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## **Relativity and the Absolute**

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SWIVEL-CHAIR abstractions? No, practical ethics. For as a man thinketh in his heart so is he. It makes some difference in a man's life whether his philosophy is Relativity or the Absolute. There are some fads in philosophy; and philosophies change like the fashions of women's bonnets. There are lords many and gods many in philosophy; and they multiply at that.

It is a far cry from the Idealism of Berkeley and Hegel to the materialism of Tyndall and Haeckel. Berkeley denied the corporeity of the world; and Tyndall told the British Association for the Advancement of Science that "we must look to matter for the power and potency of all that is."

There are even styles of Materialism and Idealism. It is some step from the materialism of Hobbes and Haeckel to the Behaviorism of John Dewey, or the super-behaviorism of the later philosophers who substitute for the human soul the mere response of the organism to its environment. The farther this latter philosophy proceeds, the worse it becomes. Matter has some recognizable qualities even if we deny it mentality. But to rest mentality on mere organization of neural and vital forces is to step from terra firma into empty space. The newer materialism is more subtle and more irrational than the older.

Idealism has had its developments. There is some difference between the Idealism of Berkeley and that of Schelling; and also between both of them and the modern Idealism of Josiah Royce and James H. Snowden. All Idealism loses the tangible world in the subjective conception. But there are differences even in that. Berkeley referred it to the fiat of God; but the later Idealists to the all-pervading life of God,-a distinction which only makes the modern Idealism more abstruse and incomprehensible, with a little tinge of Pantheism.

The philosophy of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel is known as the philosophy of the Absolute. But the chief error in the philosophy of Schelling and Hegel at least lay not in its Absolutism, but in its extreme Pantheism. There must be an Absolute. We may not be able to get our fingers on it, but it is a metaphysical necessity. It takes its place in our thinking along with the axioms of Euclid, and the First Principles of Dr. McCosh. The Absolute, together with the Infinite, is the necessity of thought, it is questionable whether the relative is conceivable apart from the Absolute, in regard to which it is relative. Or can the relative be relative to another relativity, the second as uncertain as the first?

When we proceed along these lines we discover that relativity ends in universal doubt. That is why the discussion of this subject has a religious value. This is not swivel-chair philosophy. It is the solvency or bankruptcy of all thought, life, and truth.

Here we touch the question, not only what is truth? But is there any truth? Some European writer recently declared that relativity is worse than materialism. Quite true. Materialism believed something; -held that its premises were true,-argued on the basis of those premises to what it thought were legitimate conclusions. It kept its feet on the ground to say the least. But Relativity stands in a quagmire .without bottom. It is not worth while to argue with Relativity, because no premise, for it, has any certainty. And no argument can be built on universal negation. If all is uncertain, then relativity is as uncertain as all the rest. And therefore its very uncertainty is uncertain; and thus it destroys itself.

Further if Relativity is destructive of truth, it is likewise destructive of religion and morality. The most soulblasting heresy in the world is to think that there is nothing right and nothing wrong, and it doesn't make any difference anyway. No religion nor morality can survive such a philosophy. How refreshing to turn from the vagaries of the world to the faith of the New Testament and hear Paul and John say: "I know", "I know."

Relativity applies to only a few realms of human knowledge, and is questionable even there. If it obtains in the sphere of the empirical, and even that is not absolutely certain always and everywhere, at least we are sure that it has no place in consciousness. There is no disputing with consciousness that I am, or that I know my states, or my personal identity.

Neither have the mathematical certainties been weakened by any claims of relativity. The multiplication table is good for all time and all worlds; and true in spite of all philosophies. We think there are some things in human knowledge that may lay claim to being fundamental truth. Fundamentalism, whether in religion or philosophy, is the only rational standpoint.

It is supposed that the New Physics favors Relativity, and that therefore Relativity has a quasi scientific basis. But the New Physics is itself only a theory and in need of verification. And another generation will probably leave most of it on the scrap-heap, while some newer theory will clamor for recognition.

Our humble conviction is that the Quantum Theory will not stand; and that Energism as a philosophy is unthinkable. Much is said these days about "pure energy." We venture to think that there is no such thing. Energy does not exist apart from substance. Energy as we know it in this world is an effect, and cannot exist without a cause. It is not *sui generis*. As there can be no motion without something that moves, so there can be no force without something that gives rise to it.

We are far from thinking that the resolution of the atom into electricity has banished matter. The resultant electricity is still material substance, according to the best authorities. No bridge has been found to span the gap between matter and spirit, and the chasm is too wide to leap across. Up to the present we are decidedly dualists.

An assumed velocity has been invoked to destroy the fact of gravitation, and the estimate of measurements. If the earth should hurtle through space 161,000 miles per second our horizontal, head-on yard sticks would be reduced to 18 inches, and the distance from Philadelphia to Harrisburg, or from Pittsburgh to Altoona would shrink to 50 miles. So that attraction and distance are relative to velocity.

Even admitting the principle for the sake of generosity, what we are concerned with is not what would result under unreal and impossible conditions, but what is the fact under the conditions that now exist.

Alluding to another phase of the subject, Einstein's algebraic equations are incomprehensible to the ordinary scholar, not because Algebra is incomprehensible; but because of the values, or rather lack of values, attributable to the terms. In Algebra if a,b,c have assigned values, then x,y,z are easily deducible. But if a,b,c represent nothing definite, nor numerical, what conclusion can be arrived at as to x,y,z? This seems to us another phase of the quagmire.

For example, Professor Edington says: "If today you ask a physicist what he has finally made out of the aether or the electron to be, the answer will not be a description in terms of billiard balls or flywheels or anything concrete; he will point instead to a number of symbols and a set of mathematical equations which they satisfy. What do the symbols stand for? The mysterious reply is given that physics is indifferent to that; it has no means of probing beneath the symbolism. To understand the phenomena of the physical world it is necessary to know the equations which the symbols obey, but not the nature of that which is being symbolized:"

One could wish for something more concrete; and wonders whether such indefinite processes insure reality in the visible and tangible world in which we live.

We think that even in this age of uncertainty there are some things certain enough to enable us to say with the man born blind: "One thing I know."

We think too that in this time when uncertainty is exploited in physics and philosophy, the Absolute deserves renewed emphasis. A merely empirical philosophy may result in the Unknowable of Herbert Spencer. But there is an *a priorism* that has to be recognized, and the Absolute is a metaphysical necessity. The laws of thought are as valid and far more certain than scientific experimentation.

Religion and morality find a Gibraltar in the Absolute, while Relativity presents itself as The Beautiful Isle of Nowhere.