

A TRUCE OF PHILOSOPHIES.

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PRAGMATISM says that truth is always relative to our development of mind, and valued according to our purposes. If this is true—and there is no doubt but it at least represents a truth—then a philosophy that can reconcile the sustaining purposes of materialism, idealism and pantheism, will be able so to appeal to the whole soul of man that he will recognize the teaching as truth—as the idea-embodiment-for-him of reality. To sketch the outlines of such a reconciling philosophy, and to show the real underlying harmony between these three philosophies, is the none too modest purpose of this essay.

Following the pragmatic principle of practicality, let us try to assign a place to pantheism. The chief objection to pantheism is the passive mood that it imparts. The recognition of worthiness in everything that is, is not conducive to strife for the things that are not and must be. If everything at any one time is either good or working for good, there is no standard for the choice of more or less productive paths in life. Spinoza's pantheism resolved itself into an end to all striving, and a passive oneness with the All—though nothing is more manifest than that to be one with the All is to be active. The modern "Christian Scientist" pantheism does not discourage striving, but allows it recognition along with all things else, as good; but, since all is good, there is no impelling motive to altruistic striving, and selfish striving is the more encouraged. The materially prosperous flock to the Scientist standard; others of the fold are encouraged, and thus aided, to gain material prosperity; and the whole tone of their worship is one of deadening contentment in health and wealth or whatever other material blessings they may have: Not for them any agony over starving millions in China or in tenement houses in unvisited corners of their own city!

Yet it can readily be seen that this philosophy would do very

nicely for a well-adjusted world, where governmental and human frailties were so slight that there was no need of an aggressive and sacrificing altruism. The reason we rebel against pantheism is that the times are not yet ripe for it. Humanity cannot live half emancipated and half enchained. The emancipated must devote themselves to rending the others' chains. But once the chains are all broken and thrown into the melting-pot of dissolution, then pantheism can come into its own.

There are yet some objections which we must answer here. Some object to a perfect, pantheistic world for our goal, because, they say, they would not live in a land whose fruits were not sweetened by desperate strife. These we may ask if there is not something wrong with a mind that insists upon having others suffer to spice its pleasure. But, say others, granted such a world of perfection is better than our present world, is it worth striving for? Would it not be a tame object for century-long struggle? Why not give up the fight and die? To this the first reply is, to give up the fight is to shirk. Man has an impulse that makes him strive upward, and to drop out of the struggle is ignoble. Even could all men be persuaded to give up the fight, the world would still move on, even without man, and still have problems unsolved which only evolution and striving could solve. And this would remain true if man killed, before himself, all life upon which he could lay hand. And the second reply is that, no matter how near perfect the institutions of man and the dispositions of beasts, there are always the elements to brave, games to excite and develop, mountain crags to scale. And if the man of the perfect world becomes surfeited of these—which is not likely from our present need of bundling for the elements and of braces and supporters for our games—he may at least seek a calm death, untroubled by the responsibility of the sins of the world.

So pantheism is an unsilenceable craving, which the selfish hope of a personal reward hereafter cannot silence, but only deaden. In our philosophy, then, pantheism for the future.

Examining idealism by its fruits, we find two distinct, yet often entwined, types of idealism, which we will denote as aspirational idealism and as basic or cosmic idealism. Their products in the world are practically opposite, and when the two are combined in a philosophy, as they are almost invariably, they make for a sort of contradictory ethical indeterminism.

Basic idealism defines matter as we know it as a figment of the mind. Kant's critical rationalism concedes some ground to the

materialist in his threefold world of mental states, phenomena and things-in-themselves, but his definition of phenomena as the synthesis of sense-impressions by means of mental categories gives him a decided leaning toward basic idealism. Now the fruits of these beliefs—pure and critical basic idealism—are perhaps not so soporific as is pantheism, but they have marked tendencies that way. If ideals, ideas, or categories are held to be independent of matter (creating phenomena rather than created by phenomena), if ideas or categories are shot at us bolt out of the sky—we not only are involved in an endless array of equally dogmatic ideas, we not only find ourselves unable to cope with numerous physical situations for which there is no adequate God-given idea, but we are likely to become physically lethargic, and echo too emphatically the ideas of Rabbi Ben Ezra of “the vulgar mass called work,” of the world as “machinery just meant to give the soul its bent,” and the subsequent injunction, “Thou, heaven’s consummate cup, what need’st thou with earth’s wheel?” This tone of selfish individualism is sounded at frequent intervals through the idealism of the nineteenth century—its poets and its ministers—and its voice is still a strong one, comforting into torpor those who otherwise could not rest until they had made the world physically a better place to live in, and who but for trust that the sweet in spirit shall be saved to eternal bliss, might pin their lives and their trust to the hope of perfection achieved in the physical world, through physical as well as soul labor. (This is not meant in any way to ridicule the belief in a future spiritual life, except as it is used as a drug to deaden the sensibilities which demand a housecleaning in this world.)

But the other kind of idealism, aspirational idealism, we would cling to above all else in the world. It is forming and clinging to ideals that has raised us above the brutes of the paleolithic age, the brutes of the inquisition days, the brutes of this day of war and after-war terror, and the weaker brutes of our nation’s southern neighbor. It is the forming of ideals *and* the insistence upon making them *real* and *material* that has raised man to be man. And it is at this point that aspirational idealism conflicts with cosmic idealism. Cosmic idealists are content to keep their ideals in the realm of the ideal; natural, aspirational idealists throb to grasp their ideas and bring them to earth for all men to see and love.

So, then, idealism, not for the explanation of the present through the past, but for the evolution of the future through the present, shall be part of our philosophy.

And then materialism. Here again we have two sorts, ethical and cosmic. I know of nothing more gross than ethical materialism. That since a thousand dollars, a roomy home or a tiny pearl is to be desired, a million dollars, a thirty-room house or a string of giant pearls is of so much the more value, is absurd reasoning. Nor is the idea that to furnish a modern home with Oriental rugs, medieval art, Greek statuary, colonial pillared porches, bungalow roof and Roman lions at the gate—a hodge-podge of things valuable in their proper atmosphere—much better. To know a lady by the quality and quantity of her dresses, to measure a man by his possessions, to measure joy by laughter, or song by volume—these are of the gross.

But cosmic materialism—that is a different thing. The scientific investigations of evolution have shown that man could rise from the ignoble ape—yes, even from the Protozoa, who trace a common ancestry with plants. Possibly some day it will be shown that man arose from no higher origin than a chemical reaction. Does it, then, seem unlikely that mind should evolve from pure sensitive matter—that the ideal, though higher than the material, should have evolved from it?

What there is of natural revolt against this now fairly established theory is due primarily to a repugnance toward those animals which trace a common ancestry with us. But this repugnance has its basis in the fact that these types are not evolving types, but decadent and static offshoots of the true agent of evolution. This very naturally raises the question, "Is man also a stationary, unevolving type?" If we cannot answer this with a strong negative, we shall not be able to wean the aspirational idealist away from cosmic idealism, and the efforts of this essay are useless. But if we have faith in a slow but steady human evolution, we need not despise our lowly material origin.

It may serve us well to take up the question of empiricism. In spite of the ethical, pragmatic, view against cosmic idealism, and the preponderance of reason in evolution against it, may we not still be wrong in denying it? How do we know that there are things-in-themselves? And if we know that, how are we sure we know them as they are? This seems to me well enough answered, by, for instance, the predictions of astronomy. The ability to foretell by science is certainly indicative of sufficient ability to know things as they are, to satisfy all our purposes. Of course, we cannot know what our world would mean to a fourth-dimension person, nor have we fathomed just its relation to the universe. But it is

absurd to believe with the idealist that God tags us around, placing illusions before us, which in accordance with divine law produce certain effects upon the mind, leading the mind to imagine in turn control over an illusory body, made for our mind's benefit by God. which in turn produces certain God-inspired illusory effects upon the illusions which God has located in our minds as ideas of matter. Nor can we even agree with Kant that our idea of matter and movement is but the synthesis of sensations of things-in-themselves by God-given categories of cause, time and space, for psychology has been able in some degree to trace these categories to empirical experience. Psychology tells us, and perhaps we can dimly recall, of a time when the world was to our infant mind one vast confusion. Impressions were made, strengthened by repetition, knit with others by coincidence and analogy of effect, connected with opposites by conflict of effect, and so on until our minds could grasp with less and less mystification the things of this world. This remarkable train of development seems to require no other building-material than a head filled with matter having a sensitive reaction to ether-waves, air-waves and the grosser material bodies about us. Psychology has, in other words, practically accomplished what was once considered impossible—knowing the knower. The mind has practically been reduced to a structure evolved through the centuries (as the individual, so the phylum) from sensitive-reactive matter. Under this materialistic aspect our knowledge may be incomplete, fragmentary, and hence faulty, but it is not dubious in its foundation. It may be but a reflection, but it serves our purposes, and the only way to improve it is not to seek mystic interpretations of it, but to examine it more closely.

Nor even is a more radical materialism to be feared. (My discussion may be discounted from this point on without affecting my main contention as expressed in the conclusion. I am now merely adding my personal foibles to the possibilities.) Of course, all evolution may have been accomplished under the lash of a creator-driver—a personality—a fixed, immovable and ideal God. But does this seem likely? And if so, whence full-fledged into being sprang God?

An acceptance of a materialistic basis for the world is bound at least to make unnecessary the belief in an all-powerful creative and guiding hand, either in the growth of the mind or the growth of the world. (Do not misinterpret me as denying a guiding Aspiration or Spirit, for that is the object of my deepest worship.) It is not belittling to the human race to think of it as evolving through

the millions of years from a simple reactive-sensitive mass until it bodied forth creatures with a soul for beauty, for sympathy and for sacrifice. Nor is it a libel upon God to think of God as an impersonal Aspiration and Will, growing gradually in us through this evolution—the Soul ideal—always a step in advance of the body.

A future life of the spirit is not inconsistent with materialism. That the spirit—the motive pulse of the body—may pass into a finer and more plastic body, as the ether, appeals to the scientific mind. If it does pass into such a transcendent medium, its influence in the world is multiplied—a sort of mental telepathy—and it is also possible that every thought, every moment, has its immortality or eternal punishment.

To those who find a Reason for creation, we may say, find if you will the first reason for the universe. Then ask for the reason that lies back of that. And so on. Do you think you will ever find one that will explain itself?

And to those who seek a Cause for creation, we may say, find the Ultimate Cause, and then tell us how *It* sprang into being.

But to those who seek a Purpose pervading the world, we may say, Look at the universe as it was in the beginning, a causeless, reasonless, purposeless life. Then see through time a giant strength and purpose rising out of the mist—a will to the universal realization of fundamental impulses and to good will among men, beasts, birds, and growing herbs. This is the God in man—this is the soul. This is that which lives through death. This is that which will emancipate the earth from her terrible birth-pangs with an issue that shall comfort her as long as she lives. This is the idealism arising out of materialism to grasp pantheism.

So you see, we have materialism for the past, idealism for the present and pantheism for the future. We sought a truce of philosophies, but I fear we have stirred us up a fight.