

# The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the  
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Founded by EDWARD C. HEGELER

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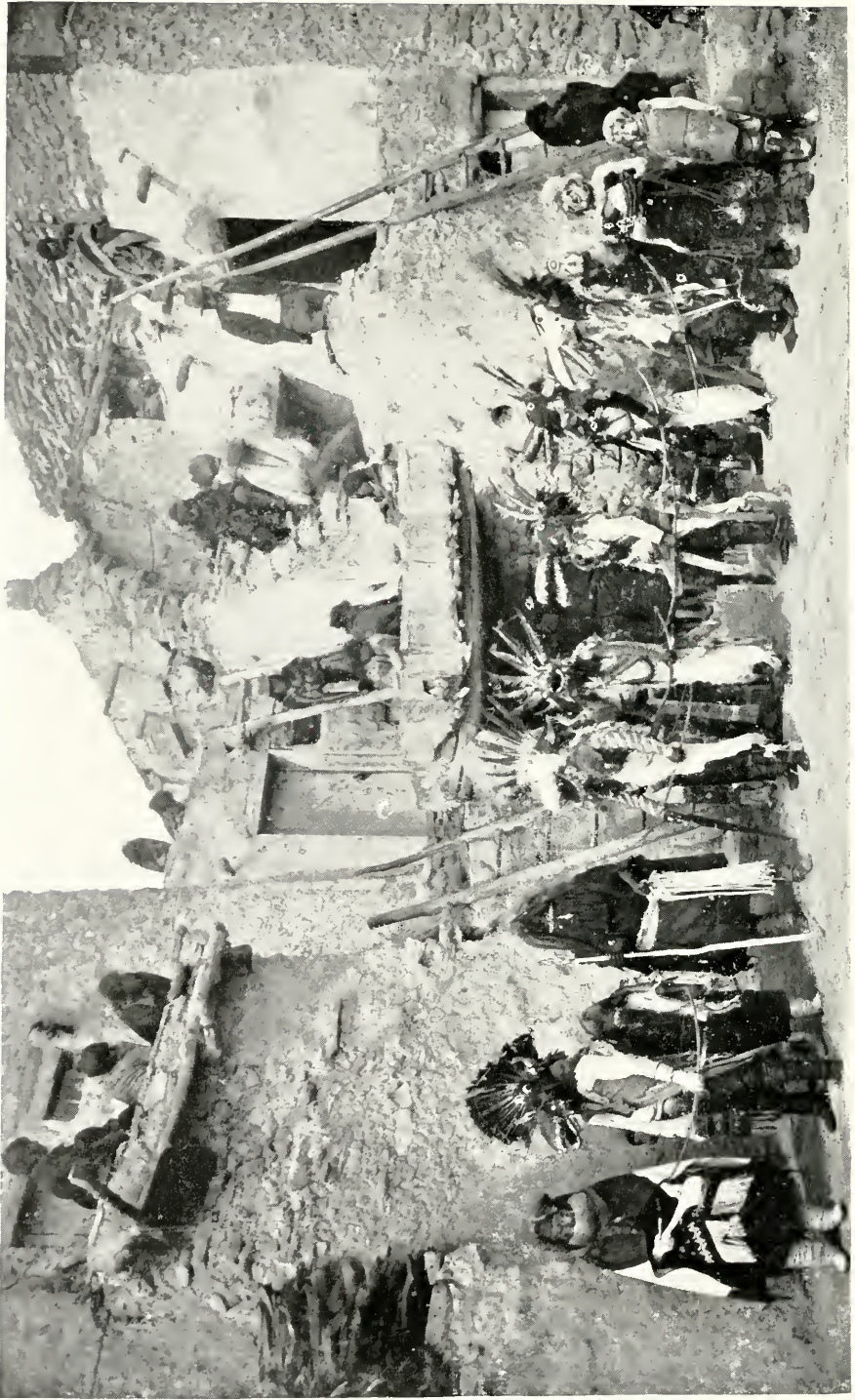
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NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS

*Frontispiece to the Open Court*



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## A POST-KANTIAN ANTINOMY

BY ERNEST T. PAINE

LIKE most titles, the subject "A Post-Kantian Antinomy" is a misnomer. If any philosophical problem was both Kantian and pre-Kantian, the question between mechanism and teleology might be so designated. But for some reason best known to himself Kant did not explicitly include this well-dried bone of contention among the dialectical fossils which adorn the pages of the "Critique of Pure Reason". . . . The universe had (and had not) a beginning in time; everything (and nothing) is simple; there must (and there cannot) be freedom; there is (and there is not) a necessary Being on whom the world depends. Certainly these disputes involve the question of purposiveness. But it remained for Charles Darwin to supply conditions under which the dry bone should return to life and reassume its antinomian form,—the same shape, but grown massive and portentous. In our day there must come to every thoughtful person at least some moments when chase, or even capture, by dinosaur, mammoth, or ichthyosaurus, would be welcome in preference to the agony of slow torture by a cosmological monster that is not only prehistoric but two-headed.

For the present discussion there is little need of assembling reasons *pro* and *contra* in the formal Kantian manner so as to see how neatly they annul each other. It is quite possible, of course, to assume an affectation of skepticism and go about looking for antinomies, like Lucian's philosopher with the scales. "And what are the scales for, my fine fellow?" said the prospective buyer to this promising slave. "Oh, I put arguments in them" was the reply: "and when I get the arguments evenly balanced, so that they differ by not so much as a feather's weight, then I don't know which side is more convincing." When it comes to teleology, however, skepti-

cism would often seem to be no matter of mere affectation. There are times when without any pretensions to the subtlety of sophist or jesuit we would as soon take one side as the other in the debate. Purpose must, and purpose cannot be, the guiding principle of the universe.

The contradiction is sufficiently disturbing; yet after all why meddle with it? How fatuous, indeed, to repeat the time-worn arguments and illustrations! But these are, many of them, just the difficulties that have never been adequately dealt with. I wander out in the fields in the autumn and come home covered with those perverse, adhesive, two-tined seed-carriers commonly known as stick-tights. Stick is what they will do, defying any implement of removal. A fine-toothed comb will be as useless as a garden-rake. It will take longer to pick them off than it will to write this paper. Well, we sometimes feel like saying, only an idiot could fail to see purposiveness in such adaptations. Good for William Jennings Bryan! He had the courage to utter what we all really thought. Let us no longer be satisfied with glittering evolutionary generalizations. We wish to know in detail how such things can be explained apart from intention and design. If a plant depends on stick-tights for dissemination of its seed, its success in the struggle for life presupposes *real* double-pointed tacks from the outset. But this way lies complete surrender. We must haul down the biological flag. Back to Paley and the only authentic palaeontology (or of course one should say anatomy). We will even solicit a humble place at the next Lord Mayor's dinner in order to make public recantation of our heresy regarding the human epiglottis; although, we confess, the teleological account of that particular organ did use to stick in our throats. "Consider how many Lord Mayor's banquets have occurred during the last hundred years." (Is that how the passage runs?) "What deglutition! What manducation! And not one Alderman choked in a century!"

All *must* have been planned in advance! That is one feeling which the whole output of evolutionary writing, supported by no end of more or less good-humored raillery, will not always quite dispel. But there are other moods, equally recurrent, when the outrageous corollaries of our erstwhile cheap anthropomorphism bring us to confusion. Miami, then, has been undergoing punishment lately. And the Black Plague was a benign heavenly visitation. And the Great War was a far-off divine event. And this is the best of all

possible worlds. And "spite of pride, in erring reason's spite, one thing is clear: whatever is, is right." Surely Alec Pope had his tongue in his cheek when he wrote those lines; or else he richly deserves to have told about him the story of what recently happened in my library. Our unlettered domestic, cleaning the bookshelves, was observed to take down a copy of the "Essay on Man" and look at the title. "Hm", she remarked, "Pop's Easy Man", and nonchalantly replacing the volume went on with her dusting. Beyond doubt Juanita was right. If Berkeley justly complained of the way in which people sometimes sit down in a forlorn skepticism, we may be pardoned for suggesting that it is quite as reprehensible to sit down in an abandonment of optimism. The case is by no means as simple as the easy Essay represented it to be.

What is to be done in this predicament? Numerous avenues of escape have been suggested, but frankly the aim of this paper is to comment on the misleading character of some of these. To begin with, there is Samuel Butler, who first attracted our attention as capable of saying something worth while, by that memorable, if somewhat cynical, remark in the "Way of All Flesh" about political and religious fundamentalism. He characterized certain people as desiring higher prices and cheaper wages; but otherwise, he said, they were most contented when things were changing least. "Tolerators, if not lovers, of all that was familiar, haters of all that was unfamiliar, they would have been equally horrified at hearing the Christian religion doubted and at seeing it practised." We presently discovered that although Butler, as hinted by this passage, was himself an ardent believer in change, that is in evolution, he was a most acute critic of the more doubtful aspects of Darwinism; and so far our sympathies were with him. But whether anything can be made of his doctrine of unconscious purposiveness is another question. The doctrine seems plausible at first, possibly because coupled with such a successful attack on the natural selection theory. Butler indeed plays havoc with Darwin's fortuitous variations; yet he seems not to have perceived that the argument against Darwin is capable of being turned back against his own view. If the variations are fortuitous and minute, where, truly, is natural selection to obtain a foothold? But if the variations are unconsciously purposive, as Butler maintained, what is to keep them in line long enough for significant modifications to be effected? We should note that Butler believed as strongly as Darwin in the gradual

accumulation of slight variations. For example there is his illustration of the web-footed bird.

"Thus," he says, "a bird whose toes were not webbed, but which had under force of circumstances little by little in the course of many generations learned to swim, . . . such a bird did not probably conceive the idea of swimming on water and set itself to get webbed feet. The bird found itself in some small difficulty, out of which it either saw, or at any rate found that it could extricate itself by striking out vigorously with its feet and extending its toes as far as ever it could; it thus began to learn the art of swimming and conceived the idea of swimming synchronously, or nearly so; or perhaps wishing to get over a yard or two of deep water, and trying to do so without being at the trouble of rising to fly, it would splash and struggle its way over the water, and thus practically swim, though without much perception of what it had been doing. Finding that no harm had come to it, the bird would do the same again and again; it would thus presently lose fear, and would be able to act more calmly; then it would begin to find out that it could swim a little, and if its food lay much in the water so that it would be of great advantage to it to be able to alight and rest without being forced to return to land, it would begin to make a practice of swimming. It would now discover that it could swim the more easily according as its feet presented a more extended surface to the water; it would therefore keep its toes extended whenever it swam, and as far as in it lay, would make the most of whatever skin was already at the base of its toes. After very many generations it would become web-footed, if doing as above described should have been found continuously convenient, so that the bird should have continuously used the skin about its toes as much as possible in this direction."

Now this is all very fine until we come to the *proviso* in the last sentence. After very many generations the bird would become web-footed *if doing as above described should have been found continuously convenient, so that the bird should have continuously used the skin about its toes as much as possible in this direction.*" This indispensable condition, which Butler slips in without attracting much attention to it, we have the right and the obligation to italicize. What assurance is there that countless generations of land birds would have continuously desired to find food or anything else in the water? One exception, we must remember, would have disproved this rule. One timid reactionary, like a fussy hen that would any time grate-



fully starve to death in preference to getting her feet wet, would have *deducked* the earth's surface in advance and forever.

We must not lose ourselves in details, but a further argument of Butler's touching the question calls for notice. Explaining the very gradual manner in which, according to his theory, purpose becomes defined and realized, he says: "It may appear as though I were blowing hot and cold with the same breath, inasmuch as I am insisting that important modifications of structure have been always purposive; and at the same time am denying that the creature modified has had any purpose in the greater part of all those actions which at length have modified both structure and instinct. . . . [But] provided there is a *very little* perception of and prescience concerning the means whereby the *next* desired end may be attained, it matters not how little in advance that end may be of present desires and faculties; it is still reached through purpose, and must be called purposive. . . . If each one of the small steps is purposive the result is purposive, though there was never purpose extended over more than one, two, or perhaps at most three, steps at a time." Now it is the fashion to berate formal logic for never discovering any fallacies except such as have been made to order and put in text books to be rediscovered there by a notably illogical and reluctant younger generation. But how is the foregoing argument of Butler's for a beautiful instance of a fallacy in real life? "If each of the small steps is purposive, the result is purposive." Surely *purposive* is used in two senses here, and the statement is just as misleading as any stock example of composition in the logic manuals; as can be shown by substituting for *purposive* the really appropriate expression in each case. The sentence will then read: "If each of the small steps is intentional, the result may be spoken of as intentional, although as a matter of fact none but the last participant in the series actually intended it." Or more briefly: "If each of the small steps is (consciously) purposive, the result is (unconsciously) purposive, —whatever that may mean. But this is poles asunder from the original proposition.

We are thus brought face to face with the major problem, which may now be considered without any further reference to stick-tights, water-fowl, poultry-yards, or even material fallacies in logic. Is, or is it not, the expression *unconscious purposiveness* a contradiction in terms? Is, or is not, *entelechy* an idol of the market-place, a cant word in philosophy, which we are in some danger of rolling

off our tongues with too pious unction? Is, or is not, *teleology* a term that we should be more careful about employing, unless we deliberately use it in the good old-fashioned connotation which meant something, or, in the current idiom, had teeth in it, by which to get hold of human comprehension? Professor Creighton once wrote: "At the present time one may perhaps say that the fundamental question in philosophy is whether it is possible to employ the category of Teleology or Purposiveness as an explanation of the universe and of our own experience; and, if so, what content is to be given to this conception." After commenting on the inadequacy of caudo-mechanical interpretations, he significantly continued:—"The question then is: Are we justified in advancing to a different form of judgment, to judgments of Teleology or Individuality? If this question be answered in the affirmative, it is above all essential to remember that a change of category is no excuse for indefiniteness. Philosophical analysis and interpretation are necessarily different from those of science, but philosophical procedure must not be less strict than that of the sciences, or its conceptions less carefully defined." The passage just quoted ran without change through the last two editions of the *Logic*, published in 1913 and 1920. James Ward's "Realm of Ends" had been published in 1911; Bosanquet's "Principle of Individuality and Value" in 1912 (the Lectures were in 1911). Hobhouse's "Development and Purpose" appeared in 1913. It might therefore seem as if, in spite of his obvious leanings toward a teleological view, and notwithstanding the noteworthy contributions of Ward, Bosanquet, and Hobhouse in the same direction, Professor Creighton thought, near the very end of his life and work, that the problem of purposiveness was still greatly in need of clarification. With this opinion, if he did hold it, I at least should concur. That is, the post-Kantian antinomy is yet unresolved.

To restate the situation, there is on the one side mechanism, which is no longer satisfactory to anybody, chiefly perhaps for the reason that, as Hobhouse has suggested, the most teleological thing imaginable is a machine, and the more perfect, the more teleological; on the other side there is radical finalism, also an outworn doctrine, largely because it appears to be inconsistent with our moral experience; and between these extremes we find a limbo of rather ill-defined conceptions ranging, say, from Butler's view already mentioned, to Lloyd Morgan's "Emergent Evolution" and General Smuts's "Holism" recently announced. Now Lloyd Morgan and

General Smuts and those who anticipated them (for it is doubtful whether there is much that is new in principle in these lately published volumes) may be on the right track; but that is not to assert that the question of purposiveness is greatly illuminated by the favorite doctrine of these recent writers, namely that a true whole is more than an aggregate and cannot be understood by reference merely to the nature of the units combined in the whole; that the whole determines the parts instead of being determined by them. Surely this is the essential principle of an entelechy, and no one could wish to dissent from it. So far, so good. But we are still in the dark as to how we can apprehend a final cause that does not precede its effect by way of being a plan or idea present either to the consciousness of an organism itself or to the mind of some external agent. Old-fashioned teleology with a vengeance! But should we not perhaps cease calling our theories teleological, unless we are willing to entertain this view?

Purpose, that is, involves awareness of an end. Purposiveness is the most characteristic mark of intelligence. To think at all is to intend. To know is to appreciate the meanings of things, to relate them from the point of view of their significance. To be conscious is to have desires and aims. All this we believe to be good doctrine. We are roused to commendable fervor by the typical utterances of idealism, for example that fine remark of Bosanquet's that "if anything bewilders us in the proceedings of nature, we set it down, as a mere matter of course, to our ignorance." We flatter ourselves that we discover a teleological trend even in T. H. Huxley, as for instance when he says that the amount of order discoverable in the universe is limited only by our ability to perceive it; or again, surprisingly enough, in the Romanes Lecture, where commenting like any dyed-in-the-wool evolutionist on the impermanence of the cosmos, he says: [The world thus] "assumes the aspect not so much of a permanent entity as of a changeful process in which naught endures save the flow of energy and the rational order which pervades it." And Huxley called himself an agnostic. Agnostic nothing! we retort. What more does idealism crave than rational order? For how could rational order be brought to pass by anything else than mind? Or, in Bosanquet's words, how could anything be due to mind that never was a plan before a mind? "It couldn't," a certain still small voice within us keeps declaring. But evolution, if consistent, asserts flatly that it could, and must. Very well, then, let the

two opponents have it out together. But we are not sure that people who are supposed to be fighting for teleology will not look like deserters if they go very far toward compromise with a relentlessly non-teleological foe.

Passages of doubtful complexion occur in books as admirable as those of Hobhouse. For instance there is a page in "Development and Purpose" where the attempt to deduce teleological behavior from sensori-motor responses ends in "just words", or as perhaps one would better say, in the restoration of purposiveness under another name to the position from which it was supposed to have been banished. "*Naturam expellas furca, tamen usque recurret.*" "Drive out purpose with a fork, Still she'll come and ask for work!" Thus, in the present context, we may translate the familiar line.

Hobhouse's paragraph is as follows:

"Without the formation of purpose it is possible that actions should be coordinated in series, so as to produce results of importance to the organism. This brings us to the second method in which sensori-motor response may serve the future. Just as the hereditary structure may determine a reflex response, which performs a function without intelligence or purpose, so it may determine a tension of feeling guiding a train of sensori-motor acts—and indeed of structural and reflex acts along with them—and persisting till a result of importance to the organism is attained. Trains of action so determined are generically instincts. We may conceive that where there is a well-developed instinct, but little or no intelligence, the train of action is determined by a tension, which at any given point is satisfied only by a performance which falls in with the course leading up to the final accomplishment of the result, and by no other. The solitary wasp dragging a spider to its hole does not act altogether mechanically, nor altogether intelligently. But it is not satisfied till it gets the spider into the hole. That result, and no other, relieves the tension. Where intelligence arises within the sphere of instinct, it probably takes short views at the outset and aims at near results, which will relieve the tension and so satisfy. From these it advances step by step till it grasps the end of the instinct, which then becomes suffused with purpose."

Having quoted this passage I will dismiss it, believing its unsatisfactory character to be apparent. It is no explanation of a developing instinct to say that hereditary structure determines it; nor yet of a train of acts to say that it is governed by a "tension".



“Hereditary structure” and “tension” as here employed are plain *idola fori*; and besides that, the paragraph is full of teleological concepts in spite of the non-purposive presuppositions with which it begins.

There is one more passage in Hobhouse to which I may call attention as further revealing the difficulties that lie in wait for believers in teleology who assent too readily and completely to some of the conclusions of modern science. In the second chapter of “Development and Purpose” Hobhouse falls in line with those voluntarists, from Schopenhauer down, who have desired to extend the concept of mind so as to make it include much more than what is clearly conscious. “The facts of consciousness”, Hobhouse says, “reveal upon examination the working of causes strictly continuous with those that appear within the field of consciousness itself, but yet extending outside that field. There appears in short to be something that operates unconsciously, but yet in a manner closely comparable and even in essence identical with many of the operations familiar to us as operations of consciousness. Moreover by these operations, proceeding as it were in the background, the attitude of consciousness is in a large measure determined. Conscious and unconscious operations then may be legitimately grouped together, and without prejudgment as to their ultimate nature the sum of them may be called Mind. Mind then appears as that which has consciousness in its foreground, while in the background it is the theatre of energies, of interactions, of stresses and strains, the play of which goes to determine the character of the scene by which the said foreground is filled. To understand this relation, not in its metaphysical essence, but in its empirical detail, is highly important for our purpose.”

Now I would say at present that the empirical detail is all right. At least it would appear that we must concede this point, however reluctantly, because the empirical description seems to be valid; and, besides, there is the testimony of Freud, Jung, and the rest; even of William James, who solemnly declared (and he was not often solemn) that the most important psychological discovery in a quarter century was the subconscious life of human beings. But the ‘metaphysical essence’ is cause for genuine alarm. What follows from the remark that by operations proceeding in the background the attitude of consciousness is in large measure determined? The question answers itself; for how can anyone retain a shadow of con-

fidence in purpose as a metaphysical principle, after yielding predominance in the mental-spiritual-conscious realm to mere physical and unconscious factors?

But someone will now say,—“What has become of the post-Kantian antinomy? One side was to be as good as the other in this debate, and here you are talking idealism and not giving the adversary half a chance. Why not spell ‘adversary’ with a capital A in the time-honored manner of religion, since by appealing to prejudice and misinformation you are making a veritable devil out of mechanism, though if opportunity were afforded mechanism could present a very good case.” The fact is, I admit the justice of these strictures. Idealism does appeal to me. I was brought up that way; and then, to use William James’s expression, it is a more illustrious theory. But mechanism, also, I often admire, particularly at those times, inevitable in everyone’s life, when the evidence seems conclusive that the “universe has no sort of relation to moral ends”. What I dislike, and this is the substance of the present discussion, is the spectacle of idealism making unsolicited and unnecessary overtures to its opponents, by trying to turn consciousness into the unconscious and purposiveness into the non-purposive. Such adventures seem to be neither promising nor legitimate. Furthermore (though this, again, is abandoning a strictly impartial, antinomian standpoint) it would be more appropriate for the overtures to come from the other side.