

R. G. E.
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FORCE AND LIFE.

A MECHANICAL THEORY OF EVOLUTION
AND OF LIFE THE ONLY ONE POS-
SIBLE--SPENCER AND THE LEARNED
SOCIETIES.

To the Editor of the New-York Times:

"Outsider" thinks that in the main he agrees with "R. G. E." This is very strange since "R. G. E." made a direct attack upon his positions seriatim. Now he centres all his opposition to "Spencerianism," as he is pleased to call the synthetic philosophy, because it gives us a purely mechanical explanation of objective nature. Perhaps "Outsider" will enlighten us upon what other kind of explanation he would have. A large number of people, the writer among the number, have somehow arrived at the idea that there are but two choices in the matter for the mind to grasp at. One is miracle, the equivalent of cosmic lawlessness; the other is mechanics, or the equivalent of law and order. Which of these does "Outsider" choose? If there is a third alternative, it is really a pity that no one has ever yet taken pains to formulate it. If there is a law of matter that is not mechanical, we should like to know it. Because evolution is a law it is and must necessarily be purely mechanical. To be otherwise, in its objective aspect, would make it what for lack of a more accurate term we might designate "caprice." The law of evolution was never formulated by any one before Spencer, although "Outsider" seems to think that it was. Long prior to Newton men believed that bodies of all kinds fell to the earth, but it was Newton who first taught that such falling was due to a force that varied inversely as the square of the distance and directly as the mass. Long before Dalton, the discrete character of the ultimate particles of matter was believed in, but he first showed the meaning of definite proportions in chemistry. Long before Spencer, men believed in change and some kind of orderly progress, but to his genius we are indebted for the discovery that the unfolding is a change "from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a definite, coherent heterogeneity, with the consequent integration of matter and dissemination of motion."

Mr. Spencer's life work has been the amassing of facts of science and the discovery of this law among them. The Moors had a vague conception of evolution, but surely "Outsider" would not claim for them a knowledge of the law of evolution. Kant believed in a vague type of evolution, but did not

know the law. Von Baer came nearer formulating it correctly than any person before Spencer, but he failed to see that it applied to the growth of worlds, life, and society. Neither Lamarck nor Darwin gave it to us, and the former never knew it. The latter lived to learn it from Herbert Spencer. A belief in progress is one thing and acceptance of the law of evolution is quite a different thing. "Outsider" ought to know this. If his latest words correctly express his views he denies the truth of that law and claims impliedly that no one has yet discovered it unless it is himself. It was Mill, I believe, that said that "words are the counters of wise men, but the money of fools." "Outsider" finds fault with Spencer because he subordinates the word life to the word force. He puts his objection as against the fact life and the fact force, however. If he would more carefully study Mr. Spencer's position he would see that his objection is purely verbal. Life in the Synthetic Philosophy is limited to adjustments among organisms. The old notion of a soul as the seat of life gives most minds a trend to a belief that the word life should be applied to a power or force distinct from but associated with the organism, and causing its adjustments. When Mr. Spencer uses the word life he means only the sum of the adjustments. When "Outsider" uses the same word his mind seems to be applying it to an occult cause of the adjustments. Mr. Spencer's force and "Outsider's" life approach each other more nearly than the word life as applied by both. Mr. Spencer subordinates the mechanical adjustments under the title "life" to that power that is over all, in all, and through all. When he is asked about that power he tells us that it is greater, not less, than consciousness. When deciding upon a choice between pure materialism, that makes the universe fundamentally and radically mindless, and pure idealism, that denies the existence of everything not mind, he unhesitatingly gives the weight of his opinion to idealism. He claims, however, that both are right in part and wrong in part. Objectively the universe is purely mechanical, but the evidence that this mechanism is only symbolic of an unknowable higher state is overwhelming.

"Outsider" loses sight entirely of the fact that all this mechanism to which he objects is symbolic and not actual. We are so constituted that we can only know relations, and the relations within the objective world cannot in the very nature of our knowing power be understood except as mechanical. His position seems to differ from Spencer's in that he holds to a belief in separate souls animating separate bodies, while Mr. Spencer rather favors the idea that the soul is the resultant of the body and its contained energy. The mind, according to Spencer, is but an opposite aspect of the brain substance and its activities.

"Outsider" may object to my thus defining his position, but in no other way can his drift be understood by the writer. If this is a wrong statement of the case, it will be a pleasure to receive a correction. He seems to have fallen seriously in love with that reversed universe idea, and as seriously believes that the law of evolution is not a mathematical consequence of the persistence of force, because it would be as consistent with birds growing back to eggs as eggs growing to birds. Indeed! Then in his mathematics, if all plus quantities become minus ones, the results will be identical. The doctrine of the persistence of force is not the doctrine of the non-persistence of force, surely. To reverse the velocity of a moving body, it must first come to a standstill. Its energy ceases to be molar and becomes molecular.

To reverse all movements, even the molecular must be reversed. But how shall we do this? It is to obliterate elasticity. A total reversal of energy will be a total extinction of energy at the turning point. But a total extinction of energy is a total proof that force does not persist. After extinguishing energy, the introduction into the universe of an equal negative quantity to the former positive would be still another proof of the non-persistence of force. A reversed universe causing birds to grow into eggs would be a universe in which the law of the persistence of force did not hold true. "Outsider" must seek some other reason for differing with Mr. Spencer than this.

What possible difference can it make to Mr. Spencer's worth or the truth of his positions whether societies of specialists acknowledge and honor him or not? He is not a chemist. Why should societies of chemists bestow honors upon him? He is not an astronomer. Why should astronomical societies claim him? He is not a specialist in any line, and has not at any time devoted his attention to original work with sufficient vigor and continuity to win such honors. None of them pretend to pay homage to the kind of work he has done. Prof. Cope is honored for his work as a paleontologist, and Prof. Cook for his as a chemist. Neither is esteemed in such societies directly for his generalizations. The theological bias is responsible in a great measure for this state of things. The Royal Society of Edinburgh honor Huxley that they may the more fully emphasize their persistent opposition and spite to generalizations that they deem anti-theological. The disciple is chosen because he has done much work they commend, and he is distinctly given to understand that it is because of such work they choose him. In this way they can the better express their disapproval of the work of the master that is of a different type. There are many members of that society that would be only too well pleased to honor Spencer, but that theological bias is yet too strong for them. He has done some work as a specialist, and should be received for that. But it is not enough to overbalance the weight of the supposed crime of his being a philosopher of a type distinctly disliked by bigots. R. G. E.

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