

# Reflex Action and Theism

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## MEMBERS OF THE MINISTERS' INSTITUTE:

Let me confess to the diffidence with which I find myself standing here to-day. When the invitation of your committee reached me last fall, the simple truth is that I accepted it as most men accept a challenge,—not because they wish to fight, but because they are ashamed to say no. Pretending in my small sphere to be a teacher, I felt it would be cowardly to shrink from the keenest ordeal to which a teacher can be exposed,—the ordeal of teaching other teachers. Fortunately, the trial will last but one short hour; and I have the consolation of remembering Goethe's verses,—

"Vor den Wissenden sich stellen,  
Sicher ist 's in allen Fällen,"—

for if experts are the hardest people to satisfy, they have at any rate the liveliest sense of the difficulties of one's task, and they know quickest when one hits the mark.

Since it was as a teacher of physiology that I was most unworthily officiating when your committee's invitation reached me, I must suppose it to be for the sake of bringing a puff of the latest winds of doctrine which blow over that somewhat restless sea that my presence is desired. Among all the healthy symptoms that characterize this age, I know no sounder one than the eagerness which theologians show to assimilate results of science, and to hearken to the conclusions of men of science about universal matters. One runs a better chance of being listened to to-day if one can quote Darwin and Helmholtz than if one can only quote Schleiermacher or Coleridge. I almost feel myself this moment that were I to produce a frog and put him through his physiological performances in a masterly manner before your eyes, I should gain more reverential ears for what I have to say during the remainder of the hour. I will not ask whether there be not something of mere fashion in this prestige which the words of the physiologists enjoy just now. If it be a fashion, it is certainly a beneficial one upon the whole; and to challenge it would come with a poor grace from one who at the moment he speaks is so conspicuously profiting by its favors.

I will therefore only say this: that the latest breeze from the physiological horizon need not necessarily be the most important one. Of the immense amount of work which the laboratories of Europe and America, and one may add of Asia and Australia, are producing every year, much is destined to speedy refutation; and of more it may be said that its interest is purely technical, and not in any degree philosophical or universal.

This being the case, I know you will justify me if I fall back on a doctrine which is fundamental and well established rather than novel, and ask you whether by taking counsel together we may not trace some new consequences from it which shall interest us all alike as men. I refer to the doctrine of reflex

action, especially as extended to the brain. This is, of course, so familiar to you that I hardly need define it. In a general way, all educated people know what reflex action means.

It means that the acts we perform are always the result of outward discharges from the nervous centres, and that these outward discharges are themselves the result of impressions from the external world, carried in along one or another of our sensory nerves. Applied at first to only a portion of our acts, this conception has ended by being generalized more and more, so that now most physiologists tell us that every action whatever, even the most deliberately weighed and calculated, does, so far as its organic conditions go, follow the reflex type. There is not one which cannot be remotely, if not immediately, traced to an origin in some incoming impression of sense. There is no impression of sense which, unless inhibited by some other stronger one, does not immediately or remotely express itself in action of some kind. There is no one of those complicated performances in the convolutions of the brain to which our trains of thought correspond, which is not a mere middle term interposed between an incoming sensation that arouses it and an outgoing discharge of some sort, inhibitory if not exciting, to which itself gives rise. The structural unit of the nervous system is in fact a triad, neither of whose elements has any independent existence. The sensory impression exists only for the sake of awaking the central process of reflection, and the central process of reflection exists only for the sake of calling forth the final act. All action is thus *re*-action upon the outer world; and the middle stage of consideration or contemplation or thinking is only a place of transit, the bottom of a loop, both whose ends have their point of application in the outer world. If it should ever have no roots in the outer world, if it should ever happen that it led to no active measures, it would fail of its essential function, and would have to be considered either pathological or abortive. The current of life which runs in at our eyes or ears is meant to run out at our hands, feet, or lips. The only use of the thoughts it occasions while inside is to determine its direction to whichever of these organs shall, on the whole, under the circumstances actually present, act in the way most propitious to our welfare.

The willing department of our nature, in short, dominates both the conceiving department and the feeling department; or, in plainer English, perception and thinking are only there for behavior's sake.

I am sure I am not wrong in stating this result as one of the fundamental conclusions to which the entire drift of modern physiological investigation sweeps us. If asked what great contribution physiology has made to psychology of late years, I am sure every competent authority will reply that her influence has in no way been so weighty as in the copious illustration, verification, and consolidation of this broad, general point of view.

I invite you, then, to consider what may be the possible speculative consequences involved in this great achievement of our generation. Already, it dominates all the new work done in psychology; but what I wish to ask is whether its influence may not extend far beyond the limits of psychology, even into those of theology herself. The relations of the doctrine of reflex action with no less a matter than the doctrine of theism is, in fact, the topic to which I now invite your attention.

We are not the first in the field. There have not been wanting writers enough to say that reflex action and all that follows from it give the *coup de grâce* to the superstition of a God.

If you open, for instance, such a book on comparative psychology, as *der Thierische Wille* of G. H. Schneider, you will find, sandwiched in among the admirable dealings of the author with his proper subject, and popping out upon us in unexpected places, the most delightfully *naïf* German onslaughts on the degradation of theologians, and the utter incompatibility of so many reflex adaptations to the

environment with the existence of a creative intelligence. There was a time, remembered by many of us here, when the existence of reflex action and all the other harmonies between the organism and the world were held to prove a God. Now, they are held to disprove him. The next turn of the whirligig may bring back proof of him again.

Into this debate about his existence, I will not pretend to enter. I must take up humbler ground, and limit my ambition to showing that a God, whether existent or not, is at all events the kind of being which, if he did exist, would form *the most adequate possible object* for minds framed like our own to conceive as lying at the root of the universe. My thesis, in other words, is this: that some outward reality of a nature defined as God's nature must be defined, is the only ultimate object that is at the same time rational and possible for the human mind's contemplation. *Anything short of God is not rational, anything more than God is not possible*, if the human mind be in truth the triadic structure of impression, reflection, and reaction which we at the outset allowed.

Theism, whatever its objective warrant, would thus be seen to have a subjective anchorage in its congruity with our nature as thinkers; and, however it may fare with its truth, to derive from this subjective adequacy the strongest possible guaranty of its permanence. It is and will be the classic mean of rational opinion, the centre of gravity of all attempts to solve the riddle of life,—some falling below it by defect, some flying above it by excess, itself alone satisfying every mental need in strictly normal measure. Our gain will thus in the first instance be psychological. We shall merely have investigated a chapter in the natural history of the mind, and found that, as a matter of such natural history, God may be called the normal object of the mind's belief. Whether over and above this he be really the living truth is another question. If he is, it will show the structure of our mind to be in accordance with the nature of reality. Whether it be or not in such accordance is, it seems to me, one of those questions that belong to the province of personal faith to decide. I will not touch upon the question here, for I prefer to keep to the strictly natural-history point of view. I will only remind you that each one of us is entitled either to doubt or to believe in the harmony between his faculties and the truth; and that, whether he doubt or believe, he does it alike on his personal responsibility and risk.

"Du musst glauben, du musst wagen,  
Denn die Götter leihn kein Pfand,  
Nur ein Wunder kann dich tragen  
In das schöne Wunderland."

I will presently define exactly what I mean by God and by Theism, and explain what theories I referred to when I spoke just now of attempts to fly beyond the one and to outbid the other.

But, first of all, let me ask you to linger a moment longer over what I have called the reflex theory of mind, so as to be sure that we understand it absolutely before going on to consider those of its consequences of which I am more particularly to speak. I am not quite sure that its full scope is grasped even by those who have most zealously promulgated it. I am not sure, for example, that all physiologists see that it commits them to regarding the mind as an essentially teleological mechanism. I mean by this that the conceiving or theorizing faculty—the mind's middle department—functions *exclusively for the sake of ends* that do not exist at all in the world of impressions we receive by way of our senses, but are set by our emotional and practical subjectivity altogether.<sup>1</sup> It is a transformer of the

world of our impressions into a totally different world,—the world of our conception; and the transformation is effected in the interests of our volitional nature, and for no other purpose whatsoever. Destroy the volitional nature, the definite subjective purposes, preferences, fondnesses for certain effects, forms, orders, and not the slightest motive would remain for the brute order of our experience to be remodelled at all. But, as we have the elaborate volitional constitution we do have, the remodelling must be effected; there is no escape. The world's contents are *given* to each of us in an order so foreign to our subjective interests that we can hardly by an effort of the imagination picture to ourselves what it is like. We have to break that order altogether,—and by picking out from it the items which concern us, and connecting them with others far away, which we say 'belong' with them, we are able to make out definite threads of sequence and tendency; to foresee particular liabilities and get ready for them; and to enjoy simplicity and harmony in place of what was chaos. Is not the sum of your actual experience taken at this moment and impartially added together an utter chaos? The strains of my voice, the lights and shades inside the room and out, the murmur of the wind, the ticking of the clock, the various organic feelings you may happen individually to possess, do these make a whole at all? Is it not the only condition of your mental sanity in the midst of them that most of them should become non-existent for you, and that a few others—the sounds, I hope, which I am uttering—should evoke from places in your memory that have nothing to do with this scene associates fitted to combine with them in what we call a rational train of thought,—rational, because it leads to a conclusion which we have some organ to appreciate? We have no organ or faculty to appreciate the simply given order. The real world as it is given objectively at this moment is the sum total of all its beings and events now. But can we think of such a sum? Can we realize for an instant what a cross-section of all existence at a definite point of time would be? While I talk and the flies buzz, a sea-gull catches a fish at the mouth of the Amazon, a tree falls in the Adirondack wilderness, a man sneezes in Germany, a horse dies in Tartary, and twins are born in France. What does that mean? Does the contemporaneity of these events with one another and with a million others as disjointed, form a rational bond between them, and unite them into anything that means for us a world? Yet just such a collateral contemporaneity, and nothing else, is the real order of the world. It is an order with which we have nothing to do but to get away from it as fast as possible. As I said, we break it: we break it into histories, and we break it into arts, and we break it into sciences; and then we begin to feel at home. We make ten thousand separate serial orders of it, and on any one of these we react as though the others did not exist. We discover among its various parts relations that were never given to sense at all (mathematical relations, tangents, squares, and roots and logarithmic functions), and out of an infinite number of these we call certain ones essential and lawgiving, and ignore the rest. Essential these relations are, but only *for our purpose*, the other relations being just as real and present as they; and our purpose is to *conceive simply* and to *foresee*. Are not simple conception and prevision subjective ends pure and simple? They are the ends of what we call science; and the miracle of miracles, a miracle not yet exhaustively cleared up by any philosophy, is that the given order lends itself to the remodelling. It shows itself plastic to many of our scientific, to many of our aesthetic, to many of our practical purposes and ends.

When the man of affairs, the artist, or the man of science fails, he is not rebutted. He tries again. He says the impressions of sense *must* give way, *must* be reduced to the desiderated form.<sup>2</sup> They all postulate in the interests of their volitional nature a harmony between the latter and the nature of things. The theologian does no more. And the reflex doctrine of the mind's structure, though all theology should as yet have failed of its endeavor, could but confess that the endeavor itself at least obeyed in form the mind's most necessary law.<sup>3</sup> Now for the question I asked above: What kind of a being would God be if he did exist? The word 'God' has come to mean many things in the history of human thought, from Venus and Jupiter to the 'Idee' which figures in the pages of Hegel. Even the

laws of physical nature have, in these positivistic times, been held worthy of divine honor and presented as the only fitting object of our reverence.<sup>4</sup> Of course, if our discussion is to bear any fruit, we must mean something more definite than this. We must not call any object of our loyalty a 'God' without more ado, simply because to awaken our loyalty happens to be one of God's functions. He must have some intrinsic characteristics of his own besides; and theism must mean the faith of that man who believes that the object of *his* loyalty has those other attributes, negative or positive, as the case may be.

Now, as regards a great many of the attributes of God, and their amounts and mutual relations, the world has been delivered over to disputes. All such may for our present purpose be considered as quite inessential. Not only such matters as his mode of revealing himself, the precise extent of his providence and power and their connection with our free-will, the proportion of his mercy to his justice, and the amount of his responsibility for evil; but also his metaphysical relation to the phenomenal world, whether causal, substantial, ideal, or what not,—are affairs of purely sectarian opinion that need not concern us at all. Whoso debates them presupposes the essential features of theism to be granted already; and it is with these essential features, the bare poles of the subject, that our business exclusively lies.

Now, what are these essential features? First, it is essential that God be conceived as the deepest power in the universe; and, second, he must be conceived under the form of a mental personality. The personality need not be determined intrinsically any further than is involved in the holding of certain things dear, and in the recognition of our dispositions toward those things, the things themselves being all good and righteous things. But, extrinsically considered, so to speak, God's personality is to be regarded, like any other personality, as something lying outside of my own and other than me, and whose existence I simply come upon and find. A power not ourselves, then, which not only makes for righteousness, but means it, and which recognizes us,—such is the definition which I think nobody will be inclined to dispute. Various are the attempts to shadow forth the other lineaments of so supreme a personality to our human imagination; various the ways of conceiving in what mode the recognition, the hearkening to our cry, can come. Some are gross and idolatrous; some are the most sustained efforts man's intellect has ever made to keep still living on that subtle edge of things where speech and thought expire. But, with all these differences, the essence remains unchanged. In whatever other respects the divine personality may differ from ours or may resemble it, the two are consanguineous at least in this,—that both have purposes for which they care, and each can hear the other's call.

Meanwhile, we can already see one consequence and one point of connection with the reflex-action theory of mind. Any mind, constructed on the triadic-reflex pattern, must first get its impression from the object which it confronts; then define what that object is, and decide what active measures its presence demands; and finally react. The stage of reaction depends on the stage of definition, and these, of course, on the nature of the impressing object. When the objects are concrete, particular, and familiar, our reactions are firm and certain enough,—often instinctive. I see the desk, and lean on it; I see your quiet faces, and I continue to talk. But the objects will not stay concrete and particular: they fuse themselves into general essences, and they sum themselves into a whole,—the universe. And then the object that confronts us, that knocks on our mental door and asks to be let in, and fixed and decided upon and actively met, is just this whole universe itself and its essence.

What are *they*, and how shall I meet *them*?

The whole flood of faiths and systems here rush in. Philosophies and denials of philosophy, religions and atheisms, scepticisms and mysticisms, confirmed emotional moods and habitual practical biases, jostle one another; for all are alike trials, hasty, prolix, or of seemly length, to answer this momentous question. And the function of them all, long or short, that which the moods and the systems alike subserve and pass into, is the third stage,—the stage of action. For no one of them itself is final. They form but the middle segment of the mental curve, and not its termination. As the last theoretic pulse dies away, it does not leave the mental process complete: it is but the forerunner of the practical moment, in which alone the cycle of mentality finds its rhythmic pause.

We easily delude ourselves about this middle stage. Sometimes we think it final, and sometimes we fail to see, amid the monstrous diversity in the length and complication of the cogitations which may fill it, that it can have but one essential function, and that the one we have pointed out,—the function of defining the direction which our activity, immediate or remote, shall take.

If I simply say, "Vanitas vanitatum, omnia vanitas!" I am defining the total nature of things in a way that carries practical consequences with it as decidedly as if I write a treatise *De Natura Rerum* in twenty volumes. The treatise may trace its consequences more minutely than the saying; but the only worth of either treatise or saying is that the consequences are there. The long definition can do no more than draw them; the short definition does no less. Indeed, it may be said that if two apparently different definitions of the reality before us should have identical consequences, those two definitions would really be identical definitions, made delusively to appear different merely by the different verbiage in which they are expressed.<sup>5</sup> My time is unfortunately too short to stay and give to this truth the development it deserves; but I will assume that you grant it without further parley, and pass to the next step in my argument. And here, too, I shall have to bespeak your close attention for a moment, while I pass over the subject far more rapidly than it deserves. Whether true or false, any view of the universe which shall completely satisfy the mind must obey conditions of the mind's own imposing, must at least let the mind be the umpire to decide whether it be fit to be called a rational universe or not. Not any nature of things which may seem to be will also seem to be *ipso facto* rational; and if it do not seem rational, it will afflict the mind with a ceaseless uneasiness, till it be formulated or interpreted in some other and more congenial way. The study of what the mind's criteria of rationality are, the definition of its exactions in this respect, form an intensely interesting subject into which I cannot enter now with any detail.<sup>6</sup> But so much I think you will grant me without argument,—that all three departments of the mind alike have a vote in the matter, and that no conception will pass muster which violates any of their essential modes of activity, or which leaves them without a chance to work. By what title is it that every would-be universal formula, every system of philosophy which rears its head, receives the inevitable critical volley from one half of mankind, and falls to the rear, to become at the very best the creed of some partial sect? Either it has dropped out of its net some of our impressions of sense,—what we call the facts of nature,—or it has left the theoretic and defining department with a lot of inconsistencies and unmediated transitions on its hands; or else, finally, it has left some one or more of our fundamental active and emotional powers with no object outside of themselves to react-on or to live for. Any one of these defects is fatal to its complete success. Some one will be sure to discover the flaw, to scout the system, and to seek another in its stead.

I need not go far to collect examples to illustrate to an audience of theologians what I mean. Nor will you in particular, as champions of the Unitarianism of New England, be slow to furnish, from the motives which led to your departure from our orthodox ancestral Calvinism, instances enough under the third or practical head. A God who gives so little scope to love, a predestination which takes from endeavor all its zest with all its fruit, are irrational conceptions, because they say to our most cherished

powers, There is no object for you.

Well, just as within the limits of theism some kinds are surviving others by reason of their greater practical rationality, so theism itself, by reason of its practical rationality, is certain to survive all lower creeds. Materialism and agnosticism, even were they true, could never gain universal and popular acceptance; for they both, alike, give a solution of things which is irrational to the practical third of our nature, and in which we can never volitionally feel at home. Each comes out of the second or theoretic stage of mental functioning, with its definition of the essential nature of things, its formula of formulas prepared. The whole array of active forces of our nature stands waiting, impatient for the word which shall tell them how to discharge themselves most deeply and worthily upon life. "Well!" cry they, "what shall we do?" "Ignoramus, ignorabimus!" says agnosticism. "React upon atoms and their concussions!" says materialism. What a collapse! The mental train misses fire, the middle fails to ignite the end, the cycle breaks down half-way to its conclusion; and the active powers left alone, with no proper object on which to vent their energy, must either atrophy, sicken, and die, or else by their pent-up convulsions and excitement keep the whole machinery in a fever until some less incommensurable solution, some more practically rational formula, shall provide a normal issue for the currents of the soul.

Now, theism always stands ready with the most practically rational solution it is possible to conceive. Not an energy of our active nature to which it does not authoritatively appeal, not an emotion of which it does not normally and naturally release the springs. At a single stroke, it changes the dead blank *it* of the world into a living *thou*, with whom the whole man may have dealings. To you, at any rate, I need waste no words in trying to prove its supreme commensurateness with all the demands that department Number Three of the mind has the power to impose on department Number Two.

Our volitional nature must then, until the end of time, exert a constant pressure upon the other departments of the mind to induce them to function to theistic conclusions. No contrary formulas can be more than provisionally held. Infra-theistic theories must be always in unstable equilibrium; for department Number Three ever lurks in ambush, ready to assert its rights, and on the slightest show of justification it makes its fatal spring, and converts them into the other form in which alone mental peace and order can permanently reign.

The question is, then, *Can* departments One and Two, *can* the facts of nature and the theoretic elaboration of them, always lead to theistic conclusions?

The future history of philosophy is the only authority capable of answering that question. I, at all events, must not enter into it to-day, as that would be to abandon the purely natural-history point of view I mean to keep.

This only is certain, that the theoretic faculty lives between two fires which never give her rest, and make her incessantly revise her formulations. If she sink into a premature, short-sighted, and idolatrous theism, in comes department Number One with its battery of facts of sense, and dislodges her from her dogmatic repose. If she lazily subside into equilibrium with the same facts of sense viewed in their simple mechanical outwardness, up starts the practical reason with its demands, and makes *that* couch a bed of thorns. From generation to generation thus it goes,—now a movement of reception from without, now one of expansion from within; department Number Two always worked to death, yet never excused from taking the most responsible part in the arrangements. To-day, a crop of new facts; to-morrow, a flowering of new motives,—the theoretic faculty always having to effect the transition,

and life growing withal so complex and subtle and immense that her powers of conceiving are almost ruptured with the strain. See how, in France, the mummy-cloths of the academic and official theistic philosophy are rent by the facts of evolution, and how the young thinkers are at work! See, in Great Britain, how the dryness of the strict associationist school, which under the ministration of Mill, Bain, and Spencer dominated us but yesterday, gives way to more generous idealisms, born of more urgent emotional needs and wrapping the same facts in far more massive intellectual harmonies! These are but tackings to the common port, to that ultimate *Weltanschauung* of maximum subjective as well as objective richness, which, whatever its other properties may be, will at any rate wear the theistic form.

Here let me say one word about a remark we often hear coming from the anti-theistic wing: It is base, it is vile, it is the lowest depth of immorality, to allow department Number Three to interpose its demands, and have any vote in the question of what is true and what is false; the mind must be a passive, reactionless sheet of white paper, on which reality will simply come and register its own philosophic definition, as the pen registers the curve on the sheet of a chronograph. "Of all the cants that are canted in this canting age" this has always seemed to me the most wretched, especially when it comes from professed psychologists. As if the mind could, consistently with its definition, be a reactionless sheet at all! As if conception could possibly occur except for a teleological purpose, except to show us the way from a state of things our senses cognize to another state of things our will desires! As if 'science' itself were anything else than such an end of desire, and a most peculiar one at that! And as if the 'truths' of bare physics in particular, which these sticklers for intellectual purity contend to be the only uncontaminated form, were not as great an alteration and falsification of the simply 'given' order of the world, into an order conceived solely for the mind's convenience and delight, as any theistic doctrine possibly can be!

Physics is but one chapter in the great jugglery which our conceiving faculty is forever playing with the order of being as it presents itself to our reception. It transforms the unutterable dead level and continuum of the 'given' world into an utterly unlike world of sharp differences and hierarchic subordinations for no other reason than to satisfy certain subjective passions we possess.<sup>7</sup>

And, so far as we can see, the given world is there only for the sake of the operation. At any rate, to operate upon it is our only chance of approaching it; for never can we get a glimpse of it in the unimaginable insipidity of its virgin estate. To bid the man's subjective interests be passive till truth express itself from out the environment, is to bid the sculptor's chisel be passive till the statue express itself from out the stone. Operate we must! and the only choice left us is that between operating to poor or to rich results. The only possible duty there can be in the matter is the duty of getting the richest results that the material given will allow. The richness lies, of course, in the energy of all three departments of the mental cycle. Not a sensible 'fact' of department One must be left in the cold, not a faculty of department Three be paralyzed; and department Two must form an indestructible bridge. It is natural that the habitual neglect of department One by theologians should arouse indignation; but it is most *unnatural* that the indignation should take the form of a wholesale denunciation of department Three. It is the story of Kant's dove over again, denouncing the pressure of the air. Certain of our positivists keep chiming to us, that, amid the wreck of every other god and idol, one divinity still stands upright,—that his name is Scientific Truth, and that he has but one commandment, but that one supreme, saying, *Thou shalt not be a theist*, for that would be to satisfy thy subjective propensities, and the satisfaction of those is intellectual damnation. These most conscientious gentlemen think they have jumped off their own feet,—emancipated their mental operations from the control of their subjective propensities at large and *in toto*. But they are deluded. They have simply chosen from among the entire set of propensities at their command those that were certain to construct, out of the materials given, the



leanest, lowest, aridest result,—namely, the bare molecular world,—and they have sacrificed all the rest.<sup>8</sup>

Man's chief difference from the brutes lies in the exuberant excess of his subjective propensities,—his pre-eminence over them simply and solely in the number and in the fantastic and unnecessary character of his wants, physical, moral, aesthetic, and intellectual. Had his whole life not been a quest for the superfluous, he would never have established himself as inexpugnably as he has done in the necessary. And from the consciousness of this he should draw the lesson that his wants are to be trusted; that even when their gratification seems farthest off, the uneasiness they occasion is still the best guide of his life, and will lead him to issues entirely beyond his present powers of reckoning. Prune down his extravagance, sober him, and you undo him. The appetite for immediate consistency at any cost, or what the logicians call the 'law of parsimony,'—which is nothing but the passion for conceiving the universe in the most labor-saving way,—will, if made the exclusive law of the mind, end by blighting the development of the intellect itself quite as much as that of the feelings or the will. The scientific conception of the world as an army of molecules gratifies this appetite after its fashion most exquisitely. But if the religion of exclusive scientificism should ever succeed in suffocating all other appetites out of a nation's mind, and imbuing a whole race with the persuasion that simplicity and consistency demand a *tabula rasa* to be made of every notion that does not form part of the *soi-disant* scientific synthesis, that nation, that race, will just as surely go to ruin, and fall a prey to their more richly constituted neighbors, as the beasts of the field, as a whole, have fallen a prey to man.

I have myself little fear for our Anglo-Saxon race. Its moral, aesthetic, and practical wants form too dense a stubble to be mown by any scientific Occam's razor that has yet been forged. The knights of the razor will never form among us more than a sect; but when I see their fraternity increasing in numbers, and, what is worse, when I see their negations acquiring almost as much prestige and authority as their affirmations legitimately claim over the minds of the docile public, I feel as if the influences working in the direction of our mental barbarization were beginning to be rather strong, and needed some positive counteraction. And when I ask myself from what quarter the invasion may best be checked, I can find no answer as good as the one suggested by casting my eyes around this room. For this needful task, no fitter body of men than the Unitarian clergy exists. Who can uphold the rights of department Three of the mind with better grace than those who long since showed how they could fight and suffer for department One? As, then, you burst the bonds of a narrow ecclesiastical tradition, by insisting that no fact of sense or result of science must be left out of account in the religious synthesis, so may you still be the champions of mental completeness and all-sidedness. May you, with equal success, avert the formation of a narrow scientific tradition, and burst the bonds of any synthesis which would pretend to leave out of account those forms of being, those relations of reality, to which at present our active and emotional tendencies are our only avenues of approach. I hear it said that Unitarianism is not growing in these days. I know nothing of the truth of the statement; but if it be true, it is surely because the great ship of Orthodoxy is nearing the port and the pilot is being taken on board. If you will only lead in a theistic science, as successfully as you have led in a scientific theology, your separate name as Unitarians may perish from the mouths of men; for your task will have been done, and your function at an end. Until that distant day, you have work enough in both directions awaiting you.

Meanwhile, let me pass to the next division of our subject. I said that we are forced to regard God as the normal object of the mind's belief, inasmuch as any conception that falls short of God is irrational, if the word 'rational' be taken in its fullest sense; while any conception that goes beyond God is impossible, if the human mind be constructed after the triadic-reflex pattern we have discussed at such

length. The first half of the thesis has been disposed of. Infra-theistic conceptions, materialisms and agnosticisms, are irrational because they are inadequate stimuli to man's practical nature. I have now to justify the latter half of the thesis.

I dare say it may for an instant have perplexed some of you that I should speak of conceptions that aimed at going beyond God, and of attempts to fly above him or outbid him; so I will now explain exactly what I mean. In defining the essential attributes of God, I said he was a personality lying outside our own and other than us,—a power not ourselves. Now, the attempts to fly beyond theism, of which I speak, are attempts to get over this ultimate duality of God and his believer, and to transform it into some sort or other of identity. If infratheistic ways of looking on the world leave it in the third person, a mere *it*; and if theism turns the *it* into a *thou*,—so we may say that these other theories try to cover it with the mantle of the first person, and to make it a part of *me*.

I am well aware that I begin here to tread on ground in which trenchant distinctions may easily seem to mutilate the facts.

That sense of emotional reconciliation with God which characterizes the highest moments of the theistic consciousness may be described as 'oneness' with him, and so from the very bosom of theism a monistic doctrine seems to arise. But this consciousness of self-surrender, of absolute practical union between one's self and the divine object of one's contemplation, is a totally different thing from any sort of substantial identity. Still the object God and the subject I are two. Still I simply come upon him, and find his existence given to me; and the climax of my practical union with what is given, forms at the same time the climax of my perception that as a numerical fact of existence I am something radically other than the Divinity with whose effulgence I am filled.

Now, it seems to me that the only sort of union of creature with creator with which theism, properly so called, comports, is of this emotional and practical kind; and it is based unchangeably on the empirical fact that the thinking subject and the object thought are numerically two. How my mind and will, which are not God, can yet cognize and leap to meet him, how I ever came to be so separate from him, and how God himself came to be at all, are problems that for the theist can remain unsolved and insoluble forever. It is sufficient for him to know that he himself simply is, and needs God; and that behind this universe God simply is and will be forever, and will in some way hear his call. In the practical assurance of these empirical facts, without 'Erkenntnisstheorie' or philosophical ontology, without metaphysics of emanation or creation to justify or make them more intelligible, in the blessedness of their mere acknowledgment as given, lie all the peace and power he craves. The floodgates of the religious life are opened, and the full currents can pour through.

It is this empirical and practical side of the theistic position, its theoretic chastity and modesty, which I wish to accentuate here. The highest flights of theistic mysticism, far from pretending to penetrate the secrets of the *me* and the *thou* in worship, and to transcend the dualism by an act of intelligence, simply turn their backs on such attempts. The problem for them has simply vanished,—vanished from the sight of an attitude which refuses to notice such futile theoretic difficulties. Get but that "peace of God which passeth understanding," and the questions of the understanding will cease from puzzling and pedantic scruples be at rest. In other words, theistic mysticism, that form of theism which at first sight seems most to have transcended the fundamental otherness of God from man, has done it least of all in the theoretic way. The pattern of its procedure is precisely that of the simplest man dealing with the simplest fact of his environment. Both he and the theist tarry in department Two of their minds only so long as is necessary to define what is the presence that confronts them. The theist decides that

its character is such as to be fitly responded to on his part by a religious reaction; and into that reaction he forthwith pours his soul. His insight into the *what* of life leads to results so immediately and intimately rational that the *why*, the *how*, and the *whence* of it are questions that lose all urgency. 'Gefühl ist Alles,' Faust says. The channels of department Three have drained those of department Two of their contents; and happiness over the fact that being has made itself what it is, evacuates all speculation as to how it could make itself at all.

But now, although to most human minds such a position as this will be the position of rational equilibrium, it is not difficult to bring forward certain considerations, in the light of which so simple and practical a mental movement begins to seem rather short-winded and second-rate and devoid of intellectual style. This easy acceptance of an opaque limit to our speculative insight; this satisfaction with a Being whose character we simply apprehend without comprehending anything more about him, and with whom after a certain point our dealings can be only of a volitional and emotional sort; above all, this sitting down contented with a blank unmediated dualism,—are they not the very picture of unfaithfulness to the rights and duties of our theoretic reason?

Surely, if the universe is reasonable (and we must believe that it is so), it must be susceptible, potentially at least, of being reasoned *out* to the last drop without residuum. Is it not rather an insult to the very word 'rational' to say that the rational character of the universe and its creator means no more than that we practically feel at home in their presence, and that our powers are a match for their demands? Do they not in fact demand to be *understood* by us still more than to be reacted on? Is not the unparalleled development of department Two of the mind in man his crowning glory and his very essence; and may not the *knowing of the truth* be his absolute vocation? And if it is, ought he flatly to acquiesce in a spiritual life of 'reflex type,' whose form is no higher than that of the life that animates his spinal cord,—nay, indeed, that animates the writhing segments of any mutilated worm?

It is easy to see how such arguments and queries may result in the erection of an ideal of our mental destiny, far different from the simple and practical religious one we have described. We may well begin to ask whether such things as practical reactions can be the final upshot and purpose of all our cognitive energy. Mere outward acts, changes in the position of parts of matter (for they are nothing else), can they possibly be the culmination and consummation of our relations with the nature of things? Can they possibly form a result to which our godlike powers of insight shall be judged merely subservient? Such an idea, if we scan it closely, soon begins to seem rather absurd. Whence this piece of matter comes and whither that one goes, what difference ought that to make to the nature of things, except so far as with the comings and the goings our wonderful inward conscious harvest may be reaped?

And so, very naturally and gradually, one may be led from the theistic and practical point of view to what I shall call the *gnostical* one. We may think that department Three of the mind, with its doings of right and its doings of wrong, must be there only to serve department Two; and we may suspect that the sphere of our activity exists for no other purpose than to illumine our cognitive consciousness by the experience of its results. Are not all sense and all emotion at bottom but turbid and perplexed modes of what in its clarified shape is intelligent cognition? Is not all experience just the eating of the fruit of the tree of *knowledge* of good and evil, and nothing more?

These questions fan the fire of an unassuageable gnostic thirst, which is as far removed from theism in one direction as agnosticism was removed from it in the other; and which aspires to nothing less than an absolute unity of knowledge with its object, and refuses to be satisfied short of a fusion and solution

and saturation of both impression and action with reason, and an absorption of all three departments of the mind into one. Time would fail us to-day (even had I the learning, which I have not) to speak of gnostic systems in detail. The aim of all of them is to shadow forth a sort of process by which spirit, emerging from its beginnings and exhausting the whole circle of finite experience in its sweep, shall at last return and possess itself as its own object at the climax of its career. This climax is the religious consciousness. At the giddy height of this conception, whose latest and best known form is the Hegelian philosophy, definite words fail to serve their purpose; and the ultimate goal,—where object and subject, worshipped and worshipper, facts and the knowledge of them, fall into one, and where no other is left outstanding beyond this one that alone is, and that we may call indifferently act or fact, reality or idea, God or creation,—this goal, I say, has to be adumbrated to our halting and gasping intelligence by coarse physical metaphors, 'positings' and 'self-returnings' and 'removals' and 'settings free,' which hardly help to make the matter clear.

But from the midst of the curdling and the circling of it all we seem dimly to catch a glimpse of a state in which the reality to be known and the power of knowing shall have become so mutually adequate that each exhaustively is absorbed by the other and the twain become one flesh, and in which the light shall somehow have soaked up all the outer darkness into its own ubiquitous beams. Like all headlong ideals, this apotheosis of the bare conceiving faculty has its depth and wildness, its pang and its charm. To many it sings a truly siren strain; and so long as it is held only as a postulate, as a mere vanishing point to give perspective to our intellectual aim, it is hard to see any empirical title by which we may deny the legitimacy of gnosticism's claims. That we are not as yet near the goal it prefigures can never be a reason why we might not continue indefinitely to approach it; and to all sceptical arguments, drawn from our reason's actual finiteness, gnosticism can still oppose its indomitable faith in the infinite character of its potential destiny.

Now, here it is that the physiologist's generalization, as it seems to me, may fairly come in, and by ruling any such extravagant faith out of court help to legitimate our personal mistrust of its pretensions. I confess that I myself have always had a great mistrust of the pretensions of the gnostic faith. Not only do I utterly fail to understand what a cognitive faculty erected into the absolute of being, with itself as its object, can mean; but even if we grant it a being other than itself for object, I cannot reason myself out of the belief that however familiar and at home we might become with the character of that being, the bare being of it, the fact that it is there at all, must always be something blankly given and presupposed in order that conception may begin its work; must in short lie beyond speculation, and not be enveloped in its sphere.

Accordingly, it is with no small pleasure that as a student of physiology and psychology I find the only lesson I can learn from these sciences to be one that corroborates these convictions. From its first dawn to its highest actual attainment, we find that the cognitive faculty, where it appears to exist at all, appears but as one element in an organic mental whole, and as a minister to higher mental powers,—the powers of will. Such a thing as its emancipation and absolution from these organic relations receives no faintest color of plausibility from any fact we can discern. Arising as a part, in a mental and objective world which are both larger than itself, it must, whatever its powers of growth may be (and I am far from wishing to disparage them), remain a part to the end. This is the character of the cognitive element in all the mental life we know, and we have no reason to suppose that that character will ever change. On the contrary, it is more than probable that to the end of time our power of moral and volitional response to the nature of things will be the deepest organ of communication therewith we shall ever possess. In every being that is real there is something external to, and sacred from, the grasp of every other. God's being is sacred from ours. To co-operate with his creation by the

best and rightest response seems all he wants of us. In such co-operation with his purposes, not in any chimerical speculative conquest of him, not in any theoretic drinking of him up, must lie the real meaning of our destiny.

This is nothing new. All men know it at those rare moments when the soul sobers herself, and leaves off her chattering and protesting and insisting about this formula or that. In the silence of our theories we then seem to listen, and to hear something like the pulse of Being beat; and it is borne in upon us that the mere turning of the character, the dumb willingness to suffer and to serve this universe, is more than all theories about it put together. The most any theory about it can do is to bring us to that. Certain it is that the acutest theories, the greatest intellectual power, the most elaborate education, are a sheer mockery when, as too often happens, they feed mean motives and a nerveless will. And it is equally certain that a resolute moral energy, no matter how inarticulate or unequipped with learning its owner may be, extorts from us a respect we should never pay were we not satisfied that the essential root of human personality lay there.

I have sketched my subject in the briefest outlines; but still I hope you will agree that I have established my point, and that the physiological view of mentality, so far from invalidating, can but give aid and comfort to the theistic attitude of mind. Between agnosticism and gnosticism, theism stands midway, and holds to what is true in each. With agnosticism, it goes so far as to confess that we cannot know how Being made itself or us. With gnosticism, it goes so far as to insist that we can know Being's character when made, and how it asks us to behave.

If any one fear that in insisting so strongly that behavior is the aim and end of every sound philosophy I have curtailed the dignity and scope of the speculative function in us, I can only reply that in this ascertainment of the *character* of Being lies an almost infinite speculative task. Let the voluminous considerations by which all modern thought converges toward idealistic or pan-psychic conclusions speak for me. Let the pages of a Hodgson, of a Lotze, of a Renouvier, reply whether within the limits drawn by purely empirical theism the speculative faculty finds not, and shall not always find, enough to do. But do it little or much, its *place* in a philosophy is always the same, and is set by the structural form of the mind. Philosophies, whether expressed in sonnets or systems, all must wear this form. The thinker starts from some experience of the practical world, and asks its meaning. He launches himself upon the speculative sea, and makes a voyage long or short. He ascends into the empyrean, and communes with the eternal essences. But whatever his achievements and discoveries be while gone, the utmost result they can issue in is some new practical maxim or resolve, or the denial of some old one, with which inevitably he is sooner or later washed ashore on the *terra firma* of concrete life again.

Whatever thought takes this voyage is a philosophy. We have seen how theism takes it. And in the philosophy of a thinker who, though long neglected, is doing much to renovate the spiritual life of his native France to-day (I mean Charles Renouvier, whose writings ought to be better known among us than they are), we have an instructive example of the way in which this very empirical element in theism, its confession of an ultimate opacity in things, of a dimension of being which escapes our theoretic control, may suggest a most definite practical conclusion,—this one, namely, that 'our wills are free.' I will say nothing of Renouvier's line of reasoning; it is contained in many volumes which I earnestly recommend to your attention.<sup>9</sup> But to enforce my doctrine that the number of volumes is not what makes the philosophy, let me conclude by recalling to you the little poem of Tennyson, published last year, in which the speculative voyage is made, and the same conclusion reached in a few lines:—

"Out of the deep, my child, out of the deep, From that great deep before our world begins,  
Whereon the Spirit of God moves as he will,—  
Out of the deep, my child, out of the deep,  
From that true world within the world we see,  
Whereof our world is but the bounding shore,—  
Out of the deep, Spirit, out of the deep,  
With this ninth moon that sends the hidden sun  
Down yon dark sea, thou comest, darling boy.  
For in the world which is not ours, they said,  
'Let us make man,' and that which should be man,  
From that one light no man can look upon,  
Drew to this shore lit by the suns and moons  
And all the shadows. O dear Spirit, half-lost  
In thine own shadow and this fleshly sign  
That thou art thou,—who wailest being born  
And banish'd into mystery,...  
...our mortal veil  
And shattered phantom of that Infinite One,  
Who made thee unconceivably thyself  
Out of his whole world-self and all in all,—  
Live thou, and of the grain and husk, the grape  
And ivyberry, choose; and still depart  
From death to death through life and life, and find  
Nearer and ever nearer Him who wrought  
Not matter, nor the finite-infinite,  
*But this main miracle, that thou art thou,*  
*With power on thine own act and on the world."*

1. See some Remarks on Spencer's Definition of Mind, in the Journal of Speculative Philosophy for January, 1878.
2. "No amount of failure in the attempt to subject the world of sensible experience to a thorough-going system of conceptions, and to bring all happenings back to cases of immutably valid law, is able to shake our faith in the rightness of our principles. We hold fast to our demand that even the greatest apparent confusion must sooner or later solve itself in transparent formulas. We begin the work ever afresh; and, refusing to believe that nature will permanently withhold the reward of our exertions, think rather that we have hitherto only failed to push them in the right direction. And all this pertinacity flows from a conviction that we have no right to renounce the fulfilment of our task. What, in short sustains the courage of investigators is the force of obligation of an ethical idea." (Sigwart: Logik, bd. ii., p. 23.)

This is a true account of the spirit of science. Does it essentially differ from the spirit of religion? And is any one entitled to say in advance, that, while the one form of faith shall be crowned with success, the other is certainly doomed to fail?

3. Concerning the transformation of the given order into the order of conception, see S. H. Hodgson, The Philosophy of Reflection, chap. v.; H. Lotze, Logik, sects. 342-351; C. Sigwart, Logik, sects. 60-63, 105.
4. Haeckel has recently (Der Monismus, 1893, p. 37) proposed the Cosmic Ether as a divinity fitted to reconcile science with theistic faith.
5. See the admirably original "Illustrations of the Logic of Science," by C. S. Peirce, especially the second paper, "How to make our Thoughts clear," in the Popular Science Monthly for January, 1878.

6. On this subject, see the preceding Essay.
  7. "As soon as it is recognized that our thought, as logic deals with it, reposes on our *will to think*, the primacy of the will, even in the theoretical sphere, must be conceded; and the last of presuppositions is not merely [Kant's] that 'I think' must accompany all my representations, but also that 'I will' must dominate all my thinking." (Sigwart; Logik, II. 25.)
  8. As our ancestors said, *Fiat justitia, pereat mundus*, so we, who do not believe in justice or any absolute good, must, according to these prophets, be willing to see the world perish, in order that *scientia fiat*. Was there ever a more exquisite idol of the den, or rather of the *shop*? In the clean sweep to be made of superstitions, let the idol of stern obligation to be scientific go with the rest, and people will have a fair chance to understand one another. But this blowing of hot and of cold makes nothing but confusion.
  9. Especially the *Essais de Critique Générale*, 2me Edition, 6 vols., 12mo, Paris, 1875; and the *Esquisse d'une Classification Systématique des Doctrines Philosophiques*, 2 vols., 8vo, Paris, 1885.
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