

THE PLACE OF RELIGION IN MODERN SCIENTIFIC CIVILIZATION.

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Religion may be defined as dealing with the relations of man to superior entities, usually conceived as individuals, that is, a personal God or personal Gods, or conceptions as immortality, resurrection, etc. Science, <sup>as understood here</sup> deals with the conclusions derived by the laws of logic from our sense perceptions.

There has grown up through the centuries an increasing antagonism between science and religion, making the two incompatible with each other. Religion met this by the Inquisition, that is, by forcibly suppressing science and its votaries. However, our civilization is an engineering civilization, and the prosperous life of the large populations which our earth now supports, has become possible only by the work of the engineer. But engineering is the application of science to the service of man, and so today science is the foundation not only of our prosperity, but of our very existence, and thus necessarily has become the dominating power in our human society.

Therefore in civilized countries, the attempt of religion to suppress science by the Inquisition of mediæval times is laughed out of court, and in semi-civilized countries such an attempt for instance as to forbid by legislation the teaching of evolution in state universities, is rarely successful, at least not for a long time.

Our knowledge of the superior entities, with which historic religion deals, has been derived by experience, and by "Revelation".

Undoubtedly experience led to the first conception of superior beings, or "Gods": the forces of nature personified; the experiences in dreams; the orderly progress of nature, which seemed to imply a manager of the universe. With our increasing knowledge, this became less and less satisfactory. For instance, the terror of the thunderstorm led primitive man to the conception of a Supreme Being, whose attribute was the thunderbolt. But when Franklin brought the lightning from the clouds and showed it to be a mere electric spark; when we learned to make lightning harmless by the lightning rod, and when finally we harnessed electricity to do our work, naturally our reverence for the thrower of the thunder bolt decayed. So the gods of experience vanished. For a time, the wonderful fitness of nature gave argument for the defence of the conception of a Supreme Being who had made everything in nature so perfectly fitting its purpose. But Darwin gave a ridiculously simple explanation of the fitness of nature, by showing that only the fittest can survive and anything unfit is rapidly exterminated, and so on merely mechanical principles nature becomes perfect in fitness. Therefore the hatred of all the forces of darkness against the theory of evolution.

Thus no evidence or proof of the existence of a God has been found in the phenomena of nature, based on experience.

Logical proof of the existence of God, immortality, etc., has been given repeatedly <sup>1)</sup>, but in all these attempts, the proof is based on an assumption, such as the existence of the mind independent of the body, etc., and stands and falls with this assumption, and this assumption cannot be proven. That is, the attempted proof of God is a syllogism. There are a number of conceptions, God, immortality, the existence, independent of the body, of the soul and the mind and in general the personal individuality or the "ego", the existence of life not merely as a biochemical process but as an entity independent of the living body, etc. All these conceptions are inter-related and dependent on each other in such manner that, if one is proven, all the others logically follow from it.

For a long time attempts were thus made by empirical science to prove one of these conceptions. The most promising appeared the proof of the existence of life independent of and not limited by the laws of inanimate nature. Such would be brought if the existence of a "vital force" could be proven, which can do things, that the laws of inanimate nature cannot accomplish. As you know, the "vital force" held sway for a long time in chemistry. When chemistry developed, it was found that the compounds met in inanimate nature could be produced by the chemist in his laboratory; but the "organic" compounds, that is,

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1) Mostly in the scientific writings of the Roman Catholic Church. The Protestant minister usually does not have the required scientific training, but merely proclaims the infallibility of the Bible and condemns science when it contradicts the Bible, without realizing that this is no proof.

the things produced in living plants and animals, could not be produced by the chemist, and so were attributed to the action of the "vital force". But gradually one after the other of these chemical products of living things were produced synthetically by the chemist, and while many of the organic compounds have for some reason or another not yet been reproduced, the evidence has long become conclusive that the same laws of chemistry operate in the construction of the organic compounds, and no field is left for a vital force, but the "vital force" does not exist in the realm of science.

In the realm of science, all attempts to find any evidence of supernatural beings, of metaphysical conceptions, as God, immortality, infinity, etc. thus have failed, and if we are honest, we must confess that in science, there exists no God, no immortality, no soul, or mind as distinct from the body, but scientifically God and immortality are illogical conceptions. That is, science had inevitably to become atheistic.

There remained only Revelation as the foundation of the historical conception of religion. But is there any difference between the "dream" of prehistoric man, in which he "sees" wonderful things, and the "Revelation" of Mohammed, or Buddha or Moses or other founders of religions, which all contradict each other.

Thus there is no evidence outside of science for God, immortality and similar conceptions, and there is evidence against these conceptions in science, and science has justified its methods and conclusions by the work it has accomplished.

But it is very hard for man to get along without a belief in these conceptions. We may get along without a God, but not without immortality. Our self-conceit dislikes to place so little value on ourselves, our knowledge, skill, experience, in short our ego, to concede that all this is merely a function of the biochemical process of life, which utterly ceases and vanishes with the desintegration of the protoplasm of our body by death.

The conceptions of physical science are incompatible with the metaphysical conceptions of God, immortality, infinity, etc.. But are the conceptions of science really final and all embracing, or are they limited also, holding within a certain range only, and not beyond this? Science derives its conclusions by the laws of logic from our sense perceptions. Thus it does not deal with the real world, of which we know nothing, but with the world as it appears to our senses. But are there no limitations to our sense perceptions, which limit the validity of the conclusions we derive from them?

All our sense perceptions are limited by, and attached to the conceptions of time and space. Kant, the greatest and most critical of all philosophers, denies that time and space are the product of experience, but shows them to be categories, conceptions in which our mind clothes the sense perceptions. Modern physics has come to the same conclusion in the relativity theory, that absolute space and absolute time have no existence, but time and space exist only as far as things or events fill them, that is, are forms of sense perceptions.

Still greater and more pertinent is another limitation of our sense perceptions: our senses can perceive only finite things, but cannot perceive the infinite. No reasoning from any foundation can put anything into the conclusions, which is not contained in the foundations, and thus, with our sense perceptions finite, all conclusions from them, that is, the entire structure of science is limited to the finite. Hence any attempt of science, to deal with an infinite conception, as the infinite in time and space, immortality, and the conception of God, etc., in short, all these inter-related conceptions discussed above, must fail and lead to contradictions, be illogical.

Thus the proof of the non-existence in science, of the conception of God, immortality, etc. really means nothing except that we cannot get by reasoning a conclusion which is not contained in the premises on which we started our reasoning; finite science cannot deal with the conceptions of the infinite or absolute.

Furthermore, science derived its conclusions from the sense perceptions by the laws of logic. But what proof is there of the correctness of the laws of logic, except experience, which no matter how comprehensive must remain limited.

Thus the negative answer of science, on the question of whether there are conceptive entities of infinite character, as infinity in time and space, immortality of the ego, God, etc. is not conclusive and the question is still as open as it ever was.

How can we approach its solution and can we ever get an answer on the question of the existence of the infinite? The best we can expect to do is to search into the foundations and limitations of our mental processes, to determine how far conceptions are really illogical and contradictory, and how far they appear so merely because they involve conceptions beyond the limits of our mind. But there can be no scientific foundation of religion, but belief must always remain the foundation of religion, while that of science is logical reasoning from facts, that is, sense perceptions, and all that we can say is, that the two, science and religion, are not necessarily incompatible, but are different and unrelated activities of the human mind.

Thus inherently, science and religion are not antagonistic, but separate, the one dealing with the finite conclusions from our finite sense perceptions, that is, the world of facts facts, and reality, and the other with infinite conceptions, which can neither be proved nor disproven empirically, but are outside of the realm of science. A collision between science and religion can occur only, when the one tries to encroach on the

field of the other, for instance, when religion attempts to teach history in the fable of the Creation of the world, or biology in opposing the theory of evolution, etc. But these are not proper and essential parts of religion, but mere survivals of the child's age of man.