

THE EMPRIZE SUPREME—CONCERNING EVOLUTION AND RELIGIOUS FAITH

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IF we admit that man is of the dust—totally a product of evolution, can we still find the higher values? And if we find these values how shall they be named? Down through the centuries of the past, men have given to these higher values the names faith, religion, God. Must we today abandon these names, breaking utterly with the emotional life of our race up to the present time, and find other names; or is there a fundamental continuity in the evolution of human emotional life which makes the old words the only words that will fully express the meanings which we find in our own hearts, when we ponder on the nature of man's life?

The organization of our thinking is named philosophy and science. How shall we name the organization of our emotions if we reject the names, faith, religion, God?

The modern study of physical and biological science has culminated in the theory of evolution—the belief that man is a product of the development of lower forms of life. This doctrine is so firmly established in the thought of modern men, that those who attack it, do nothing but reveal their own amazing ignorance. This ignorance is stubbornly maintained on account of fear—fear that the theory, if believed, would destroy the higher values.

Is this fear justifiable? What are the religious and ethical implications of the doctrine? Must we, in the light of evolution, relegate all religious ideas to the category of fantasies; or can we find in evolution itself a sound basis for those realities which can be named nothing but faith, religion, God?

Evolution presents to the mind a universe composed of particles of matter which move in space. These movements of the particles of matter in spatial relations extend through time, and by evolution, organisms appear which change as time goes on and these changes

result in many types and kinds, tending for the most part toward greater complication. And latest to appear is man, an organism composed of particles of matter all in motion in relation to each other, but with such a marvelous harmony and co-ordination that man can see and understand, dimly at least, how he came to be.

But what room is there in this cold heartless mechanistic universe for any God?

We might as well ask what room there is in this cold, heartless universe for any man.

All that can be found within a man must also be in that cold mechanistic universe. And if in man we find that which is warm and living, we may be sure that in that universe of which man is the child, the offspring, there is also something warm and living.

Let us turn our attention upon that primitive inorganic slime in which there must have come to being that missing link between the complicated inorganic body and the simplest, the very first, the all-ancestral organism. Let us grant that there was a time when no living thing existed. In some complex solution of myriads of complex molecules, perhaps in the slime of the primeval sea, the non-living conglomerations must have been immense in number. The physiochemical experiments tried by nature in that cosmic laboratory, must have been almost endless. Each of these bodies must have had properties from the others. Each of these myriads of bodies existed for a little time and then disintegrated. But among the multitude, by a happy circumstance, one strange body appeared one day, which did not so easily disintegrate. It had three striking properties—yes four. It absorbed or fed upon the less complex materials and transformed them into its own substance and thus grew in bulk. It changed, it underwent mutations. It divided and thus multiplied itself. These three things doubtless had been done by many other bodies before it.

But it had the power of changing itself so as to avoid or to escape destruction, and while other bodies previously may have had such power, they did not have it in so marked a degree as this new body. Thus success in self-preservation was finally attained by a body which differed from the myriad previous failures only in the degree of the tendency to maintain itself. This new mass of matter had a power, a property, a tendency that made the day of its origin the beginning of a new era on the earth, the era of life. And this little speck in the slime, became the first born, the all-ancestor of the living world.

While this first successful living being probably differed so slight-

ly from its abortive predecessors, yet how vast, how profound the difference between an organism and a non-living body!

What was the nature of that simplest living cell? How did it differ from inorganic bodies? You will answer that it had the power to change in such a way as to adapt itself to cope with the changes in environment.

Its molecules, while doubtless acting in strict accordance with the chemical laws, did by so acting, co-operate in such a manner as to keep the body from meeting with destruction. The body must have taken food, it must have multiplied itself, and its most striking characteristic was this tendency, this impulse to maintain its own existence. It must have had also the power of mutation, and once these primal organisms were established in the slime, there would come into operation the law of the survival of the fittest.

Thus natural selection results in progress to higher and still higher types—and at last man. But even a man, as well as that first parental organism, is a chemical equilibrium of the particles of matter.

Let us admit that this is the case. Let us grant that the organism is nothing more than the arrangement of its elements in accord with physical and chemical laws, that the vital phenomena differ from the non-vital only in so far as the structure of the organic body differs from that of the inorganic. We still will have to admit that there is one thing to be said of the organism which cannot be said of an inorganic body, namely, that it has a tendency to maintain its own existence. All living things, from the simplest organism to man, must perform the same essential functions of relation to environment, nutrition, and reproduction.

These are essential because it is by their agency that life of the organism is maintained. Progress from the lower forms to the higher, is growth in the power of the more nearly perfect accomplishment of these functions, resulting in a firmer hold upon life.

Now let us direct our attention upon that characteristic of man which also was a characteristic of that simplest organism, and of all living things. That is the tendency, the impulse to preserve the life, it is the will to live. Since the living organism has really grown out of that mechanistic inorganic universe, that cold, hard, old universe had the possibility of something warm and living in it. In fact the tendency toward life, the impulse toward immortality, the will to live, must be the tendency, the impulse, the will of the universe itself. Nature is not so cold and hard and mechanistic and

heartless after all, since this hot desire for life we find within ourselves, is natural.

Nature is a name, a vital name which we apply to that otherwise chilly inorganic universe when we include living beings in our thought.

The name God is a still more vital name. It is the name to use when we are thinking of this tendency toward life, this warm and throbbing will to live. But such a God is surely not the thundering despot of the ancient Hebrews. And in this discussion we are not going to permit the smuggling in of the old theological characteristics.

And furthermore we are not going to allow ourselves to become entangled in the endless mazes of metaphysical surmises. Any hypothesis which is not capable of rigid scientific demonstration is not worthy of consideration. No theory ought to be accepted as the truth unless it has withstood most searching trials. We should never lose the consciousness of the hypothetical nature of a theory. Any attempt to extend the frontiers of our knowledge should be cautious and modest. In theorizing, we must be most economical, most skeptical. We must maintain a jealous guard against the easy entrance to our minds of ideas not sanctioned by most rigorous tests.

The undoubted progress of modern positive science has been due not only to that unbounded restless research, that infinite exercise of observation and experiment, but even more to that chaste reserve, that almost cynical, ever skeptical economy and simplicity of theory.

And therefore our science today is like a mighty building. It has been built high, the walls and superstructures are strong and knit well together. But shall we fear to inspect the foundations, to examine the bed-rock on which this immense structure must depend? By all means let us go down and examine the foundations of the great structure of our science.

What is the bed-rock, the ultimate foundation of our positive science?

It is the same as the bed-rock, the ultimate foundation of our true religion. It is the primitive impulse to preserve our lives. The impulse to live, the instinct of self-preservation is primordial, universal, and fundamental in human nature. It is therefore the will of man. Our observations reveal to us that this impulse is common to all living creatures. It therefore must spring out of the very nature of our universe, that is to say, it is the will of God.

Another universal instinct among creatures of intelligence is the scientific impulse, the desire to know the truth. Increased knowl-

edge must mean increased hold upon life, because the greater our knowledge of our environment, the less our danger of death. The scientific impulse is also a religious impulse, because the increase of our knowledge of the truth increases our hold upon life, and brings to a greater realization the fundamental desire to live abundantly.

Science as well as religion is and must be founded upon this bed-rock, the will to live. This will to live must be in matter itself. It must be latent in the very dust. Matter has a natural tendency, when right conditions and right materials are present, to form living bodies. Once an organism is in existence it must not only tend to continue to exist but by the very nature of things, that is, by natural necessity, this tendency will be increased and strengthened. This tendency of all living beings to continue to live ever more intensely, is so fundamental that we may call it God's tendency or the will of God.

Survival is dependent upon this tendency. Those who do the will of God, who meet the requirements of natural necessity, survive. Those who fail to meet the natural conditions, those who fail to conform to necessity or reason, die.

But life is never totally destroyed. The best adapted to pass on the torch, survive for a sufficient length of time to pass it on, and their will is the will of God, namely to provide survival for their kind.

The freak species which did not will to keep the race alive disappear; in fact such a species could never achieve existence. A new species must spring from individuals which, due to mutations, differ from the ancestral stock. Now if these mutations weakened the will to serve the race, that species would perish even before it came into existence.

Racial strength is then attained by loyalty or the will to serve the kind. The greater the will of its individuals to serve it, the stronger must be the race. The stronger the race the greater its hold on life. The greater the race's hold on life, the greater the security of the individual.

Man is by far the strongest species of living creatures. We are so because, by evolution there have been developed and preserved in us, instincts that constitute our will to serve our kind, and therefore we are bound by our inner nature, by the very heart and will and essence of all our deep desires, to help our human kind to realize the destiny provided for us in the will of God.

You, dear reader, are the product of this evolution. You are so

made that this natural necessity, working within your being, drives you to devotion to your stock.

This devotion to your kind, this loyalty is you, yourself, the very heart of you. You can not escape it. You can not even wish to do so, not any more than you can wish to amputate and throw away your hands and feet and eyes. It is God's will, your will. Any inclination or desire in you that opposed this will of yours, you yourself would call depraved, and you would reject it as not according to your nature.

I think I hear you exclaim that man does not wish only the good of others. That man's desire *is* depraved! It is selfishness! To pile up money! The wild ambition to rule another. Even reformers, who hypercritically preach the good of others! They would impose by force their own distorted will upon the weak!

But look into your own heart. You may see there bitter resentment. Against what? Against the wickedness of man. What is there in you that causes this resentment? The reason you resent the evil is that you will the good.

And what is the good that man wills? It is to live. The will of man—the will of God—life. Yes, life is what we want; the more abundant life; life in all its glorious fullness; life that would be planned and lived by men the masters of their destiny, by men who love their brothers.

And it is the will of God, the will of man, the will to live, the will to win, morale. Morale is the logic of faith. It was morale that gave the Greeks their courage at Thermopylæ. And do you think Leonidas, the Spartan leader of that little band, should have demanded of some smooth-tongued sophist, proof that a handful of men could stand against an army?

It was true that they could stem that warlike flood. Not by logic was it proved, but by morale. And morale is faith—faith in human destiny. Faith is not credulity, that easy-going inclination to believe what is not proved. We must take it in its ancient meaning. Faith is more allied to loyalty and courage than belief. It is the determination to make our life succeed. It is the will to win. It is the will to live. It is the bed-rock, the ultimate foundation of our science, of our religion, of our very existence. Without it the universe would be chaos—nothing.

It is by faith that men win the good. The Emprize Supreme is a work of man upon this earth; the will of God, the will of man,

life! It is a mighty work to do! It is no less a work than the betterment of our human kind. It is a continuation of the work of evolution.

And true religion is to do the will of man, the will of God. And that is to put ahead that mighty enterprise of nature, evolution.

This is true religion, as old as the hope of man. It has been the occupation of every poet, of every artist, of every seeker after beauty, of every prophet, of every scientific thinker, of every seeker after truth; of every noble-hearted soul that ever lived since man appeared upon the earth. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, the Man of Galilee Himself, they all teach faith—faith in human destiny.

All religions seek the good of man, although they may be entangled with superstitious errors. Forms and rites and customs differ. Many observances which are held sacred by the people who practice them are evil, not because they differ from the customs with which we are familiar, but because they are injurious to the human stock, because they hinder the Emprize Supreme.

But these superstitious errors are due to frailties of the mind and to the limitations of the knowledge of the time and place. We must look into the heart and we shall find ourselves in harmony with all good men, all engaged in one Emprize Supreme.

They all have one intent and that is to do the will of Man, the will of God, to bring about the triumph of human destiny.

Yes, all tribes and nations are religious, and this truly is the very heart of all religion—the betterment of man.

Yet, you say that in our western world, with all its boasted progress, the people's hearts are chilly toward religion. But it is not true religion, it is superstition that makes them cold. And even in this coldness, the great intent of every noble mind is the betterment of man. On this they pin their faith. In this they find their comfort.

Yes! They are prepared! The human race is ready for a word that will unite them in a glorious army, with high resolve to win, and perhaps this thought is the glowing ember that will set the heart of man afire, with high and pure religion once again—this thought—The will of man, the will of God, the Emprize Supreme!