

THE SPECULATIVE

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THE SPECULATIVE.

"We need what Genius is unconsciously seeking, and, by some daring generalization of the universe, shall assuredly discover, a spiritual calculus, a *Novum Organon*, whereby nature shall be divined in the soul, the soul in God, matter in spirit, polarity resolved into unity; and that power which pulsates in all life, animates and builds all organizations, shall manifest itself as one universal deific energy, present alike at the outskirts and centre of the universe, whose centre and circumference are one; omniscient, omnipotent, self-subsisting, uncontained, yet containing all things in the unbroken synthesis of its being."—("CALCULUS," one of Alcott's "*Orphic Sayings*.")

At the end of the sixth book of Plato's Republic, after a characterization of the two grades of sensuous knowing and the grade of the understanding, "which is obliged to set out from hypotheses, for the reason that it does not deal with principles but only with results," we find the speculative grade of knowing characterized as "that in which the soul, setting out from an hypothesis, proceeds to an unhypothetical principle, and makes its way without the aid of [sensuous] images, but solely through ideas themselves." The mathematical procedure which begins by hypotheating definitions, axioms, postulates, and the like, which it never examines nor attempts to deduce or prove, is the example given by Plato of the method of the Understanding, while he makes the speculative Reason "to posit hypotheses by the Dialectic, *not as fixed principles*, but only as starting points, in order that, by removing them, it may arrive at the unhypothetical—the principle of the universe."

This most admirable description is fully endorsed by Aristotle, and firmly established in a two-fold manner:

1. In the *Metaphysics* (xi. 7) he shows ontologically, starting with *motion* as an hypothesis, that the *self-moved* is the first principle; and this he identifies with the speculative, and the being of God.

2. In the *De Anima* (iii. 5-8) he distinguishes psychologically the "active intellect" as the highest form of knowing, as that which is its own object, (subject and object,) and hence as containing its own end and aim in itself—as being infinite. He identifies this with the Speculative result, which he found ontologically as the Absolute.

Spinoza in his *Ethics* (Prop. xl. Schol. ii., and Prop. xlv., Cor. ii. of Part II.) has well described the Speculative, which

he names "*Scientia intuitiva*," as the thinking of things under the form of eternity, (*De natura rationis est res sub quadam specie aternitatis percipere.*)

Though great diversity is found in respect to form and systematic exposition among the great philosophers, yet there is the most complete unanimity, not only with respect to the transcendency of the Speculative, but also with reference to the content of its knowing. If the reader of different systems of Philosophy has in himself achieved some degree of Speculative culture, he will at every step be delighted and confirmed at the agreement of what, to the ordinary reader, seem irreconcilable statements.

Not only do speculative writers agree among themselves as to the nature of things, and the destiny of man and the world, but their results furnish us in the form of pure thought what the artist has wrought out in the form of beauty. Whether one tests architecture, sculpture, painting, music or pœtrÿ; it is all the same. Goethe has said:

"As all Nature's thousand changes
But one changeless God proclaim;
So in Art's wide kingdoms ranges
One sole meaning, still the same:
This is Truth, eternal Reason,
Which from Beauty takes its dress,
And serene, through time and season,
Stands for aye in loveliness."

While Art presents this content to the senses, Religion offers it to the conception in the form of a dogma to be held by faith; the deepest Speculative truth is allegorically typified in a historical form, so that it acts upon the mind partly through fantasy and partly through the understanding. Thus Religion presents the same content as Art and Philosophy, but stands between them, and forms a kind of middle.

ground upon which the purification takes place. "It is the purgatory between the Inferno of Sense and the Paradise of Reason." Its function is mediation; a continual degrading of the sensuous and external, and an elevation to the supersensual and internal. The transition of Religion into Speculative Philosophy is found in the mystics. Filled with the profound significance of religious symbolism, and seeing in it the explanation of the universe, they essay to communicate their insights. But the form of Science is not yet attained by them. They express themselves, not in those universal categories that the Spirit of the Race has formed in language for its utterance, but they have recourse to symbols more or less inadequate because ambiguous, and of insufficient universality to stand for the archetypes themselves. Thus "Becoming" is the most pure germinal archetype, and belongs therefore to logic, or the system of pure thought, and it has correspondences on concrete planes, as e. g., *time, motion, life, &c.* Now if one of these concrete terms is used for the pure logical category, we have mysticism. The alchemists, as shown by a genial writer of our day, use the technique of their craft to express the profound mysteries of spirit and its regeneration. The Eleusinian and other mysteries do the like.

While it is one of the most inspiring things connected with Speculative Philosophy to discover that the "Open Secret of the Universe" has been read by so many, and to see, under various expressions, the same meaning; yet it is the highest problem of Speculative Philosophy to seize a method that is adequate to the expression of the "Secret;" for its (the content's) own method of genetic development must be the only adequate one. Hence it is that we can classify philosophic systems by their success in seizing the content which is common to Art and Religion, as well as to Philosophy, in such a manner as to allow its free evolution; to have as little in the method that is merely formal or extraneous to the idea itself. The rigid formalism of Spinoza—though manipulated by a clear speculative spirit—

is inadequate to the unfolding of its content; for how could the mathematical method, which is that of quantity or external determinations alone, ever suffice to unfold those first principles which attain to the quantitative only in their result?

In this, the profoundest of subjects, we always find in Plato light for the way. Although he has not given us complete examples, yet he has pointed out the road of the true Speculative method in a way not to be mistaken. Instead of setting out with first principles presupposed as true, by which all is to be established, (as mathematics and such sciences do), he asserts that the first starting points must be removed as inadequate. We begin with the immediate, which is utterly insufficient, and exhibits itself as such. We ascend to a more adequate, by removing the first hypothesis; and this process repeats itself until we come to the first principle, which of course bears its own evidence in this, that it is absolutely universal and absolutely determined at the same time; in other words it is the self-determining, the "self-moved," as Plato and Aristotle call it. It is its own other, and hence it is the true infinite, for it is not limited but continued by its other.

From this peculiarity results the difficulty of Speculative Philosophy. The unused mind, accepting with naïveté the first proposition as settled, finds itself brought into confusion when this is contradicted, and condemns the whole procedure. The irony of Socrates, that always begins by positing the ground of his adversary, and reducing it through its own inadequateness to contradict itself, is of this character, and the unsophisticated might say, and do say: "See how illogical is Socrates, for he sets out to establish something, and arrives rather at the destruction of it." The *reductio ad absurdum* is a faint imitation of the same method. It is not sufficient to prove your own system by itself, for each of the opposing systems can do that; but you must show that any and all counter-hypotheses result in your own. God makes the wrath of men to praise Him, and all imperfect things must continually demonstrate the perfect, for the

reason that they do not exist by reason of their defects, but through what of truth there is in them, and the imperfection is continually manifesting the *want* of the perfect. "Spirit," says Hegel, "is self-contained being. But matter, which is spirit outside of itself, [turned inside out,] continually manifests this, its inadequacy, through gravity—attraction to a central point beyond each particle. (If it could get at this central point, it would have no extension, and hence would be annihilated.)"

The soul of this method lies in the comprehension of the negative. In that wonderful exposé of the importance of the negative, which Plato gives in the *Parmenides* and *Sophist*, we see how justly he appreciated its true place in Philosophic Method. Spinoza's "*omnis determinatio est negatio*" is the most famous of modern statements respecting the negative, and has been very fruitful in results.

One would greatly misunderstand the Speculative view of the negative should he take it to mean, as some have done, "that the negative is as essential as the positive." For if they are two independent somewhat over against each other, having equal validity, then all unity of system is absolutely impossible—we can have only the Persian *Ahriman* and *Ormuzd*; nay, not even these—for unless there is a primal unity, a "*Zerwane-Akerene*"—the uncreated one, these are impossible as opposites, for there can be no tension from which the strife should proceed.

The Speculative has insight into the constitution of the positive out of the negative. "That which has the form of Being," says Hegel, "is the self-related;" but relation of all kinds is negation, and hence whatever has the form of being and is a positive somewhat, is a self-related negative. Those three stages of culture in knowing, talked of by Plato and Spinoza, may be characterized in a new way by their relation to this concept.

The first stage of consciousness—that of immediate or sensuous knowing—seizes objects by themselves—isolatedly—without

their relations; each seems to have validity in and for itself, and to be wholly positive and real. The negative is the mere absence of the real thing; and it utterly ignores it in its scientific activity.

But the second stage traces relations, and finds that things do not exist in immediate independence, but that each is related to others, and it comes to say that "Were a grain of sand to be destroyed, the universe would collapse." It is a necessary consequent to the previous stage, for the reason that so soon as the first stage gets over its childish engrossment with the novelty of variety, and attempts to seize the individual thing, it finds its characteristic marks or properties. But these consist invariably of relations to other things, and it learns that these properties, without which the thing could have no distinct existence, are the very destruction of its independence, since they are its complications with other things.

In this stage the negative has entered and has full sway. For all that was before firm and fixed, is now seen to be, not through itself, but through others, and hence the being of everything is its negation. For if this stone exists only through its relations to the sun, which is *not* the stone but something else, then the being of this stone is its own negation. But the second stage only reduces all to dependence and finitude, and does not show us how any real, true, or independent being can be found to exist. It holds fast to the stage of mediation alone, just as the first stage held by the *immediate*. But the dialectic of this position forces it over into the third.

If things exist only in their relations, and relations are the negatives of things, then all that appears positive—all being—must rest upon negation. How is this? The negative is essentially a relative, but since it is the only substrate (for all is relative), it can relate only to itself. But self-relation is always identity, and here we have the solution of the previous difficulty. All positive forms, all forms of immediateness or being, all forms of identity, are self-relations, consisting of a negative

or relative, relating to itself. But the most wonderful side of this, is the fact that since this relation is that of the *negative*, it *negates* itself in its very relation, and hence its *identity* is a producing of *non-identity*. Identity and distinction are produced by the self-same process, and thus *self-determination* is the origin of all identity and distinction likewise. This is the speculative stand-point in its completeness. It not only possesses speculative content, but is able to evolve a speculative system likewise. It is not only conscious of the principles, but of their method, and thus all is transparent.

To suppose that this may be made so plain that one shall see it at first sight, would be the height of absurdity. Doubtless far clearer expositions can be made of this than those found in Plato or Proclus, or even in Fichte and Hegel; but any and every exposition must incur the same difficulty, viz: The one who masters it must undergo a thorough change in his innermost. The "Palingenesia" of the intellect is as essential as the "regeneration of the heart," and is at bottom the same thing, as the mystics teach us.

But this great difference is obvious superficially: In religious regeneration it seems the yielding up of the self to an alien, though beneficent, power, while in philosophy it seems the complete identification of one's self with it.

He, then, who would ascend into the thought of the best thinkers the world has seen, must spare no pains to elevate his thinking to the plane of pure thought. The completest discipline for this may be found in Hegel's Logic. Let one not despair, though he seem to be baffled seventy and seven times; his earnest and vigorous assault is repaid by surprisingly increased strength of mental acumen which he will be assured of, if he tries his powers on lower planes after his attack has failed on the highest thought.

These desultory remarks on the Speculative, may be closed with a few illustrations of what has been said of the negative.

I. Everything must have limits that mark it off from other things, and these limits are its negations, in which it ceases.

II. It must likewise have qualities which distinguish it from others, but these likewise are negatives in the sense that they exclude it from them. Its determining by means of qualities is the making it *not* this and *not* that, but exactly what it is. Thus the affirmation of anything is at the same time the negation of others.

III. Not only is the negative manifest in the above general and abstract form, but its penetration is more specific. Everything has distinctions from others in general, but also from *its* other. *Sweet* is opposed not only to other properties in general, as *white*, *round*, *soft*, etc., but to *its* other, or *sour*. So, too, white is opposed to black, soft to hard, heat to cold, etc., and in general a *positive* thing to a *negative* thing. In this kind of relative, the negative is more essential, for it seems to constitute the intimate nature of the opposites, so that each is reflected in the other.

IV. More remarkable are the appearances of the negative in nature. The element *fire* is a negative which destroys the form of the combustible. It reduces organic substances to inorganic elements, and is that which negates the organic. Air is another negative element. It acts upon all terrestrial elements; upon water, converting it into invisible vapor; upon metals, reducing them to earths through corrosion—eating up iron to form rust, rotting wood into mould—destructive or negative alike to the mineral and vegetable world, like fire, to which it has a speculative affinity. The grand type of all negatives in nature, such as air and fire, is *Time*, the great devourer, and archetype of all changes and movements in nature. Attraction is another appearance of the negative. It is a manifestation in some body of an essential connection with another which is not it; or rather it is an embodied self-contradiction: "that other (the sun) which is not me (the earth) is my true being." Of course its own being is its own negation, then.

Thus, too, the plant is negative to the inorganic—it assimilates it; the animal is negative to the vegetable world.

As we approach these higher forms of negation, we see the negative acting against itself, and this constitutes a process. The food that life requires, which it negates in the process of digestion, and assimilates, is, in the life process, again negated, eliminated from the organism, and replaced by new elements. A negation is made, and this is again negated. But the higher form of negation appears in the generic; "The species lives and the individual dies." The generic continually transcends the individual—going forth to new individuals and deserting the old—a process of birth and decay, both nega-

tive processes. In conscious Spirit both are united in one-movement. The generic here enters the individual as pure *ego*—the undetermined possibility of all determinations. Since it is undetermined, it is negative to all special determinations. But this *ego* not only exists as subject, but also as object—a process of self-determination or self-negation. And this negation or particularization continually proceeds from one object to another, and remains conscious under the whole, not dying, as the mere animal does, in the transition from individual to individual. This is the *aperçu* of Immortality.

HERBERT SPENCER.

CHAPTER I.

THE CRISIS IN NATURAL SCIENCE.

During the past twenty years a revolution has been working in physical science. Within the last ten it has come to the surface, and is now rapidly spreading into all departments of mental activity.

Although its centre is to be found in the doctrine of the "Correlation of Forces," it would be a narrow view that counted only the expounders of this doctrine, numerous as they are; the spirit of this movement inspires a heterogeneous multitude—Carpenter, Grove, Mayer, Faraday, Thompson, Tyndall and Helmholtz; Herbert Spencer, Stuart Mill, Buckle, Draper, Lewes, Lecky, Max Müller, Marsh, Liebig, Darwin and Agassiz; these names, selected at random, are suggested on account of the extensive circulation of their books. Every day the press announces some new name in this field of research.

What is the character of the old which is displaced, and of the new which gets established?

By way of preliminary, it must be remarked that there are observable in modern times three general phases of culture, more or less historic.

The first phase is thoroughly dogmatic: it accepts as of like validity metaphysical

abstractions, and empirical observations. It has not arrived at such a degree of clearness as to perceive contradictions between form and content. For the most part, it is characterized by a reverence for external authority. With the revival of learning commences the protest of spirit against this phase. Descartes and Lord Bacon begin the contest, and are followed by the many—Locke, Newton, Leibnitz, Clark, and the rest. All are animated with the spirit of that time—to come to the matter in hand without so much mediation. Thought wishes to rid itself of its fetters; religious sentiment, to get rid of forms. This reaction against the former stage, which has been called by Hegel the metaphysical, finds a kind of climax in the intellectual movement just preceding the French revolution. Thought no longer is contented to say "Cogito, ergo sum," abstractly, but applies the doctrine in all directions, "I think; in that deed, I am." "I am a man only in so far as I think. In so far as I think, I am an essence. What I get from others is not mine. What I can comprehend, or dissolve in my reason, that is mine." It looks around and spies institutions—"clothes of spirit," as Herr Teufelsdröck calls them. "What are you doing here, you sniveling priest?" says Voltaire; "you are imposing delusions