) The Scriptural doctrine accounts for the spiritual nature of man, and meets all his spiritual necessities. It gives him an object of adoration, love, and confidence. It reveals the Being on whom his [Pg 7] indestructible sense of responsibility terminates. The truth of this doctrine, therefore, rests not only on the authority of the Scriptures, but on the very constitution of our nature. The Bible has little charity for those who reject it. It pronounces them to be either derationalized or demoralized, or both.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] *Evidences of Man's Place in Nature*. London, 1864, p. 57.

[2] The two facts which are commonly urged as inconsistent with Theism, are the existence of misery in the world, and the occurrence of undeveloped or useless organs, as teeth in the jaws of the whale and mammæ on the breast of a man. As to the former objection, sin, which is the only real evil, is accounted for by the voluntary apostasy of man; and as to undeveloped organs they are regarded as evidences of the great plan of structure which can be traced in the different orders of animals. These unused organs were—says Professor Joseph Le Conte, in his interesting volume on *Religion and Science*, New York, 1874, p. 54—regarded as blunders in nature, until it was discovered that use is not the only end of design. "By further patient study of nature," he says, "came the recognition of another law beside use,—a law of order underlying and conditioning the law of use. Organisms are, indeed, contrived for use, but according to a preordained plan of structure, which must not be violated." It is of little moment whether this explanation be considered satisfactory or not. It would certainly be irrational to refuse to believe that the eye was made for the purpose of vision, because we cannot tell why a man has mammæ. A man might as well refuse to admit that there is any meaning in all the writings of Plato, because there is a sentence in them which he cannot understand.

The Pantheistic Theory.

This has been one of the most widely diffused and persistent forms of human thought on this whole subject. It has been for thousands of years not only the philosophy, but the religion of India, and, to a great extent, of China. It underlies all the forms of Greek philosophy. It crept into the Church, concealed under the disguise of Scriptural terminology, in the form of Neo-Platonism. It was constantly reappearing during the Middle Ages, sometimes in a philosophical, and sometimes a mystical form. It was revived by Spinoza in the seventeenth century, and subsequently became dominant in the philosophy and literature of Europe. It is coming up again. Some distinguished naturalists are swinging round from one pole to the opposite; from saying there is no God, to teaching that everything is God. [Pg 8] Sometimes, one and the same book in one half teaches materialism, in the other half idealism: the one affirming that everything is matter, the other that matter is nothing, but that everything is mind, and mind is God.

The leading principles of the Pantheistic theory are,—(1.) That there is an Infinite and Absolute Being. Of this Being nothing can be affirmed but actuality. It is denied that it is conscious, intelligent, or voluntary. (2.) It is subject to the blind necessity of self-evolution or development. (3.) This development being necessary is constant; from everlasting to everlasting. According to the Braminical doctrine, indeed, there are successive cycles of activity and repose, each cycle being measured by countless millions of centuries. According to the moderns, self-evolution being necessary, there can be no repose, so that *Ohne Welt kein Gott*. (4.) The Finite is, therefore, the existence form of the Infinite; all that is in the latter for the time being is in the former. All that is possible is actual. (5.) The Finite is the Infinite, or, to use theistic language, the World is God, in the sense that all the world is and contains is the form in which God, at each successive moment, exists. There is no [Pg 9] power, save only the power manifested in the world; no consciousness, intelligence, or voluntary activity, but in finite things, and the aggregate of these is the power, consciousness, intelligence, and activity of God. What we call sin is as much a form of God's activity as what we call virtue. In other words, there is no such thing as free agency in man, no

such thing as sin or responsibility. When a man dies he sinks into the abyss of being as a drop of water is lost in the ocean. (6.) Man is the highest form of God's existence. God is incarnate in the human race. Strauss says, that what the Church teaches of Christ is not true of any individual man, but is true of mankind. Or, as Feuerbach more concisely expresses it, "Man alone is our God." The blasphemy of some of the German philosophers on this subject is simply unutterable. In India we see the practical operation of this system when it takes hold on the people. There the personification of the Infinite as evil (the Goddess Kala) is the most popular object of worship.

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Epicurean Theory.

Epicurus assumed the existence of matter, force and motion,—Stoff und Kraft. He held that all space was filled with molecules of matter in a state of rapid motion in every direction. These molecules were subject to gravity and endowed with properties or forces. One combination of molecules gave rise to unorganized matter, another to life, another to mind; and from the various combinations, guided by unintelligent physical laws, all the wonderful organisms of plants and animals have arisen. To these combinations also all the phenomena of life, instinct, and intelligence in the world are to be referred. This theory has been adopted in our day by a large class of scientific men, especially in Germany. The modern advocates of the theory are immeasurably superior to the ancient Epicureans in their knowledge of astronomy, botany, zoölogy, and biology; but in their theory of the universe, and in their mode of accounting for all the phenomena of life and intelligence, they are precisely on the same level. They have not added an idea to the system, which has ever been regarded as the opprobrium of human [Pg 11] thought. Büchner, Moleschott, Vogt, hold that matter is eternal and indestructible; that matter and force are inseparable: the one cannot exist without the other. What, it is asked, is motion without something moving? What is electricity without an electrified body? What is attraction without molecules attracting each other? What is contractibility without muscular fibre, or secretion without a secreting gland? One combination of molecules exhibits the phenomena of life, another combination exhibits the phenomena of mind. All this was taught

by the old heathen philosopher more than two thousand years ago. That this system denies the existence of God, of mind as a thinking substance distinct from matter, and of the possibility of the conscious existence of man after death, are not inferences drawn by opponents, but conclusions openly avowed by its advocates.

Herbert Spencer's New Philosophy.

Mr. Darwin calls Spencer our "great philosopher." His is the speculating mind of the new school of science. This gives to his opinions special interest, although no one but himself is to be held responsible for his peculiar views, except so far as others see fit to avow [Pg 12] them. Mr. Spencer postulates neither mind nor matter. He begins with Force. Force, however, is itself perfectly inscrutable. All we know about it is, that it is, that it is indestructible, and that it is persistent.

As to the origin of the universe, he says there are three possible suppositions: 1st. That it is self-existent. 2d. That it is self-created. 3d. That it is created by an external agency. [3] All these he examines and rejects. The first is equivalent to Atheism, by which Spencer understands the doctrine which makes Space, Matter, and Force eternal and the causes of all phenomena. This, he says, assumes the idea of self-existence, which is unthinkable. The second theory he makes equivalent to Pantheism. "The precipitation of vapor," he says, "into cloud, aids us in forming a symbolic conception of a self-evolved universe;" but, he adds, "really to conceive self-creation, is to conceive potential existence passing into actual existence by some inherent necessity, which we cannot do." (p. 32). The Theistic theory, he says, is equally untenable. "Whoever agrees that the atheistic hypothesis is [Pg 13] untenable because it involves the impossible idea of self-existence, must perforce admit that the theistic hypothesis is untenable if it contains the same impossible idea." (p. 38). The origin of the universe is, therefore, a fact which cannot be explained. It must have had a cause; and all we know is that its cause is unknowable and inscrutable.

When we turn to nature the result is the same. Everything is inscrutable. All we know is that there are certain appearances, and

that where there is appearance there must be something that appears. But what that something is, what is the noumenon which underlies the phenomenon, it is impossible for us to know. In nature we find two orders of phenomena, or appearances; the one objective or external, the other subjective in our consciousness. There are an Ego and a non-Ego, a subject and object. These are not identical. "It is," he says, "rigorously impossible to conceive that our knowledge is a knowledge of appearances only, without at the same time conceiving a reality of which they are appearances, for appearance without reality is unthinkable." (p. 88). So far we can go. There is a reality which is the cause of the [Pg 14] phenomena. Further than that, in that direction, our ignorance is profound. He proves that space cannot be an entity, an attribute, or a category of thought, or a nonentity. The same is true of time, of motion, of matter, of electricity, light, magnetism, etc., etc. They all resolve themselves into appearances produced by an unknown cause.

As the question, What is matter? is a crucial one, he dwells upon it in various parts of his writings. Newton's theory of ultimate atoms; Leibnitz's doctrine of monads; and the dynamic theory of Boscovich, which makes matter mere centres of force, are all dismissed as unthinkable. It is not very clear in what sense that word is to be taken. Sometimes it seems to mean, meaningless; at others, self-contradictory or absurd; at others, inconceivable, *i. e.* that of which no conception or mental image can be formed; at any rate, it implies what is unknowable and untenable. The result is, so far as matter is concerned, that we know nothing about it. "Our conception of matter," he says, "reduced to its simplest shape, is that of coexistent positions that offer resistance, as contrasted with our conception of space in which the coexistent positions offer [Pg 15] no resistance." (p. 166). Resistance, however, is a form of force; and, therefore, on the following page, Spencer says, "that forces standing in certain correlations, form the whole contents of our idea of matter."

When we turn from the objective to the subjective, from the external to the inward world, the result is still the same. He agrees with Hume in saying that the contents of our consciousness is a series of impressions and ideas. He dissents, however, from that philosopher, in saying that that series is all we know. He admits

that impressions necessarily imply that there is something that is impressed. He starts the question, What is it that thinks? and answers, We do not know. (p. 63). He admits that the reality of individual personal minds, the conviction of personal existence is universal, and perhaps indestructible. Nevertheless that conviction cannot justify itself at the bar of reason; nay, reason is found to reject it. (p. 65). Dean Mansel says, that consciousness gives us a knowledge of self as a substance and not merely of its varying states. This, however, he says, "is absolutely negated by the laws of thought. The fundamental condition to all consciousness, emphatically insisted upon by Mr. Mansel in common with Sir William Hamilton and others, is the antithesis of subject and object.... What is the corollary from this doctrine, as bearing on the consciousness of self? The mental act in which self is known implies, like every other mental act, a perceiving subject and a perceived object. If, then, the object perceived is self, what is the subject that perceives? Or if it is the true self which thinks, what other self can it be that is thought of? Clearly, a true cognition of self implies a state in which the knowing and the known are one—in which subject and object are identified; and this Mr. Mansel rightly holds to be the annihilation of both. So that the personality of which each is conscious, and of which the existence is to each a fact beyond all others the most certain, is yet a thing which cannot be known at all; knowledge of it is forbidden by the very nature of human thought." (pp. 65, 66).

Mr. Spencer does not seem to expect that any man will be shaken in his conviction by any such argument as that. When a man is conscious of pain, he is not to be puzzled by telling him that the pain is one thing (the object perceived) and the self another thing (the [Pg 17] perceiving subject). He knows that the pain is a state of the self of which he is conscious. Consciousness is a form of knowledge; but knowledge of necessity supposes an intelligent reality which knows. A philosophy which cannot be received until men cease to believe in their own existence, must be in extremis.

Mr. Spencer's conclusion is, that the universe—nature, or the external world with all its marvels and perpetual changes,—the world of consciousness with its ever varying states, are impressions or phenomena, due to an inscrutable, persistent force.

As to the nature of this primal force or power, he quotes abundantly and approvingly from Sir William Hamilton and Mr. Mansel, to prove that it is unknowable, inconceivable, unthinkable. He, however, differs from those distinguished writers in two points. While admitting that we know no more of the first cause than we do of a geometrical figure which is at once a circle and a square, yet we do know that it is actual. For this conviction we are not dependent on faith. In the second place, Hamilton and Mansel taught that we know that the Infinite cannot be a person, self-conscious, intelligent, and voluntary; yet [Pg 18] we are forced by our moral constitution to believe it to be an intelligent person. This Mr. Spencer denies. "Let those," he says, "who can, believe that there is eternal war between our intellectual faculties and our moral obligations. I, for one, admit of no such radical vice in the constitution of things." (p. 108). Religion has always erred, he asserts, in that while it teaches that the Infinite Being cannot be known, it insists on ascribing to it such and such attributes, which of course assumes that so far forth it is known. We have no right, he contends, to ascribe personality to the "Unknown Reality," or anything else, except that it is the cause of all that we perceive or experience. There may be a mode of being, as much transcending intelligence and will, as these transcend mechanical motion. To show the folly of referring to the Unknown the attributes of our own spirits, he makes "the grotesque supposition that the tickings and other movements of a watch constituted a kind of consciousness; and that a watch possessed of such a consciousness, insisted on regarding the watchmaker's actions as determined like its own by springs and escapements." (p. 111). The vast majority of men, instead of agreeing [Pg 19] with Mr. Spencer in this matter, will doubtless heartily, each for himself, join the German philosopher Jacobi, in saying, "I confess to Anthropomorphism inseparable from the conviction that man bears the image of God; and maintain that besides this Anthropomorphism, which has always been called Theism, is nothing but Atheism or Fetichism." [4]

Mr. Spencer, therefore, in accounting for the origin of the universe and all its phenomena, physical, vital, and mental, rejects Theism, or the doctrine of a personal God, who is extramundane as well as antemundane, the creator and governor of all things; he rejects Pantheism, which makes the finite the existence-form of the

Infinite; he rejects Atheism, which he understands to be the doctrine of the eternity and self-existence of matter and force. He contents himself with saying we must acknowledge the reality of an unknown something which is the cause of all things,—the noumenon of all phenomena. "If science and religion are to be reconciled, the basis of the reconciliation must be this deepest, widest, and most certain of all facts,—that the Power which the [Pg 20] universe manifests is utterly inscrutable." (p. 46). "The ultimate of ultimates is Force." "Matter and motion, as we know them, are differently conditioned manifestations of force." "If, to use an algebraic illustration, we represent Matter, Motion, and Force, by the symbols x , y , z ; then we may ascertain the values of x and y in terms of z , but the value of z can never be found; z is the unknown quantity, which must forever remain unknown, for the obvious reason that there is nothing in which its value can be expressed." (pp. 169, 170).

We have, then, no God but Force. Atheist is everywhere regarded as a term of reproach. Every man instinctively recoils from it. Even the philosophers of the time of the French Revolution repudiated the charge of atheism, because they believed in motion; and motion being inscrutable, they believed in an inscrutable something, *i. e.* in Force. We doubt not Mr. Spencer would indignantly reject the imputation of atheism; nevertheless, in the judgment of most men, the difference between Antitheist and Atheist is a mere matter of orthography.

FOOTNOTES:

[3] *First Principles of a New System of Philosophy*. By Herbert Spencer. Second edition. New York, 1869, p. 30.

[4] *Von den göttlichen Dingen, Werke*, III. pp. 422, 425. Leipzig, 1816.

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Hylozoic Theory.

This theory assumes the universe to be eternal. There is nothing extra, or antemundane. There is but one substance, and that substance is matter. Matter, however, has an active and passive principle. Life and rationality are among its attributes or functions. The universe, therefore, is a living whole pervaded by a principle not only of life but of intelligence. This hylozoic doctrine, some modern scientific men, as Professor Tyndall, seem inclined to adopt. They tell us that matter is not the dead and degraded thing it is commonly regarded. It is active and transcendental. What that means, we do not know. The word transcendental is like a parabola, in that there is no knowing where its meaning ends. To say that matter is transcendental, is saying there is no telling what it is up to. This habit of using words which have no definite meaning is very convenient to writers, but very much the reverse for readers. Some of the ancient Stoics distinguished between the active and passive principles in the world, calling the one mind, the other, matter. These however were as intimately united as matter and life in a plant or animal.

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Theism in Unscriptural Forms.

There are men who are constrained to admit the being of God, who depart from the Scriptural doctrine as to his relation to the world. According to some, God created matter and endowed it with certain properties, and then left it to itself to work out, without any interference or control on his part, all possible results. According to others, He created not only matter, but life, or living germs, one or more, from which without any divine intervention all living organisms have been developed. Others, again, refer not only matter and life, but mind also to the act of the Creator; but with creation his agency ceases. He has no more to do with the world, than a ship-builder has with the ship he has constructed, when it is launched and far off upon the ocean. According to all these views a creator is a mere *Deus ex machina*, an assumption to account for the origin of the universe.