

perience of change, yet it is uniformity in the midst of change that produces the judgment of substance. Again, to stand in relation has no significance unless the relation be perceived. Standing in relation is no different from standing out of relation till the relation is perceived. Thus we are driven to our first conclusion that in reality we have attribute and the affirmation of it by the percipient. The latter, or essence, is subjective and the reality is the union of subjective and objective.

But for all practical purposes, we may be satisfied with the result of analysis. We know that an experience is real and are indifferent whether philosophy recognizes the criterion of validity or not.

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HERBERT SPENCER AS A PHILOSOPHER¹

IT is probably too soon to speak with confidence of Mr. Spencer's services to philosophy. The enthusiasm which greeted his philosophy more than a generation ago has waned under the growing conviction of looseness and inconsequence, and the result is that in recent years his genuine service to philosophy—and to science—has not been adequately recognized. What I shall say of him is that he introduced into science and philosophy a method which has resulted in a greater advance of thought than any since the beginning of modern science, but that his own use of this method was often superficial, and that his type of mind was in many respects distinctly unphilosophical.

He was unphilosophical in the sense that he was uncritical. His cast of mind was that of a blind empiricist. He was one of those who hold that knowledge is to be found simply by opening your eyes, that disagreement and error must be due either to negligence in observation or to blind prejudice. He sets out with the assertion of a fixed world-order. This world-order is not merely *postulated* as a necessity of thought—as a condition which must be realized in fact if we are to have knowledge—but is asserted as a positive and realized fact—as something not to be worked out and proven, but simply to be recognized. And Mr. Spencer betrays the *naïveté* of his assumption in his impatience with those who are slow to recognize—who fail to see the plain fact of universal causation. If he had examined his position he must have asked—as Kant had asked long before—whether this recognition of universal causation was not in

¹ Read at a meeting of the Texas Academy of Science, held in memory of Mr. Spencer, at the University of Texas, March 24, 1904.

itself of the nature of a prejudice. And if he had critically sifted his facts he must have seen that merely by themselves they presented no clear order, and that the order found in them was obtained by a process of selection, which, in a complexity of detail unmanageable as a whole, had emphasized the small part that could be actually ordered, and had ignored the rest, merely trusting that these too could be reduced to the same order. This ordering process had long before been pointed out and, in his derivation of the conception of cause, Mr. Spencer was, I believe, the first to offer a theory of its genesis. But his theory of the genesis of the causal order presupposed that the causal order was first a fact. Indeed, though the derivative character of other evolved conceptions led him to a criticism of their validity, it was never so in the case of causation. He remains throughout within the point of view which regards the causal order as a plain fact—as something not to be interpreted or proven, but merely to be recognized.

Mr. Spencer's type of mind was one that admitted of nothing but definite certainties. Though no one has done more than he to establish the view that all distinctions in the world are relative and all differences gradual, yet in practice his facts were all absolute. Everything real was perfectly clear, and anything not perfectly clear was wholly unreal and deserved no consideration whatever. There was with him no broad boundary of doubt, as with most of us, between the real and the unreal—or, rather, I should say, no series of imperceptible gradations between clearest reality and absolute negation. His real world was like that of the ancient geographers; there was a definite end to it, and when the end was reached there was a sudden fall into nothingness. No feature of his philosophy illustrates this better than his unknowable. To many readers the unknowable is a generous concession to the possibility that what is not known clearly may still be known to a degree and apprehended as real, and many theologians have sought to discover in the unknowable a possibility of sympathy with their own views. But from Mr. Spencer's practice it must be evident that the unknowable is a matter of logical courtesy and nothing more. After fixing the limits of the knowable with a precision that implies a good deal of information about the unknowable, the latter does not again enter seriously into his system of philosophy. His statements about the knowable are as positive and final as if there were no unknowable waiting to give them a new interpretation.

I have intimated that Mr. Spencer's hard facts were in reality the reflection of a personal point of view. Now this point of view, so far from being philosophical, was nothing more than the point of view of the plain man. Mr. Spencer was a plain man of the hard-

headed type—one who, indeed, was beyond the range of popular superstition, but who, on the other hand, accepted the laws of natural science with unquestioning reverence. This does not mean, of course, that a philosopher should not accept these laws, but merely that, as a philosopher, he should accept them as hypotheses, with a regard to their possible modification in a more general view of things. For Mr. Spencer, however, they were final and absolute verities. In his appeal from the reasonings of metaphysicians to the facts of science he was evidently unconscious of the metaphysics implied in the definition and demonstration of the facts; he forgot how often the laws of science had been reconstructed upon a modified basis, and he overlooked the probability, amounting almost to certainty, that what is now systematic and clear will in its turn be recognized as inconsistent and obscure and call again for redefinition. In fact, it is a curious paradox that Mr. Spencer's evolutionary philosophy made no provision for the further evolution of scientific conceptions or for the evolution of his own thought. Throughout a long life spent in the elaboration of a system of philosophy he retained unaltered the principles and even the prejudices with which he began. His native desire for and belief in individual independence suffered no modification through his later conception of society as a social organism. So also the physical conceptions accepted in his earlier works were greatly modified by physicists during his lifetime, and the modification was due partly, though indirectly, to the influence of his own writings. But in his own thought they were never modified. The point of view of the evolutionary works simply overlaid that of the 'Social Statics,' and the result is an evolutionary philosophy in which evolution is logically a mere appearance, in which the final realities—matter and force—remain just what they were from the beginning.

It is this standpoint of the plain man which accounts for the attention universally given to his philosophy and for the popular admiration of its simplicity and clearness. For even Mr. Spencer's opponents have been accustomed to admit that, in marked contrast to all other philosophies, his was at any rate simple and clear. In reality, however, there is no writer who illustrates so well how illusory clearness may be and how often it depends upon an unconscious similarity in the standpoints of writer and reader. Mr. Spencer was clear for those who shared with him the point of view of the plain man, and to whom no questions were suggested for which he did not provide. The moment we go outside of his point of view and attempt to consider his theories in relation to those of others, to determine just where he stands and just how he answers the main question at issue, we find ourselves in confusion; he is commonly, without sus-

pecting it, on all sides at once. We may then be able to see that there is a really organic and consistent view underlying his several statements, but to state it as his real view we shall have to modify many of his statements and to reject others as not properly expressing his meaning. This, at least, has been my own experience; and to those who wish to make a test of his clearness I recommend his views of heredity, of the association of ideas, and of the relations of egoism and altruism.

The outcome of Mr. Spencer's way of thinking is a system of philosophy which has the appearance of being carefully constructed upon a solid scientific foundation, but which is in reality full of superficial reasoning. This superficiality consists largely in the uncritical use of scientific metaphor. I say 'scientific' metaphor because Mr. Spencer, instead of taking his figures from common life, took them from physical science. He then proceeded to apply them by analogy to a wide range of phenomena without taking into account the difference between the phenomena thus defined and the original figure. The final result is an argument which is often hardly superior in quality to that of Henry Drummond's 'Natural Law in the Spiritual World.' To choose a glaring but not unrepresentative illustration, take his chapter in the 'First Principles' on 'The Rhythm of Motion.' Here Mr. Spencer undertakes to show that the law of rhythm is true not only of the vibrations of a string or of a tuning-fork, but of every change in the universe, including the changes of the weather, the appearance and extinction of animal species, the rise and fall of nations, and the fluctuations of mood and attention in the individual. Until we ask what is meant by rhythm this is all deeply significant. But upon asking this question our attention is called to the fact that by 'rhythm' we mean not only recurrent alternation of action and reaction, but periodic alternation—that is to say, action and reaction which repeats itself in equal intervals of time. But Mr. Spencer, after his first few instances, ignores the necessity of periodicity. He can not pretend to show that the alternations observable in our mental conditions, in society or (leaving out the annual changes) even in the weather, are periodically recurrent. What is the result? Either, we must say, his general law of rhythm is false or it is meaningless. It is false if he adheres strictly to the periodic nature of rhythm. It is meaningless if this is to be regarded as not essential. For, that there must be action and reaction—a departure from equilibrium, now in one direction, now in another—in a world where there is a plurality of moving bodies, or where action is not perfectly adjusted to ends, is so obvious as to be a truism. It would be remarkable if it were otherwise. If these alternations were periodic the fact of their occurrence would

be significant; in the absence of periodicity they are not worth mentioning.

I have allowed myself this criticism of Spencer because it seems to me that the severest criticism can not obscure the fact that he was a man of real genius and rendered invaluable services both to science and to philosophy. The question remains, then, regarding the nature of these services. He was not the first to conceive of biological evolution, for Lamarck and others were before him and Darwin is his contemporary;² nor was he the first to propose an evolutionary philosophy, for this had been done by Hegel; and for that matter, the conception of evolution may be found in the earliest Greek poetry. Mr. Spencer's real services to thought may, I think, be brought under the following heads:

In the first place, though he was not the originator of the conception of evolution, he was the first to make it a universal and effective working-hypothesis. Darwin had applied the conception only to animal life. The Hegelian evolution was the evolution of the idea—a logical order of derivation rather than the real order. The Hegelian meant, to be sure, that the logical order was in fact the real order, but his language and ideas were so far from those of common life, and indeed the concrete significance of his conceptions was so imperfectly appreciated by himself, that it is only in the light of Mr. Spencer's work that we call the Hegelian philosophy a philosophy of evolution. What Mr. Spencer did was not merely to convert a biological conception into an hypothesis for science in general, nor yet merely to *propose* it as a general working-hypothesis, but, by taking upon himself the labor of applying the conception to fact and detail, to show that it was clearly workable. Upon the results of his work it is unnecessary to enlarge. To the introduction of the evolutionary conception we owe not only a wide extension of practically every science, but the opening to systematic investigation of many fields which hitherto had been capable only of somewhat unordered description.

In the second place, through Mr. Spencer's work we have arrived at a more truly cosmic philosophy. By this I mean that we have been brought more clearly to the conviction that the world is a unitary system, and that every fact in the world derives its character and meaning from its place in the system as a whole. This was, of course, not a new conception. That all the different features of the world must be in some sense interdependent has been recognized

² For Mr. Spencer's place in the development of evolutionary theory see the preface to the fourth edition of the 'First Principles'; also Huxley's chapter "On the Reception of the 'Origin of Species,'" contributed to Darwin's 'Life and Letters.'

from earliest times, with more or less clearness, as the postulate of all philosophy. Mr. Spencer's service consisted—here again—in working out the conception in terms of fact and detail, and in making it a practical rule of thought. To give two instances: it is to him that we chiefly owe the acceptance of a universal interdependence of mind and brain as a working-hypothesis for psychology; and he was the first, I believe, to insist upon a physical and biological interpretation of human conduct. These were, indeed, the consequences of the conception of animal evolution. While human beings were regarded as a unique animal species, sharply differentiated from the beasts by the fact of moral sense and reason, there was no ground for treating human thought and action in the light of more general laws. It was Mr. Spencer by whom, in these regions, the consequences of evolution were enforced; so that it is now an all but universally accepted principle that there is nothing in the higher stages of evolution which is not in some form present in the lower, and nothing in the lower which does not in some form persist in the higher. The introduction of this principle into philosophical studies has made them not only more coherently and comprehensively philosophical, but at the same time more definite and concrete. The older moralist, for example, in his search for the end of human conduct, was limited to the facts of human life, and the range of possible interpretations was indefinitely large. When now he assumes that the same principle of action which governs human life must also be applied to that of the lower animals, the field of discussion is immensely narrowed and the problem is much more clearly defined. The same is true of the psychologist. Professor James has made an analysis of emotion which so far surpasses all others as to be the first really concrete description. But this analysis would never have been suggested except for the hypothesis that in human life we have only a later development of the impulses which govern the lower animals.

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DISCUSSION

TWO RECENT VIEWS OF THE PROBLEM OF REALISM

IN the fifth number of this JOURNAL Doctor Hartley Burr Alexander published an article entitled 'The Concept of Consciousness,' in which, if I understand him correctly, he attempted to disprove the ordinary psychophysical view of consciousness, so far as its relevancy for metaphysics is concerned, and to suggest in its