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Materialism,

Agnosticism, and

Theosophy.

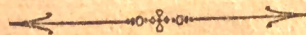


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W.A.N.



## MATERIALISM, AGNOSTICISM, AND THEOSOPHY.

The thought of to-day as to the origin, nature, and destiny of man may be broadly divided into two great classes,—Spiritualism and Materialism. The former, having its highest representative in Theosophy, runs through the great Eastern religions, by way of Judaism into Western Christianity, to apparently find its zero point in the chaos of modern spiritism, or mediumistic communication with the dead. The latter has its highest expression in the honest Agnostic, and passes by easy gradations into the crass Materialist, who knows no higher god than his own stomach, and no grander destiny than to eat, drink, and die.

If we now enquire into the points at issue between these divisions, taking their classical exponents as representative, we find that the creed of Materialism may be defined as briefly this: The universe is purely material. The infinite variations of matter of which our senses take cognizance are the result of force, which is itself simply an unintelligent, unconscious property of matter, and exists co-eternally with it. Beyond matter there is nothing. Sensation, instinct, emotion, intellectualization, together with all the myriad manifestations of consciousness, are the result of the blind combinations of matter, under the impelling influence of force. In other words, the mind of man, the thinking and reasoning principle within him, represents only the sum of the molecular and chemical changes taking place within his body at any stated time, and is dissipated upon the death of the latter as completely as though it had never existed. To Materialism there is no god; there is no soul; spirit is an unthinkable absurdity.

The "Agnostics," to choose a term which they themselves have chosen to define their position, may be regarded as scientific materialists. They admit an intelligent cause behind the phenomena of nature, but insist that this cause is and must ever remain unknowable. With peculiar inconsistency, however, they posit this unknowable as material, invalidating thus their first and chief premise. Therefore they would limit the area of human investigation entirely to the physical, and are as rigid in their exclusion of thought or spirit as factors as are their materialistic congeners.

So positive a creed, such iconoclastic tenets, ought to be able to present an impregnable front to all assaults, from whatever quarter. The facts on the physical plane and the deductions on the intellectual



should each corroborate and be a final proof of the correctness of the other. If, as materialists claim, matter is the all of the universe, then material laws ought to definitely and accurately explain all phenomena. Acknowledging nothing supersensuous in these phenomena, they bar their right to take refuge in an unknown or even in an unknowable. Further; if force, together with the motion resulting from its ceaseless action, is an unintelligent, blind property of matter, choice in the direction in which it exerts itself can not be predicated of it. And having once generated motion in any direction, its persistence in this direction ought, in accordance with both Newton's First Law of Motion and Helmholtz' Vortex Theory of Atoms, to be infinite and incapable of arrest or change, and therefore of producing variable results. And if, as Agnosticism views it, this intelligence within matter is of a material nature, then it ought by all the laws of analogy to find its very highest expression in the grossest and most dense forms of matter, whereas just the reverse of this obtains.

Let us now be sure that we have correctly stated the scientific formulas concerning human existence.

Owen<sup>1</sup> "holds the term 'life' to be a sound expressing the sum of living phenomena, and maintains these phenomena to be modes of force into which other forms of force have passed from potential to active states, and, reciprocally, through the agency of these sums or combinations of force, impressing the mind with the ideas signified by the term 'monad', 'moss', 'plant', or 'animal'."

This may be classed as a purely materialistic view.

As an example of Agnosticism, Huxley<sup>2</sup> declares: "For, after all, what do we know of matter, except as a name for the unknown and hypothetical causes of states of our own consciousness? And what do we know of spirit.....except that it is also a name for an unknown and hypothetical cause or condition of states of consciousness? In other words, matter and spirit are but names for the *imaginary* substrata of groups of natural phenomena." Note well, in passing, that although Huxley elsewhere admits the necessity for an intelligent cause for phenomena, the implication here that all substrata below matter are "imaginary" necessarily also implies that this intelligent cause is material.

Approaching the subject from another standpoint, Liebig<sup>3</sup> writes:

"Physiology has sufficiently decisive grounds for the opinion that every motion, every manifestation of force, is the result of the transformation of the structure or of its substance; that every conception,

<sup>1</sup> *Anatomy of Vertebrates.*

<sup>2</sup> *On the Physical Basis of Life.*

<sup>3</sup> *Animal Chemistry.*



every mental affection, is followed by changes in the chemical nature of the secreted fluids ; that every thought, every sensation, is accompanied by a change in the composition of the brain substance. As in the closed galvanic cell, in consequence of certain changes, an inorganic body, a metal, undergoes when placed in contact with an acid, a certain something becomes cognizable by our senses which we call a current of electricity, so in the animal body, in consequence of the changes and transformations undergone by matter previously constituting a part of the organism, certain phenomena of motion and activity are perceived, and these we call life."

Thus we might go on quoting scientist after scientist, and yet at the end find we had only arrived at the point whence we started. "There is no spirit ; there is no life after death," chants the materialist. "Or if there be, they are a part of the Great Unknowable, and do not concern us," responds the Agnostic. Now, herein lies one of the great and radical distinctions between Theosophy and Agnosticism. That there is and must ever remain for man a great unknowable, Theosophy freely admits. But it denies in the most positive terms that this unknowable includes man's origin, his relation to matter, or his future existence. In other words, Theosophy maintains that science has included in its unknowable a very great deal which for it is simply the unknown. Agnosticism advances the limits of the unknowable to the hither margin of both birth and death. Theosophy pushes them back until a veritable eternity dawns upon man's conscious horizon.

This is the real point at issue—the limits of the unknowable. When Theosophy teaches that spirit and matter are the opposite poles of the unknowable ONE, it stands in its attitude towards this unknowable on common grounds with Agnosticism. Yet how vast a difference in the relative positions. Between the unknowable of Theosophy and that of Agnosticism there is an eternity of conscious evolutionary progress for man, at the vanishing point of which, as viewed from our present standpoint, he has already become a god, with inexhaustible potentialities still before him.

It may be claimed that this is the result of metaphysical reasoning only. But if this were all the foundation upon which it rests—which is very far from being the case—it is logical and reasonable, and where shall we turn for higher proofs than are afforded by logic and reason? Certainly not to the conjectures, disagreements, and warring hypotheses of that modern Babel, science. It is high time that Agnostics recognised that the most unreliable proofs at man's command are those he obtains by means of his admittedly—imperfect physical senses. Of what avail are the eye and the ear, or the microscope and spectroscope,



unless that they reveal is illumined by the light of reason? Then is reason to be hedged around by the limitations of its physical tools? On the contrary, the very highest and most convincing proof of the reality of a thing ought to be that it is reasonable and logical, rather than the ability to demonstrate it on the dissecting table. Therefore in entering the domain of mind through the portals opened by mind itself, Theosophy takes immeasurably higher ground than Agnosticism, which seeks to do the same thing through the avenues of matter, and for this very reason never has succeeded nor ever can succeed. Granted that thought is accompanied by molecular change, does that prove that that which effects the change and the matter changed are identical? As well hold the vase to be one with the potter who moulds it, or the musician with the melody he produces through the laws of musical vibration. Bear in mind that consciousness can only relate itself to the purely physical in physical terms. The brain cells must be set in motion and therefore subjected to physical laws when thought is manifested on the physical plane, just as the keys of the piano move to the touch of the player's fingers according to the principles of mechanics. On this point a well-known scientist<sup>1</sup> writes: "Whatever we define thought to be, this fact appears to be certain, that it is capable of external manifestation by conversion into the actual energy of motion, and only by this conversion." But when, after proving by the well-known experiments of Melloni that the slightest expression of thought is accompanied by a measureable increase of the heat of the brain, he deduces from this that thought is a property of matter, and subject to material laws, he is travelling far beyond the justifiable limits of his premise. These very experiments show that the lower or more material the thought, the greater the heat production. Thus emotion yielded far more units than intellectuation. And as the thought retreated inward the heat became less, until in a purely subjective state the instruments failed to register, which is exactly in accord with Theosophic theories.

Let us take up one or more theories—say world-building—and compare the scientific and Theosophic methods of explanation. The former conceives the universe as built up by the action of unintelligent force acting upon matter. The latter that it is "the unfolding of a Divine life, functioning in every form of living and non-living being." Passing by these primary conceptions, however, and beginning with the nebulæ, science describes the process of world building as consisting primarily of the revolution of this mist-like form of matter around some central point or sun. Gradually in the outer edge of this revolving disk the centrifugal overbalances the centripetal force, and a planet sepa-

<sup>1</sup> Barker—"On the Correlation of Vital and Physical Forces."



rates. This process is repeated, until after successive planetary formations, the central sun is reached, and a system such as ours is the result. However plausible this theory, it skips a number of hard places, of which a truth-seeking philosophy, science, and religion, such as Theosophy claims to be, is bound to take notice. In the first place, what law—to use a term to which scientists are fond of appealing—places the central sun in its position and gives the original impetus to the nebular revolution? Science is dumb. Theosophy answers, There is no central sun; there is a *laya* center, produced by intelligent will; a point where there is absolutely no gravitation, and hence one towards which all the nebular mass necessarily gravitates—gravitation being only the expression of the cosmic will acting upon matter. Its original revolution, also, is a direct expression of intelligent consciousness manifesting through force. Science has no possible explanation for this primary motion. But given this *laya* center and original revolution, then the reasoning of science holds good. Naturally a larger portion of the mass would concentrate where the revolution was the slowest, or at the center. And as pressure is the most powerful agent in the production of heat with which we are acquainted, the heat of the sun and of the interior of the earth would be accounted for. As peripheral portions would be thrown off, within each would of necessity develop a secondary *laya* center, which would determine the orbit and weight of the newly-born world. The peripheral motion around the new center would create moons, and account for the diurnal revolution of the planets—a motion for which science has offered no rational explanation. Bear constantly in mind that in claiming that world-building, equally with man-building, is done by and through definite, unvarying law, Theosophy contemplates all law as only the reflection of the will of the Absolute. Eliminate the personal idea, and world-building falls under that expression of the universal consciousness known as cosmic will. Atoms gravitate towards a common center because that portion of consciousness inherent in each one compels it to do so; and in every association of matter for whatever purpose there is seen force directed by conscious intelligence. Not human intelligence, but one which accomplishes its purpose more effectually than ours, for it is nearer the great Source than are we, who may justly be said to be near the periphery. Our motion is more active in consequence, and we are thrown off into little planetary resemblances, or satellites of the great central intelligence, and for this reason have both in time and space a limited cyclic existence of our own as individuals. So great a harmony is there between the universe, or Macrocosm, and man, the Microcosm.

Again, Agnosticism claims that the universe exists by virtue of uni-



versal law. Agreed, if law means consciously-directed will. For Theosophy teaches that just as a man's physical body responds to and is governed by his will directed by his consciousness, so is the universe governed, controlled, and directed by an intelligent consciousness, residing within the matter out of which it is fashioned. Man wills, and physical body moves where his directing consciousness desires to place him. The cosmos wills, and worlds wing their way through space in obedience to conscious, intelligent design. Therefore, the so-called cosmic or universal laws are but expressions of the cosmic or universal will.

Of these laws which Materialism vaguely conceives as self-originating and self-sustaining, the one completely without exception is said to be gravitation. Laing<sup>1</sup> declares in the most positive terms, "But this we do know, that, be matter and space what they may, they are subject to this one universal, all-pervading law; and attract, have attracted, and will always attract directly as the mass of the attracting matter, and inversely as the square of the distance in space at which the attraction acts." Here is a scientific law stated in the most absolute terms. Let us see. From a well-known scientific text book<sup>2</sup> we quote: "This fluid is called the Ether. It fills alike the spaces among the atoms and molecules of bodies, and among the planets and stars of the universe. *It is without weight*, and portions of its mass move about in it without the slightest friction." Here is a dilemma. Ether is not material, or it violates the supposed universal law of gravitation. Materialism is welcome to either horn; Theosophy declines both, and posits gravitation as a secondary emanation from the universal will, and as only beginning to act after the process of world-building is well under way. If it be universal, as is claimed, why do not existing nebulae gravitate off to the nearest sums, which so immensely outweigh them?

In connection with this very point, some three years ago, Madame Blavatsky, that *bête noire* of both religion and science, declared that if scientists could perfect instruments sufficiently powerful to penetrate these nebulae, they would perceive the falsity of this assumption of the universal action of gravitation. It passed without notice, as so much that this wonderful woman says always does. But quite recently a California scientist has most unexpectedly confirmed this seemingly idle statement. One of the first results of the inspection of the heavens through the great Lick telescope was the cautious announcement by Prof. Holden that the arrangement of matter in many of the nebulae would seem to point directly to the conclusion that some other force than gravitation was the active agent.

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Science and Modern Thought.*



But having shown the insufficiency of the scientific or any other theory to account for the behavior of matter in the formation of the solar system, unless it accepts an intelligent consciousness controlling force, let us now descend from this brief survey of the Macrocosm to the Microcosm, or man.

Agnostics see in mind the highest expression of consciousness, and, as we have said, claim that this is only the result of the physical processes going on within the body. The degree of mind they also claim is due to and proceeds step by step with the evolution of the body. At what point, then, does spirit or soul make its appearance? Further, that as man's mind seems to differ from that of an animal only in degree, what right have we to assume for him a soul any more than for the animal? And if either or both have souls, wherein lies the proof that these persist after death?

Taking up these objections in the order of their statement, Theosophy answers, There is no point at which the soul is added ; it is potential in all matter ; that the very thoughts expressed in this paper were potentially present in the original fire-mist, out of which our sun and its planetary system were formed. Spirit can not be added ; it exists co-eternal with matter ; it is the upper and superior pole of THAT which is both spirit and matter. Matter is the crystallised expression of spirit, and is eternally controlled by spirit, or Consciousness, acting through Eternal motion, or force. Consciousness is not evolving up by means of or through matter. Each apparent separation is simply that portion of the universal which is manifesting on the mineral, vegetable, animal, or human plane. It is spirit, by which term we include Universal Consciousness and Absolute Ideation, which, directing force and shaping matter so as to reflect Absolute Ideation, causes all this wonderful evolution of form. Material form is but the outward expression in terms of matter of the inner intelligence. This intelligence in the star dust is expressed in the magnetic formation of *laya* centers, and in man, in causing and controlling thought. So in the mineral and vegetable kingdoms, the so-called properties of matter are expressions of consciousness upon these planes of being. What reasonable man can observe the wonderful combinations of design and color which, in some flowers at least, have no other *raison d'être* than as expressions of beauty, and not perceive a designing consciousness concerned in the admirable result? Only that we have been taught by theological absurdities to look for the designer without instead of within, for an extra-cosmic instead of an intra-cosmic intelligence, can account for our blindness. The soul of man, therefore, has no beginning, but is that individualised ray of the universal consciousness at present manifesting on the human, or plane of individuality.



Then, as to the difference between the human and animal souls. This necessarily involves also the question of the persistence of the soul after the death of the body. We have shown force to be eternal motion, guided by conscious intelligence. Its one unvarying attribute is persistence. Like matter, it cannot be destroyed. It may pass through innumerable correlations, but in the end it reappears without one iota of loss. Then how can that correlation of force which enables consciousness to manifest as the human ego ever be dissipated or lost? It can not; it is an unthinkable proposition; it violates the basic law of persistence. But force has other attributes besides persistence. In the form of heat, for instance, it has the wonderful power of becoming latent, or disappearing from the plane of our perception. A certain amount of heat converts ice into water, but in the process nearly 80 % of this heat assumes the latent condition. Herein, we hold, lies the key to that form of force which enables consciousness to express as animal intelligence or soul. At the death of the animal its intelligence becomes latent animal force, remaining within the limits of the plane, just as heat remains latent in matter. Given an animal conception, and the latent intelligence reappears, having by the law of conservation lost nothing either in quantity or quality.

But man is so much higher that his consciousness rises above the plane of latency, and persists as an individual ego. There really seems to be something in human consciousness which causes it at each successive stage of its becoming to conceive that its own limit has been reached; that farther progress is impossible. We can imagine a meeting of scientific caterpillars, for instance, gravely discussing the possibilities of a butterfly stage of existence, and concluding that such a state was from the caterpillar standpoint unscientific and not warranted by caterpillar logic; and, further, that certain caterpillars who hold the butterfly theory are the victims of delusion or superstition, and that, to be lenient with them, their mental machinery jumps a cog occasionally.

But man's widening perception ought to carry him above and beyond this paralysing point. He has reached a state where his soul force is on the border land of other and grander correlations; where objective life begins to disappear, and where subjective conditions alternate with it as intermediate links between physical life and that grander spiritual existence towards which he is tending. This subjective life which we enter upon briefly during dreams and wholly at death, necessitates and assures the persistence of the individual consciousness. The cosmic macrocosm has thrown off its peripheral microcosm; henceforth he proceeds along his individual orbit until this centrifugal



impetus is exhausted, and he returns to the source from whence he proceeded.

Perhaps it might be well to explain that Theosophy contemplates no eternal life for man as such. It teaches that all things proceed in cycles, and that the physical manifestation of this universe will be followed, after an immense period of time, by its dissolution. The will which compelled it into manifestation shall then be withdrawn, and an equal period of rest—to use a very inadequate term to express this which is known as the Great Pralaya—will follow, and this again to be succeeded by another projection, and so on, eternally. At the beginning of a new Manvantara the monad which manifested as man during the old may reappear and take on newer and grander conditions of existence, but it will never again be as man. In infinite duration, there is room for infinite manifestation.

In this persistence of the monad there is no promise that the personality will persist after death. On the contrary, our bodies are but the vestments temporarily inhabited by our conscious egos. They are cast aside at death, and the soul enters upon a subjective life, of which we have a hint in trance, dream, and hypnotic states, until it has by a process which we might term involution, assimilated the experiences of its last physical life, after which under the superior law of karmic attraction it re-enters another body to continue its evolutionary march. Theosophy further teaches that, having attained to self consciousness and consequent free will, or freedom of choice, man may so force and hasten by his will the slower evolutionary processes of his being as to enable him to anticipate these, and to connect his present consciousness with that of higher states, and so, avoiding any subjective or other lapses, maintain a continuous spiritual existence.

Bear in mind, too, that this very continuous evolution of the human consciousness necessitates the ultimate reaching a point where it will be done with gross matter as a vehicle. Shall it then on this account cease its onward march? Not so; it must ever widen its sphere; and it is even now preparing to manifest in a new correlation. It is all the time becoming more and more independent of its physical envelope for its highest expression. As Plato declared long ago, "It reasons most effectually when none of the physical senses harass it." It has evolved powers which will carry it safely through the psychic realm it must next pass, into the glorious reality of spiritual perception.

Trance, clairvoyance, the numberless instances where the soul has left the body, travelled immense distances, and returned with accurate physical information, all point to the direction human consciousness is preparing to take. Already do sleep and dreams indicate the way in which the



chasm is bridged over by psychic states. Nor must we be too sweeping in our condemnation of the Materialist for his failure to accept the promise, in these seemingly supernatural phenomena, of the glorious future which awaits humanity. To the blind, light is not conceivable; to those who lag in the development of their psychic faculties, such phenomena appear as superstition or wilful deception. Yet so close to the truth will a scientist reason, so near to the open door will he approach, that one can hardly credit that, like a sleep-walker, he takes no notice of that which is passing before his widely open eyes, but is almost forced to seek the reason in the old proverb, "None are so blind as those who do not wish to see." Still there is hope for man. Materialism, with its gloomy certainty of the extinction of all life, all intelligence in the grave; Agnosticism, with its hopeless unknowable, may wreck the personalities for a few incarnations; but the real ego sits above, an unconcerned and undismayed spectator.

Nor is it claimed that because of any development of the psychic faculties, there is any intellectual superiority. On the contrary, psychics are very apt to be of ill-balanced natures. Like physical vision, the psychic faculty conveys no information until weighed and tested by reason. Psychics are too apt to think that because their phenomena are obtained by unusual methods they are therefore infallible. Not so; reason is the supreme arbiter. Nor ought anyone to accept as true any phenomenon which does not appeal to his reason as at least possible. By so doing he would commit a sin against his own intelligence, the effect of which could not but be bad. Still, let us be not too hasty in condemnation. If we could fancy a time in human evolution when the physical eye was faintly beginning to function in a few individuals, we at once perceive how improbable the reports of the wonders, imperfectly seen and perhaps erroneously interpreted, would seem to those for whom touch was as yet the only means of contacting the external world. Yet the latter, not having their reasoning faculties disturbed by the ingress of new and strange phenomena, might well be in a position to better analyse and assign to the new facts their relative importance.

Having thus shown, as we hope and believe, that spirit, or intelligent consciousness, controls all matter, and that that portion which constitutes the human consciousness must by all the laws of reason, logic, or evidence persist after death; having made the very witnesses of our opponents, the materialistic laws of the conservation of force and the correlation of energy, bear testimony in our favor, let us conclude with a few remarks as to what Theosophy really is, and what it teaches.

It is not an outgrowth of Buddhism, although many Buddhists are in its ranks and see in its teachings the reflection of Buddha's wisdom.



It is not Christianity, though many Christians accept it, finding in it their realization of the perfect Christ. Nor is it Spiritism, so-called, although many spiritists find in it the confirmation of much that they believe. It is not Materialism, although numbers of mystic materialists in India are among its adherents. It is the Wisdom Religion, hints of which, like a golden thread, run through Buddhism, Brahmanism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Paganism, and are even found in the most sacred tenets of modern scientific Agnosticism. That which has for its motto, "There is no religion higher than Truth," can well afford to and does seek its principles wherever truth is to be found.

So much for its origin. It teaches absolute and practical universal brotherhood, based upon the scientific fact of the absolute equality of the ego.

It teaches Reincarnation, or the repeated rebirth of the ego in physical bodies ; thus doing away with the confusion, injustice, and unreasonableness of the single birth theory.

It teaches Karma, or the conservation of force on the plane of ethics ; thus abolishing the autocratic interference of any personal god, and making each one the arbiter of his own destiny.

It teaches a belief in a rational future existence, burdened by no dogmas of impossible and childish "heavens" and "hells."

It teaches infinite states of consciousness, of which that of the rock, equally with that of man, are only different degrees in the expression of the same Universal Consciousness.

These and many other tenets are embraced in its philosophy. No one can realize more keenly than the writer how imperfect is this brief sketch ; how unfair to the magnificent philosophy, science, and religion it attempts to shadow forth. As a traveller is compelled in order to reach his destination to pass with scarce a glance beautiful landscapes, inviting arbors, or murmuring waterfalls, so we have had at almost every sentence to omit explanation, collateral as well as direct proof of our statements, and digressions really necessary to even a partial elucidation of our subject.

Let no one from this paper fall into the error of supposing that consciousness evolves along a beaten path from element to god. There are infinite paths and by-paths, no two of which are precisely the same ; yet all leading eventually back to the Great First cause, from whom we have come, and to whom we shall all return. And meanwhile, as none have perfect knowledge ; as there is absolutely nothing within or without us which reasoned to its ultimate terms is not a profound mystery ; as we are completely encompassed by doubts, fears, and uncertainties, let us not waste our puny strength in combating each others' concep-



tions of truth ; but rather, in the true spirit of brotherhood, extend helping hands ; realising that in union there is strength, and devoutly giving thanks for any light, however dim, which is thrown by either science, religion, philosophy, or THEOSOPHY across the unknown seas over which our ships are sailing.

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