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"Spencer Aply Defended /editorial/,"
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SPENCER APLY DEFENDED

THE PHILOSOPHER'S FRIENDS

ACCEPT "OUTSIDER'S"

CHALLENGE.

THE SYNTHETIC PHILOSOPHY A SOUND
AND WORKABLE SYSTEM -- WHAT
HERBERT SPENCER DOES, AND WHAT
HE DOES NOT, CLAIM TO BE -- THE
KNOWABLE AND THE UNKNOWNABLE.

The attack upon the Synthetic Philosophy of Herbert Spencer in an article signed "Outsider" published in THE TIMES of last Sunday has caused an extraordinary awakening among the students of Evolution and cognate theories as set forth in Mr. Spencer's works. We have received many communications in reply to "Outsider's" article, and we publish below as many as we can make room for in this issue of THE TIMES. The discussion will be continued next Sunday. The contention of "Outsider" was that Herbert Spencer's pretensions as a scientist and a philosopher were not solidly based, that he was not a specialist of recognized authority in many of the branches of human knowledge on which he has much to say in his books, and that his system of philosophy is not entitled to take rank as a discovery worthy to be compared, for instance, with Newton's law of gravitation; but evolutionists and others who were so unfortunate as to have missed reading "Outsider's" attack will find its main ideas presented in the replies printed below:

KAPPA
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"Flaws in 'Outsider's' Reasoning,"
The New York Times, vol. 39 (Sunday, 30 March),
page 13, columns 1-2.

FLAWS IN "OUTSIDER'S" REASONING.

HIS ATTENTION CALLED TO THE FIXED
LINE BETWEEN THE KNOWABLE
AND THE UNKNOWNABLE -- EXPERI-
ENCE AND "INTUITION."

To the Editor of the New York Times:

Having read with interest the communication on Spencer's Philosophy by "Outsider" in your issue of Sunday, advantage is taken of your editorial offer to continue the discussion.

The article is made up of a series of questions so artfully framed as to seem to imply answers adverse to the doctrine of evolution. For instance, he asks whether the "pretensions" of Mr. Spencer are acknowledged to be well founded; whether, since his doctrine partly rests on these considerations among mathematicians, biologists, psychologists, and anthropologists, he is respectively an acknowledged chief, and whether, by such, he has been awarded "medals and foreign memberships of academies."

Supposing, for the sake of giving "Outsider" all the rope he wants, we should answer each of such queries in the negative, how does such an answer affect the validity of the synthetic philosophy? Not at all. That philosophy, as its name indicates, is a generalized theory of the universe, built up on recognized facts in each branch of human knowledge and deductions from those facts. Now, in any one department of knowledge, such as "biology," the specialists familiar with that department might differ from Mr. Spencer in two ways: They might dispute his facts, or his inferences from the facts. We have yet to learn of any scientist in any department who has disputed the data set out in the volumes of Mr. Spencer. In regard to the inferences deduced, the existence of "Outsider" and others sufficiently demonstrates the wonderful diversity of the human intellect.

"Outsider" doubtless knows that there are two kinds of scientists -- the specialist, and the generalizer, or philosopher. The qualities of mind adapted to each kind are very dissimilar. Mr. Spencer has never been understood to make any claim to be a specialist in any one branch of inquiry, but his works stamp him as the great generalizing thinker of the age. The specialist gathers the data, the statistics; the philosopher generalizes these into a harmonious whole. If there be any branch of science in which the philosopher is a specialist, it is the reasoning processes, whereby

generalizations indicating the true hidden connection between apparently disconnected facts are sought for and discovered. If, therefore, a specialist disputed Mr. Spencer's "Facts," he would be entitled to a respectful hearing; but, if he disputed Mr. Spencer's inferences from the facts, he could no longer speak "ex cathedra," would really be intruding upon Mr. Spencer's own domain, and his opinions would be entitled to no greater weight than those of any other intelligent thinker. The implication, therefore, from the use of the word "pretensions" that, if not recognized as an acknowledged leader in the different branches of human knowledge named, Mr. Spencer's grand generalizations derived therefrom come to naught, is as false as it is misleading.

"Outsider" then quotes from the "First Principles," Section 2, a sentence which is therein laid down for the purpose of the subsequent attempted reconciliation, by Mr. Spencer, of science and religion. This attempted reconciliation may be summarized as a reconciliation which reconciles antagonistic theories of the manner of the workings of causes and effects among phenomena on the basis that both science and religion coincide "in the assertion of a reality utterly inscrutable in its nature." This statement is certainly not true of the pretensions of dogmatic religion as it exists in this nineteenth century; and is, besides, an assertion which is in fact wide of the mark; because the long-standing dispute of the ages between science and religion has not been a dispute as to the "nature of things in themselves," but rather a dispute as to whether certain special phenomena were the results of direct supernatural causes, or natural antecedents. We are therefore inclined to agree with "Outsider" in his suspicions regarding the validity of the principle therein laid down, and do not believe that Mr. Spencer himself holds it to be a cardinal truth in all its breadth as stated, because elsewhere in his works he ridicules the eclectic philosophy of Victor Cousin -- a philosophy founded on the principle in question.

Your correspondent then says: "Next, readers would like to be informed whether Mr. Spencer's system is logically put together. Does he fully understand his own theory?" &c. This is surely a new method of criticism. Readers who have to be told whether a system of philosophy is logical or not either have not read it, or, having read it, have not understood it. The latter class are beyond help; to the former it is sufficient to say that there is no royal road to the attainments of anything worth having. Spencer's writings speak for themselves on all such questions, and no one who conscientiously reads and thinks can accuse him of defects in the logical arrangement of his facts or construction of his argument. To attempt, in the absence of criticism on any special point, to prove that he is logical and does thoroughly understand his own theory would be to attempt to summarize or rewrite the "Synthetic Philosophy" itself, a task which only one man is competent to undertake. Your questioner, therefore, should seek information on these points at the fountain heads, in the volumes of Spencer himself, wherein is set forth right grandly, and in a calm, cold, clear, unornamented style, well fitted to close argument and convincing conclusion, the elaboration of the grand conception that throughout the universe the "unceasing redistribution of matter and motion," constituting "evolution where there is a predominant integration of matter and dissipation of motion" and "dissolution where

there is a predominant absorption of motion and disintegration of matter," proceeds according to fixed laws, some of which we know, some of which we can know, and some of which the very nature of our intelligence and the history of its evolution render it impossible that we should ever know.

This brings us naturally to the most remarkable part of your correspondent's letter, where he says: "There are certain things which his somewhat clumsy conception of evolution has left him no room to explain in any evolutionary sense." "Clumsy conception" implies that there is in existence a more accurate conception of evolution than that of Mr. Spencer. If such a conception exists, your correspondent could not confer on the human race a greater favor than to bring it forth to the light of day, that all men may see, understand, and admire. "Outsider" then goes on kindly to forgive Mr. Spencer for not having explained "Matter" and "Time," (meaning in their essence as things, existences,) but can not overlook his neglect to explain space in the same way: "But space -- does not 'space' call for some explanation? Is not that a half-way philosophy which in these our days does not explain, or at least hold out some promise of explaining, why space is continuous, why it has such a wonderful uniformity in all its parts?" &c.

This is nothing more nor less than asking why the universe exists, and implying that any philosophy that does not answer such a question is defective. Space being as incomprehensible as matter which occupies it, and without which it is unthinkable, it would seem that if your correspondent excuses Mr. Spencer from explaining the nature of matter, he ought similarly to let him off from the necessity of explaining space. If "Outsider" wished to know all that can be known as to the subjective and objective nature of matter and motion, space and time, the reasons why we know so much about them, and cannot know any more, we respectfully refer him to the second volume of Mr. Spencer's "Psychology."

Had "Outsider" ever read that book he would never have asked the foregoing question. He would then have learned that one of the greatest claims to immortality the "Synthetic Philosophy" possesses is, that through its doctrine of evolution the absolute existence of a line of demarkation between the "unknowable" and the "knowable," so far as man is concerned, has been demonstrated; and, further, that the long-standing dispute between Kant and Locke and their respective followers, as to the nature of knowledge, whether partly intuitive or wholly derived from experience, has been set at rest by the conception of the inherited affects of the experience of ancestors, producing a body of organized experience in the individual, which Kant mistook for intuitive knowledge. Further, he would have learned that knowledge, being but another name for accurately organized experience of the organism possessing it, nothing can be known save that which either the individual or the race before him has experienced; and even things which have been experienced are not known in the sense here meant, so that a reason can be given for their existence, until many successions of certain phenomena in a certain order under differing conditions of presence and absence of the antecedent and consequent inquired about, have indicated a constant fixed relation between the presence of the antecedent and the consequent. Explanation of the existence of a phenomenon, therefore, implying the pre-existence in experience of some other phenomenon which preceded it, it is apparent that the reason for the existence of a certain state of affairs is only possible to be given when the state of affairs in question is the consequent

in experience of some antecedent state of affairs, and not always then, for not until constant recurrences of the same sequence exhibit the causal connection involved, are we able to give a reason why one thing exists after another. Putting the same truth in another way we may inquire what it is that we do when we ask and give a reason for the existence of a thing? It will be found that when the question can be answered, it will be a question relating to facts which have followed each other within experience; when it cannot be answered at all, the question will be as to some fact or phenomenon which has had no antecedent in experience. Thus, what is the intrinsic difference between the question "Why is space continuous? A.-- We do not know;" and the question "Why does that man look so sad? A.-- Because he has read 'Outsider's' article." On close examination it will be found that the only difference is in the subject matter inquired about, and further investigation will disclose that the difference in the subject matter lies in the fact that in the first case we are dealing with a phenomenon in which the attribute inquired about has never suffered change in all time; and in the second case we are dealing with a phenomenon in which the attribute inquired about (apparent mental state) is constantly changing. Further, in the second case, not only are we constantly experiencing instances of changes like those in question, but we gradually learn that mental states, painful or pleasurable, have objective antecedents and produce corresponding alterations in the facial appearance, and thence we deduce the conclusion that the reason why THE TIMES'S reader looks sad is that he has perused the article in question and a painful mental state has been followed by its usual expression, a saddened countenance. The reason for the existence of a thing is, therefore, the predication of an antecedent having a causal connection with it; and the ability to give a reason for the existence of a thing implies the ability to predicate the existence of an antecedent of which the thing inquired about is the consequent, implies the ability to predicate a change in the thing inquired about as to the attribute inquired about.

Since knowledge is limited by experience, and the reason for the existence of a thing involves the predication of a change in its state or condition within experience, it follows that that which has never changed in our experience or in the experience of our long line of ancestors beginning, say, with the jelly fish, cannot be explained by our mental organization. As our organism has never experienced an environment containing the phenomenon of a discontinuous kind of space, or one containing a different number of dimensions, antecedent to the space in which we live, we are therefore, and shall ever be, unable to explain the whyness of this thusness; we might as well attempt to lift ourselves by our boot straps, or explain why two and two make four.

We would proceed to discuss the other questions and implications in the article mentioned, but fear we have already trespassed too far upon your "space" and patience.

KAPPA.

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