

R. G. E.  
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A CALL FOR SPECIFICATIONS.

OPPONENTS OF SPENCER'S PHILOSOPHY  
MUST POINT OUT ITS IMPERFEC-  
TIONS -- COUNTLESS PROPHECIES  
HAVE BEEN BASED ON IT.

To the Editor of the New-York Times:

When "Outsider," in your last Sunday's edition, threw out his whole-sale challenge to evolutionists it would have seemed the part of fairness for him honestly and squarely to state where and why he objected to their doctrine. To enter a general denial without particularizing indicates at the outset timidity on his part. He is doubtful of his own positions, and so fears distinctly to express them. Such at least is the honest inference drawn by a candid reader from what he has written. The only quotation he makes from Herbert Spencer has absolutely no bearing on the question raised and is the same as if some critic of the law of gravity should assert that it could not be true because Newton believed in the corpuscular theory of light or held odd notions on political economy. A subtle problem in logic that may or may not be true in no way can invalidate the law of evolution when it has no possible bearing thereon. The hunting of the most abstract expression of a million divergent opinions is not Mr. Spencer's philosophy, and "Outsider" should be intelligent enough to know it, even if he does think that such a hunt would, for astrology, land him in a belief that the stars somehow control our destinies. If Mr. Spencer was in error when he penned the words quoted by "Outsider" it should only put us on our guard concerning his ability as a reasoner and teach us that he is in no sense infallible. If we must discredit all his other work because of a slip at the beginning of his First Principles, then, perhaps, that which will apply to him must apply with equal force to "Outsider." Let us, then, accept the challenge and its conditions, however unfair they may be, and we will soon discover who is to be discredited.

The process advocated by Mr. Spencer is simply that of cancellation. If fifty disinterested witnesses testify on a point and contradict each other in particulars he would strike out one by one all the elements of disagreement until finding at last wherein they agreed as to fact, not theory, he would pronounce that true. It might simply amount in the end, after such treatment, to a statement that something did happen. This would be the most abstract expression of the agreement within their divergent opinions. The assumption is that ideas are not causeless. When large

numbers of men without collusion hold opinions having elements of agreement some cause exists for the common thought. "Outsider" tells us that astrology treated in this way would have led us to the belief that the stars somehow influenced the destinies of men. This he seems to think would be a preposterous conclusion. But when astrology was believed in did they not? Was not the main strength of astrology at that time its own power as a doctrine to make men's movements conform to their notions of the movements of the stars? Did not intelligent men then see that such conformity did actually occur? It is time they did not suspect that the motor power was one of their own making, but they did know that the doctrine for some reason was not altogether foundationless. But this does not carry us back to the most abstract expression of the doctrine. The belief in star control had a beginning in fact somewhere. Nor have we far to look for it. Are not our movements controlled by the changes of the seasons and the alternations of day and night? Do not changes among the stars precede and herald such changes in the seasons? Is not this the most abstract expression of astrology? Is it not true? Unconsciously, then, "Outsider," by beginning his attack on Spencer here, discredits himself as a reasoner and sustains the man he attacks. When he asks us if thinkers are "ever really obliged to give all opinions equal votes without educational qualifications" we answer emphatically, no! But we wonder at the obtuseness of the man who could put so silly a question and imagine that he was candidly expressing the opinion of the party he attacks. Because Mr. Spencer tells us that the ideas and notions entertained by large bodies of men in common cannot be causeless, but must in their most abstract form be the outgrowth of facts of experience, it in no way follows that the imaginings of every crank are of equal value with the carefully determined facts and conclusions of a Tyndall or a Darwin. Does "Outsider" really believe Herbert Spencer to be the idiot he here depicts him? If he does, then why does he take pains to wage war against him? It is not to his credit to attack such a fool. If he, on the other hand, considers Mr. Spencer to be a man of good, sound sense, how shall we characterize so flagrant a misrepresentation as this is?

Had "Outsider" waited until his last paper appeared before writing that Mr. Spencer "is one of those who build Babel systems to scale the heights of knowledge" we might have looked upon him as a candid disbeliever. But when he makes such a statement at the outset, without giving a single reason for the assertion, the analogy of a noisy barker that does no biting forces itself upon us. He objects to the "hard, unchangeable foundations of 'first principles'" and apotheosizes a system of instability that he voluntarily chooses the word "fluid" to describe. Possibly he will in his next inform us whether or not he believes there is any data inexpugnable from consciousness. If there is, then we can have one or more secure cornerstones for a philosophy. If there is not, then he is wasting his time by starting or prolonging this controversy, since there can be no such thing as truth, either in principle or fact. His rhetoric is exceedingly faulty here, and compares well with his logic. Will he inform us how a foundation can be "unchangeable" if it stands on "quaggy ground"? Will he likewise tell us what is more likely to produce "quaggy ground" than the "fluid" state which he so highly commends?

To all of his questions concerning Mr. Spencer's attitude to his own system any disciple can unhesitatingly return an affirmative reply and

patiently wait to see what "Outsider" will do therewith. When he tells us that "the English have gone to great extremes in philosophy," it is quite easy to answer that the Germans, French, Italians, and all others have done precisely the same. This he should know without being told it. In the nature of things, it is impossible to have an incomplete or partially-developed system without doing so. No philosopher can be conscious of the imperfections of his own philosophy. If he was he would correct them. Imperfection necessitates extreme utterance when it is not known as imperfection. To call imperfection perfection is to be extreme. The crowning grace of Mr. Spencer's philosophy lies in the fact that it is a synthesis that embraces in a symmetric whole the elements that were stable of all preceding systems. Because his predecessors were extremists might have led us to suppose that he also was if he had offered a substitute philosophy to theirs. When, however, he gives the world a synthetic philosophy the charge becomes ridiculous. "Outsider" tells us that "there are certain things which his [Mr. Spencer's] somewhat clumsy conception of evolution has left him no room to explain in any evolutionary sense." This is certainly news to evolutionists. Where did "Outsider" find this fact, if fact it is? If Spencer's is a "somewhat clumsy conception of evolution" perhaps he can tell us where to find one that is more graceful. To say that matter is one of the things left out of the problem of evolution is simply to prove the utter ignorance of the writer concerning Mr. Spencer's philosophy. Matter was the very first thing in our visible cosmos to evolve, and evidences that it is a product of evolution have been presented more than once. What it evolved from no one pretends to know. Here we strike the borderland of that existence that transcends consciousness, and to extend our speculations beyond is idle. Both time and space have been dealt with by Mr. Spencer in his philosophy, "Outsider" to the contrary notwithstanding. Let him read the two volumes on the Principles of Psychology and he will discover how both space and time, as known to us, came into being. Beyond this they, like matter, transcend our powers of knowing. He next asks whether the resort to the unknowable is thoroughgoing evolutionism. Perhaps not to suit his fancy. He wants a philosophy that will tell him how the unknowable evolved. If that could be supplied his discontent would still continue and he would next insist upon still more teleological wisdom by demanding an explanation of the origin of that which originated the unknowable. If the law of evolution is true he is bound not to believe it till some one tells him not alone why it came to be true, but the why of that why through the endless series of his imaginings. When confronted with those problems that transcend both sense and conception, he asks us to wade into the unwadeable and tell him whether it is "the good, authentic, practical, working God of religion" that lies beyond, or "a poor, decayed divinity, exercising no functions in this evolutionary world, but retained on half pay for the sake of auld lang syne." If he wishes to believe in one or other of these, neither Mr. Spencer nor any evolutionist will deny him that sweet privilege. Can "Outsider" not see how absurdly, how senselessly ridiculous his questions are? When or where did he ever meet an evolutionist that pretended to know anything about the unknowable beyond the fact of its mere existence? That an all-pervading eternal something presents itself to our senses under the guise of worlds and their contents we have every reason to believe. That this something follows a definite order in its manifestation, known

under the name of evolution, is also clear. We perceive its effects upon our consciousness, but to get out of our consciousness to find out what it is we cannot. Try as we will we are utterly unable to picture it in any other forms than those of our own feelings, yet the moment we attempt the analysis of these feelings we are convinced that in no sense can it be like them. It may be as "Outsider" evidently believes, "the practical, working God of religion," but the writer hopes that it is something transcending that conception as far as or further than that transcends the savages' gods of wood and stone. This so-called "practical, working God of religion" is but the ideal of a past race enlarged somewhat by the average intelligence of our own times. Any God knowable and describable by man now must prove an exceedingly inadequate conception of Deity when the race reaches an intellectual level as far above this as we are above the savage. As evolutionists believe in adaptation, they can coolly leave "Outsider" to the enjoyment of his semi-barbarous anthropomorphism until his environment enables him to outgrow it.

It is quite evident from his next argument that they must do so. It is useless to try to teach a boy fractions until he has acquired a knowledge of the multiplication table. It is equally useless to endeavor to explain why certain things are unknowable to one who flounders over Spencer's definition of life, and thinks that he tries to prove that living, growing things come from lifeless elements. That the doctrine of the conservation of energy combined with the law or trend of evolution is adequate to explain the merely physical side of life can be easily defended as a single proposition. To introduce that defense here would extend this already too long article to unreasonable proportions. As the attack is merely a general denial it will be as well to await specific charges against the already published positions of evolutionists on this subject. When he asserts that "the dictum of the conservation of energy" makes a back-action, reversed universe as possible as an evolutionary one, he asserted what would be true if there was no such thing as sentient existence. Given a world of unconscious being with our present law of conservation of energy, and no doubt this would be correct. Unfortunately for such logic, we have no such universe. Such back-action would mean a journey toward non-adaptation, pain, and misery, and would be resisted at every step. Matter to the evolutionist is but the objective aspect of a something which, in every new step by which it can be traced, reveals a subjective one as well. The conservation of energy is due to this kind of matter, and is therefore quite a different thing from what it would be in a universe of pure mechanics. Given, therefore, the very kind of matter which we perceive is here, and given the conservation of energy as found, and the law of evolution as taught by Herbert Spencer is a necessary result. But even if all of this were false, it would not in the least discredit that law. It is independent of all such considerations and independent of everything "Outsider" seems to deem essential to its existence. Newton taught that every particle of matter attracts every other particle with a force that varies inversely as the square of the distance and directly as the mass. This is the law of gravity. Spencer teaches that being in every guise is first a chaos of discordant similarities, but that it changes to a union of harmonized diversities by giving up its super-abundant energy and coming together in closer compact. This is the law of evolution. To fortify this truth he has given his life. To inculcate it all his books have been written. Here is the

central sun, around which revolves all else in his philosophy. Disprove this and he is proved a blind leader of the blind. Acknowledge it and you are an evolutionist. As a source of provision no law ever was more fertile. Its implications are endless, and by it to-day every science and every line of business gains that foreseeing vision that distinguishes the present time from a generation or two ago. Men use it who do not themselves know that they are doing so. The histologist seeks and expects to find below every organized mass of diversities some preceding uniformity by which to explain it, and he is never disappointed. Millions of such prophecies have been fulfilled and millions more are yet destined to be by virtue of this same law. The paleontologist gropes amid quarries and mines for links in the chain that leads from some present harmonized diversities down to the preceding discordant similarities and he is steadily discovering them according to prophecy. Even in the organization and classification of science itself we observe the law. We see in advance that every new fact will in time find a place in a harmonic system. Facts at first are a chaos of discordant similarities, but we can always be quite sure in advance that they will form a union of harmonized diversities. If we for the first time undertake the study of a new department of science that is properly organized, we can be quite sure in advance that we will find the facts cohering together in definite places and in harmonic union. In every line of business that starts we can predict that as it grows it will become more and more definite, more and more coherent, and that the division of labor will extend with its expansion. What is this if not prophecy? Could we do it unless we had faith that it would necessarily follow that course, *i. e.*, have faith in the law of evolution? Every man not only believes, but actually knows that evolution is true in everything where he has definite knowledge at all. Many men perceive and are positive of the division of labor and of the greater definiteness and coherence that an expanding business assumes, and yet they will profess not to believe in evolution. They make a wide distinction between six and half a dozen. They are astounded when informed that evolutionists simply assert that the same sort of changes which they see and know went on in the business or study with which they are familiar goes on in every place else in nature and in everything and for precisely the same fundamental reasons. Progress is not a going along a straight or even a curved line. It is due to a spreading out, a diversification of form and function. Like a tree, it has innumerable branches pointing in all sorts of directions. Every form of business expands like a tree. Every department of knowledge expands like a tree. The mind of the child in becoming that of a man does the same. Nations develop in the same way. Industries of all kinds appear as they grow just as the branches appear and develop in a growing tree. Governments, city, State, and national, follow the same law. There is universal uniformity in all the changes that things undergo and that is typified best by the growth of a tree. This is the law of evolution. All change that seriously fails to conform to this method is extinguished at once. Nature tolerates no such trifling. Everything must match its movements by those made by everything else. To fail to do so is to court extinction. The more perfectly a business, a society, an animal, or a man adapts itself to the universal movements around, the smoother will be its course of life and the longer it will live. Our ability to do so is directly

as our power of foreseeing danger and avoiding it. To see and know these intertwinings of movement is to possess prevision in corresponding degree. To hold such power of foresight is to be able to make our adjustments wisely. He is a wise man whose mind is so ordered that its contents match accurately with the conditions of the world around him. Insanity, idiocy, and all forms of mental aberration are but misadjustments of minds with things. Such misadjustments within limits are tolerated for a time, but their tendency is always toward the injury and final extinction of the person. Thus the mind is forced to place its contents parallel with the contents of the world without. As the contents of the material world are all traveling, incessantly toward greater and greater harmonic diversity and cohesive unity, the contents of mind must do the same thing or perish. If "Outsider" will scan this last sentence he will observe that it is a very positive prophecy and one of millions on which evolutionists unreservedly stake the fortune of their law. If he will read "First Principles," "Principles of Biology," "Principles of Psychology," and, in fact, all the works of Spencer, without prejudiced eyes, he will find them teeming with prophecies, hundreds of which have already met fulfillment. If he will inquire of any scientific discoverer of the century what ideas were actuating his mind when he made his discoveries, he will soon learn that he had evolutionary notions concerning the little corner of nature where he was working, and that these notions led to the discoveries. He may have been as far from an avowed evolutionist as "Outsider," but, in spite of that, the thought that gave him a leverage to pry into the secrets of nature, we venture to predict, would, on analysis, prove to be one of pure evolution. Mr. Spencer's great work in promulgating this law simply consisted in telling every human being that his useful knowledge that governed his movements intelligently began as discrete, inharmonious facts or experiences that in time unified themselves into a harmonic system having various unlike parts; that what was true of his was true of every other person's, and that such a harmonic unification of experiences was a picture of a precisely similar arrangement of things in the world without.

Let, then, those who would oppose evolution or test its prowess bring forth cases of progress that do not accord with this law, or of retrogression that do accord with it. Let them show us, if they can, anything that has reached a high stage of development without unification of interests and division of functions. Where can they find an organism, a society, or a theory adjusted in perfect accord with a changing environment that has been sessile or retrogressive? Until these are found, Mr. Herbert Spencer is in no danger of being supplanted from his position as chief among philosophers.

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