

Monism and Christianity  
A Chapter in Philosophy of Religion  
By  
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In no period of spiritual endeavors of cultured nations has there been so much discourse about worldviews as there has been in ours. This arises not only from the fact that many today, having merely caught a whiff of philosophy, think that they must bless mankind with a novel view, but also from adherents of that same view slightly modifying it either in accordance with their philosophical grasp or, in fact, their sentiments, and then proposing it as a novel view and gathering supporters. The latter occurs most notably with monism. Hence, monists count the greatest number of groups, and indeed raise the loudest, downright militant racket. Yet however manifold and discordant this noise may be, it is pervaded by one motif: that the Christian worldview is to be discontinued, for it has outlived its time. Or better yet: that the Christian worldview has been demolished; we have only to clear away the rubble, so that in its place a proud temple of monism can be erected.

Before we inquire whether matters are so dire for Christianity, we should glance at the groups of monist warmongers.

At the head of the largest group stands the Jena biologist Haeckel.<sup>1</sup> His work on “the riddles of the world” has been translated into nearly all European tongues, as well as Japanese, and in but seven years more than a million copies of it have been disseminated. This fact, which Paulsen<sup>2</sup> calls a disgrace, becomes no more comforting if it is said that not all buyers are also readers; conversely, there are readers who merely borrow books. The only comfort here lies in the thought that not all readers are also adherents. Be that as it may, the stated fact – together with a monist league founded upon it and a daily press, ill-versed in philosophy – certainly contributed to regarding Haeckel’s materialistic understanding of the world as, first and foremost, monistic.

The second group is led by Bölsche,<sup>3</sup> a popular author of natural science and a disciple of Haeckel. What separates him from his teacher is that he

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<sup>1</sup> *Welträthsel. Gemeinverständliches über monistische Philosophie*. Bonn 1899, 1907; public versions have been edited since 1903.

<sup>2</sup> *Philosophia militans*. Berlin 1908. Chapter 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Naturgeheimniss*. Jena 1908.

abandoned his crude materialism and his fanatical dogmatism, and in some pantheistic sentiment for nature sought a purely religious contentment. We can add to his ranks those Protestant theological authors who proclaim faith to be but imagination, but who nevertheless deem it as central to all spiritual life (Kalthoff, Steudel, Schrenpf), as well as those modern lyricists who take the world to be the same as God (Dehmel, Rilke, Scholz).

But a more serious rival to Haeckel is the American Ralph Waldo Trine,<sup>4</sup> whose work "In Tune with the Infinite" has garnered as much success in the New World as Haeckel's "Riddles", and has been disseminated in hundreds of thousands translated copies across Europe. The difference between Trine's and Haeckel's works is quite considerable, both in content and in style. In a cold, professorial tone, Haeckel amasses a trove of scientific material, which he presents at all times as assured truth, and from it constructs a rigid mechanism of atoms, brains and souls, caring not whether this pleases anyone at all. By contrast, Trine avoids all dry knowledge and with a poetic, sermonic voice, like that of some ancient mystic, seeks to immerse us into the cosmic soul as the singular cause of all phenomena, that we might thereby attain true bliss. Whereas Haeckel's "Riddles" exude a Babylonian pride of the achievements of natural science with which the 19<sup>th</sup> century drew to a close, Trine's "In Tune with the Infinite" emanates a sentimentally poetic disposition, in reaction against these stated achievements of natural science.

A special group emerged from the school of E. Hartmann, who proclaimed the unconscious a substance no less objective in essence than the fact of consciousness and demanded for his metaphysical system to be called monistic. Though Hartmann has never been polemical, his disciples have grown verily aggressive. A volume titled "Der Monismus",<sup>5</sup> published last year by the most eminent of these disciples, Arthur Drews, assaults spiritedly not only the Christian worldview and Christian theology, but disputes, with utmost resolve, all other forms of monism, by attempting to prove that Hartmann's alone meets the requirements of science. As this group of monists is versed in logic and possesses philosophical and historical education and a grasp of the scientific disciplines, it is to be regarded, despite having fewer followers, as equal to Haeckel's, which is most lacking in philosophical education.

From Nietzsche's philosophy, too, a distinct group emerged, one led by Horneffer<sup>6</sup>; like an apostle, he traverses Germany, thunders with great pathos against Christianity and the Church and portrays the doctrine of the culture of

<sup>4</sup> *In Harmonie mit dem Unendlichen*. Christlieb's translation. Stuttgart 1909.

<sup>5</sup> *Der Monismus, dargestellt in Beiträgen seiner Vertreter*; 2<sup>nd</sup> Volume, Jena 1908.

<sup>6</sup> *Wege zum Leben*, Leipzig 1907. *Die künftige Religion*. Leipzig 1909.

the *Übermensch* as a form of monism. Were I to further mention that France and Italy have their own monists – the former being chiefly adherents of Comte's positivism (Buisson, Lechartier, Le Roy), and the latter either of Comte's positivism or of German philosophers (Ardi, Marchesini, Guastella) – then I would have named all that are familiar to me.

All these groups, as you have surely discerned, can be categorized under three main views. They either rest upon the natural sciences – most particularly the postulate of causality and the theory of evolution; or they understand nature mystically and romantically, as typical of the aesthetic and artistic realms; or finally, they find their footing in a specific philosophical tendency, particularly in positivism and pessimism. The differences between these views and the distinctiveness of stated groups of monists do not, of course, prevent that in a common aspiration to overturn the Christian worldview, these views even inadvertently support and reinforce one another. Thence it follows, on the one hand, that anyone who reckons earnestly with the signs of the times is bound to reflect seriously upon this phenomenon, and, on the other hand, that the timeliness of this topic within religious philosophy and life needs no justification, let alone proof. Since artistic monism pertains more to the realm of culture, while the philosophical kind employs the same means in its feud with the Christian worldview as the natural-scientific kind, I shall here concern myself solely with the latter. And even that kind I do not intend to examine from all sides but cast light only upon those aspects that render the Christian understanding seemingly illusory. These are causality and evolution.

The monism of natural science takes all essence to be not merely of the same kind, but indeed one and the same. The physical and the mental, God and the world, are identical. The manifestations of this unique essence are subject to eternal and necessary laws, such that interference of any higher intelligence into their course is altogether out of the question; any kind of free will is just as illusory. With respect to evolution, it merely reaffirms the endless sequence of causally determined phenomena, making it all the more evident that in the domain of the physical, there can be no talk of purposes, or additionally, in the mental world, of so-called immortality.

All this would of course hold if monism were an established result of scientific inquiry. Yet the task of the empirical sciences is only the treatment of experiences, whereas monism is a system of assertions that plainly extend beyond experience. The phenomenal world, in reality, manifests in a multitude of phenomena, whose unity, eternal cause, and inner essence have never been seen, touched, or weighed. This will likely forever remain the case. The same applies to the microcosm. What is given to us by experience is but a duality of

opposed phenomenal sequences. The thought of their ultimate, unique cause can be reached by way of hypothesis, but never by exact inquiry. This is, of course, because this cause is transcendent, and thus cannot become an object of experience. This is why monism's assertions about the ultimate cause of the world or of human beings are mere hypotheses, and why it ineffectually postures as pure science against faith.

Within the bounds of the empirical sciences, one therefore cannot even grasp experience, save by ascribing into their principles, namely causality and evolution, an understanding other than that which they themselves bestow. This could indeed be the path by which peace between science and faith can most likely be made. Let us make that attempt.

First and foremost, it should be openly acknowledged that the term "eternal laws" is rather confusing and that in popular understanding it contains something mythological, dare I say pagan. Eternal natural laws are certainly human rules that pertain to a certain multitude of phenomena; or abstractions, formed by the mind on the basis of factual experience. It is then beyond any doubt that everything that can be established through experience is but an exceptional regularity of natural being. Establishing a lawful course for all natural phenomena is out of the question. As for the necessity of natural laws, it holds that we cannot logically derive it from any kind of phenomenal multitude: from even the simplest phenomenon – say, an ordinary chemical compounding – it follows no more than that it occurs in reality. Therefore, when there is talk of eternal or necessary laws, some manner of generalization is typically at play. The question is merely whether such generalization is justified.

That Hume responds to this question in the negative comes as no surprise, given that he declared causality in general to be a habit. But Hume clearly lost sight of what is truly at stake – namely, the self-preservation of the spirit. If we do not assume that a universal lawfulness governs the phenomenal world, then there can, in general, be no talk of the activity of the spirit, and, in particular, of free and unified insight into nature. Thus Cohen,<sup>7</sup> when discussing Hume's conception of causality, rightly states that it is thoroughly perilous, for it poisons the wellspring of human truths. To make its activity and its unified insight possible, the human spirit was compelled to impose its law upon the phenomenal world. The same result is reached if the causal law is observed with an eye to content, for it says only that each thing must remain identical to itself, or that identical causes are to forever correspond to identical consequences. In other words, this means that the spirit imposes the rules of its own being upon phenomena as law.

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<sup>7</sup> *System der Philosophie I*. Berlin 1902, pp. 229, 266.

If this holds, then the causal law is, first and foremost, not derived from experience, but is, as Paulsen<sup>8</sup> unhesitatingly claims, a mere axiom or presumption, posited for the sake of a general and unified conception of the world. It becomes understandable, then, why it is not always and everywhere stated with the same certainty and consistency, but instead why people become gradually conscious of it with the development of spiritual activity.

If general lawfulness is then merely a requirement of the human spirit, one might ask: does it follow that reality complies with this requirement? Kant, as is well known, held causality to be a special form of our mind, and that which does not fit into this form, the mind simply does not comprehend. But even if our spirit were to comprehend a mere fragment of the universe – or, in other words, if only certain things were to fit into the forms of our mind, if they were attuned to them – this fittingness or attunement would still require its own cause, only this cause would no longer lie in the subjective spirit, but in the things themselves.

What follows by logical necessity is surely evident to all. If things in themselves point to some objective intelligence, then not only must all reality be ordered according to its mind, but reality itself must in some sense be of a spiritual nature. And if our preconception of a causal constitution of the phenomenal world is traced to the tendency of our spirit to preserve itself in its essence, standing apart from nature, then even that preconception is clearly of a religious or, if you will, a teleological character: as it is, when viewed historically in our present spiritual life, truly coupled with a monotheistic conception of the divine. Lastly, it follows from what has been said that the concept of necessary causality neither is nor can be in conflict with the belief in the omnipotence of a supreme intelligence, for causality only designates more closely the mode of divine activity. Faith thereby appears as the deepest root of a vigorous spiritual life and the strongest bulwark against scientific and ethical skepticism.

Even if these conclusions of mine were not to hold, there would still be sufficient reason to claim the dominion of spirit over nature and the legitimacy of finality – if not as contradictions to a purely mechanical understanding of the world, then as its supplements. This is not merely the view of philosophers, but of the more sober-minded natural scientists. Equally unjustified as vitalism, says the biologist Hertwig, is the mechanistic dogma that life in all its more complex phenomena is but a physico-chemical problem – whereas in reality, there will remain a permanently insurmountable gulf between organism and unorganized matter, even if the mechanism within the former is entirely es-

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<sup>8</sup> *Kants Verhältniss zur Metaphysik*. Stuttgart 1900, p. 32.

tablished.<sup>9</sup> In discussing this distinction, the botanist Reinke states: The fact is that even in the simplest unicellular life forms, all protoplasm descends from some pre-existing protoplasm, all cell nuclei and chromatic bodies from some pre-existing nuclei and chromatic bodies, indeed every nucleic thread from some previous nucleic thread – for all cellular organs can come into existence only through the division of organs of that kind.<sup>10</sup>

And what do these experts mean to say? Nothing more nor less than that the original emergence of organisms remains incomprehensible, whether we conceive of it as being molded from without or, much like the craft of glass-blowing, from within.

A similar result was also reached in a long-standing discussion on the validity of the law of energy, both within the theory of the psychophysical and within the hypothesis of exclusive natural causality. In this highly illuminating discussion, it is most interesting that Mayer, who together with Helmholtz definitively established the stated law, called for its limitation. In Mayer's view, the law cannot be applied even to physiology, since botany, in rather curious fashion, generates ternary and quaternary combinations that cannot in any way be obtained artificially, and since there is insemination and gestation in living nature to which nothing in physics corresponds. The law of energy cannot, then, be applied in the domain of the spirit. Mayer compares the relation between thought and the brain to telegraphic transmission, which cannot occur without some concurrent chemical process, yet which, in terms of content, cannot in any way be considered a function of an electrochemical process.<sup>11</sup>

A certain reaction against the law of energy can already be observed within the field of physics. Boltzman declares the derivation of the entirety of physics from the principle of energy not merely an ideal of the distant future, but also expresses doubt whether mechanical models will forever endure or non-mechanical ones will instead prove superior.<sup>12</sup>

If, after all this, we bear in mind that the law of energy conservation is certainly the principal, if not the sole result that the mechanistic interpretation of nature has hitherto produced, then you will concede that the conception of the physico-chemical world, and especially the entire sensory world as an exclusive system, is merely an unproven hypothesis. In that case then, the reach of spiritual forces, whether human or superhuman, into the sensory world –

<sup>9</sup> *Die Entwicklung der Biologie im 19. Jahrhundert (Verhandlungen . . . 1901. I.)*, p. 53.

<sup>10</sup> *Die Welt als That*. Berlin 1903, p. 175.

<sup>11</sup> *Mechanik der Wärme*. Stuttgart 1874, p. 316.

<sup>12</sup> *Über die Entwicklung der Methoden der theoretischen Physik (Verhandlungen . . . 1899. I.)* pp. 115, 121 . . .

provided, of course, that it occurs in a regular manner, and not like in spiritistic phenomena – stands in contradiction neither with the facts nor with the methods of the natural sciences.

But these results do not yet satisfy all the needs of our spirit. Alongside the idea of universal lawfulness as the consequence of a certain tendency of the spirit, in its depths arise through struggle and pain also the ideas of responsibility, blame, and culpability, or, in a word: freedom of the will. That these ideas also do not overthrow lawfulness follows from the fact that sin and blame have their own terrible laws. If by this it becomes even clearer that the notion of necessary lawfulness is but one mode of our understanding, which does not fully express the content of the spirit, then not only must free will not be denied, but must indeed be placed alongside necessity. Only both of these conceptions taken together express the entire content of the spirit; by themselves, if we are strictly consistent, they cannot be maintained. Lawfulness without freedom leads to a soulless mechanism, freedom without lawfulness to anarchic arbitrariness.

Some might say, then, that we are in a thoroughgoing dualism, whilst our spirit demands a unified conception of the world. Surely some misunderstanding is at play here; for the spirit cannot demand something that, like the mechanistic conception of the world, fails to wholly satisfy it. The stated objection rests either upon a mistaken interpretation of our spirit's unified tendency, or upon an erroneous understanding of dualism. The spirit's unified tendency concerns only the relations between phenomena, and not in any way their supposed sameness or unity. The spirit cannot abide only isolation (disconnection); but it is not bothered in the least by diversity. Hence dualism, which brings the physical and the psychical into a relation and permits reciprocal and causal interaction between them, should not be objected to for failing to satisfy the spirit – particularly where experience has shown that all metaphysical experiments aiming to reduce the diversity of operative causes upon the world have been pitifully shattered. The task of metaphysical contemplation thus cannot sensibly be the reduction of diversity and difference, but only their reconcilability. One should also bear in mind that for the validity of any metaphysical view, there exists, aside from logical consistency, no other measure but its applicability. And in that regard, no metaphysical view can compete with dualism, for not only does it best cohere with psychology and theory of knowledge, but also, as we have seen, with the natural sciences, particularly biology.<sup>13</sup>

As for evolution, the spiritual need for causal interpretation is already satisfied by a generalized notion of development toward ever higher and

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<sup>13</sup> Külpe: *Einleitung in die Philosophie*. Leipzig 1898, p. 145.



more differentiated types, as advanced in their time by Lyell, Lamarck and Goethe. But Darwin and Haeckel, by empirical means and through breeding experiments, elevated this notion into a science of species transformation and universal descent. Since these two theories together constitute what is often called Darwinism, I ought to address them with several remarks.

It is surprising that Darwinism is still reckoned with in science as a great achievement, even though it is beyond doubt that nearly everything in it has become unsettled. Fleischmann, for instance, wants to know nothing further about the kinship of animals, and demands that the natural sciences only concern themselves with description. We are to hold our tongues about the genetic relations of living nature, until some such phenomena are successfully demonstrated *ad oculos*. Since this, in Fleischmann's view, is certain never to succeed, the task is best left to pure philosophy, which has no dealings with exact empirical research.<sup>14</sup> Pauly proclaims the notion of the transformation of organic forms imperishable, yet considers natural selection inapplicable, and appeals to a psychological principle, one immanent to organisms, which directly creates purposefulness as demanded by life itself, the needs of which cannot be delayed.<sup>15</sup>

Particularly illuminating in this regard is a discussion in Viennese philosophical society, prompted by the physiologist Kassowitz's views about the crisis in Darwinism. With general approval did this scholar cite the views of Heidelberg zoologist Driesch that Darwinism should be consigned to history much like another monstrosity of our century: the philosophy of Hegel. Both, he claimed, are variations upon the same theme: the whole generalization is led by the nose, yet in no way improves the standing of this century in the eyes of later generations. By this, Kassowitz definitively rejects the theory of descent.<sup>16</sup>

The biologist Hertwig holds that today's organisms did indeed live under different forms in the past, but that these forms can in no way be determined through experience. In his view, evolution and selection rest upon different foundations.<sup>17</sup> A similar conclusion is reached by the botanist Reinke, who considers a multitude of primordial forms. In his view, it is unlikely that particular species known to us would even for the most part have developed through mutual transformation.<sup>18</sup>

From all this, it becomes evident that the natural sciences are abandoning a purely mechanical interpretation of organic life – one that relies solely upon

<sup>14</sup> *Die Descendenztheorie. Gemeinverständliche Vorlesungen*. Leipzig 1901.

<sup>15</sup> *Wahres und Falsches an Darwins Lehre*. Munich 1902.

<sup>16</sup> *Vorträge und Besprechungen über die Krisis des Darwinismus*. Leipzig 1902.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 438.



external impressions – and are returning to the view of Baer and Wigand, according to which organisms have a tendency to develop in accordance with a purpose. Reinke's dominants, too, are of course nothing other than such purposeful tendencies. Since thereby an ideal teleological principle re-enters the natural sciences, it comes as no surprise that Cossmann discusses teleological lawfulness and demands that in the interpretation of nature, it be accorded equal worth as causal lawfulness.<sup>19</sup>

With regard to evolution itself, it is accepted not only by experts from the natural sciences, but is bowed to by representatives of all the sciences in general, indeed not excluding theologians. Whether one be a monist or a theist, said the learned Jesuit Wassmann in the eminent discussion on the problem of evolution in Berlin, the science of evolution can be accepted just the same . . . for that theory is, in general, indifferent to how the world is understood.<sup>20</sup> Pétavel-Olliff<sup>21</sup> names a whole litany of English and French theologians – both Protestant and Catholic – who are proponents of evolution. One ought not forget in our day that with the acceptance of evolution, nothing is yet resolved about man's relation to other living beings, or the particular differences between them. That man alone has achieved self-consciousness, speech, and faith, and that only he has undergone a spiritual history, remains in spite of all evolution an undeniable fact. To be sure, we cannot doubt either that animals of higher species too have some intelligence, and that individualization, upon which humanity's development rests, is rooted in nature. Yet all this proves only that the position of man was not achieved by any kind of leap. On the other hand, it would not only be a mistaken kind of reasoning, but in fact a subversion of fact, if we allowed ourselves to be led astray by gradual development to ignore established qualitative differences. Man not only possesses a more perfect physical constitution and a greater capacity for knowledge, but he also stands as proof that ordinary development in the physical realm may coincide with unusual development in the psychical realm. The transition from quantitative to qualitative differences renders it intelligible why man's focus becomes increasingly on inner life – the content of which, and particularly his ideals, finally distance him entirely from animals. If faith in the immortality of the soul did not have its grounding in the metaphysical understanding of its being, it could find such foundation in the stated progress.

Another question is this: how does the theory of evolution fare in the domain of human history? Monists hold that introducing evolution into humanity's

<sup>19</sup> *Elemente der empirischen Teleologie*. Stuttgart 1899.

<sup>20</sup> *Der Kampf um das Entwicklungsproblem in Berlin*. Freiburg i/B. 1907, p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> *Le plan de Dieu dans l'évolution*. Lausanne 1902, p. 40.

history has undermined significant conditions and marks of the Christian faith; for evolution requires a religiously historical understanding of Christianity. If Christianity is but a phenomenon in the history of religion, then there is no absolute significance to it, nor a supernatural origin. As a mere moment in religious-historical development, Christianity is, akin to any other phenomenon, subject to the causal law. Conditioned merely by preceding events, it necessarily becomes, in the further course of things, a condition for novel and higher stages of development.

This understanding is justified in relating Christianity to the whole of historical development, and thus linking it with the historical conditions under which it arose. That much has seemed apt since the beginnings of Christianity. For what else is the Savior's declaration – that He came not to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them<sup>22</sup>; or Paul's statement that the law hath prepared the people of Israel for Christ<sup>23</sup> – if not an acknowledgement of Christianity's historical conditions?

But the stated understanding is altogether mistaken for conflating the concept of development with some endless process, for it in no way excludes absolute ends. The concept of development asserts only that each phenomenon is conditioned by preceding ones. The claim that this process is endless, that is, that a phenomenon could never arise that would not be superseded by another, for development ceases with it, that claim finds no trace in the concept of evolution. On the contrary. By analytical examination of that concept, we arrive at precisely the opposite result. If the stated final purpose is excluded from the concept of evolution, then it disintegrates and becomes reduced to a concept of mere causal sequence. What renders this sequence a development is exactly that each of its new moments, when compared with those preceding it, is represented as progress. Yet the thought of progressive becoming is without content if it lacks constant measure – and that measure can only be obtained by accepting a final purpose. Man can thus admit to the historical conditions of Christianity without thereby denying its absolute significance. Hence the thought – that religious history has attained its final purpose in Christianity – is by no means refuted by the very idea of evolution.

The same holds with regard to the supernatural origin of Christianity. Evolutionary thought says nothing at all about the ultimate cause of the historical process, for the natural sciences, to which this idea in fact belongs, engage only with the conditions of becoming. The ultimate cause is forever beyond the reach of their research. Therefore, even if the notion of development is applied to

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<sup>22</sup> Matthew 5:17.

<sup>23</sup> Epistle to the Galatians 3:24.

the history of religion, and even if conditions are found for its particular phenomena, be it in the psychical or historical life of mankind – nothing is thereby decided against the ultimate cause, or, in other words, against the causality of a supreme intelligence.

But all this cuts more into the theory; there are objections to Christianity that we often encounter in everyday life as well. Allow me to briefly touch upon these and then conclude. Some say that Christianity is of a transcendental nature. For the sake of eternity, it sacrifices all guilelessness and is in that sense inimical not only to life, but to culture as well. Particularly with the latter, it refuses to be reconciled with. Regarding this, I offer the following remark. It is true that Christianity is transcendental and that this transcendentality makes up its innermost essence. It cannot give up its thought of eternity, for it cannot give up the faith that the paths of man lead unto eternity. Those who would disregard this mark of eternity and reduce Christianity to a merely cultural power, transgresses not only against its essence, but its historical fact. The Savior did not conceive of his mission as making a home for people upon the Earth, but as raising them above this world: by imparting to them the vision of another, eternal world.

But it does not thence follow that Christianity overthrows our sense of nativity in the earthly realm. Should we be cast into a foreign land, even for a short while, we cannot make it our home. Similarly with humans in earthly life. The distinction lies only in that even a full human life, when measured against eternity, is incomparably brief, whereas in the aforesaid case, it can at least be roughly reckoned. Yet even here, it is ultimately facts that are decisive, not desires or illusions. There is a simple, yet irrefutable fact that forbids us to make our home upon the earth. The fact is, to be sure, a brutal one, but for that reason all the more real. And that is the open grave. As it is not up to us whether we seek our native land in this world or another, the question ought rather be: are we without a native land, or is our native land indeed in eternity?

The answer that Christianity offers to this question does not seem to belittle earthly matters in the slightest. Quite the opposite is true. Since earthly matters have no lasting permanence, their true value can be discerned only through imagination. Real meaning is imparted to them only when they are brought into a relation with something truly permanent. *Sub specie aeternitatis* dispels the void, and they attain a conditional share in essential reality. Thus, Christianity does not deny life – it affirms it. It is in fact the strongest affirmation of life there is.

In like manner, Christianity is not opposed to culture either, for it is Christianity that grants culture its true meaning. Granted, we have long since grown accustomed to hypostasizing culture as some self-contained and separate

entity, yet it has also long been established that this is the consequence of a mythological imagining typical of human beings. What we call culture is, in reality, a mere abstraction that gathers the results of human activity into a single conceptual whole. It attains reality only in relation to man – upon whose worth its own worth depends. If man, as its bearer, is a mere shadow, then culture too loses its meaning. Appealing to humanity is of no avail here, for this too is not a reality that exists in itself. Humanity is but a succession of people. Were we to add together a million zeros – the result would still, in truth, be zero. In short, humanity possesses only as much essential reality as does the individual. If the latter is but a fleeting shadow that rushes across the stage only to vanish forever in its depths, if he is a rippling wave that the ocean lifts but for a moment from its abyss only to swallow it again without trace or sound – then not only does humanity face insignificance, but the entirety of human culture. True meaning to culture can only be granted by Christianity, for it considers it the life's work of spiritual forces that strive toward eternity.

After all, the idea of culture cannot be lastingly sustained if bound entirely to earthly matters, for experience shows that the worship of culture and the absolute reverence for earthly things leads, by an inner necessity, to pessimism. Who knows not that Hegesias, the last champion of the Cyrenaic school – which held earthly matters as the ideal – urged men toward death, whence he received the epithet Πεισιθάνατος<sup>24</sup>? And everyone knows from the newspapers that life worshipping today most often ends in its negation. Christianity holds to the proper mean in this regard. Recognizing the relativity of life as well as culture, it limits the worth of both, but within those limits, it guarantees, by its transcendentality, a true, though conditional, worth to both.

From this we can surely discern that Christianity upholds not so much a view of the world, but a view of life. Since life is concerned with values and goods, the Christian faith, in truth, addresses the problem of value as such. Denying life, as it is, any absolute value, it seeks to bind it directly to the eternal, to which it ascribes absolute value. This, in vulgar parlance, is what we call salvation. But on the other hand, it cannot be denied that even the sciences – notwithstanding ethics, which maintains the tightest relation with faith – engage with questions concerning value: hence it is understandable that, on occasion, they too assume a religious character. Monism especially, in its dogmatic importunity, is ever more taking shape as a kind of religious system. In this manifestation, we must seek the causes of the struggle, waged with ever greater fervor between adherents of scientific systems on the one hand, and on the other, between them and the adherents of the Christian view.

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<sup>24</sup> Peisithánatos.

But if life requires struggle, as practice for its further development, theory surely prefers peace. Without peace, we cannot achieve a sober evaluation of scientific results, let alone a final assessment of their objective worth. And precisely on account of these undertakings has an entire literature emerged, as a summation of the aforesaid struggle. Therein we find the names of French academics Ollé-Laprune,<sup>25</sup> Blondel,<sup>26</sup> and Lapparent,<sup>27</sup> the English statesman James Balfour,<sup>28</sup> the American philosopher William James,<sup>29</sup> Munich professors Dippe<sup>30</sup> and Güttler<sup>31</sup> – not to mention names from the field of Catholic theology, such as Thamiry, Pesch, Cathrein, and others. From the labors of these minds, we have gained two things. First, a Socratic insight that we know altogether very little, and what we do know gives us no cause for struggle against the Christian worldview. Second, a firm conviction that beyond the bounds of scientific fields, there are far more momentous problems than the ones with which our spirit now grapples within the bounds.

And so, I have come to an end.

Translated by Viktor Ivanković

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<sup>25</sup> *La philosophie et le temps present*. Paris 1898. Le prix de la Paris 1900.

<sup>26</sup> *L'action*. Paris 1908.

<sup>27</sup> *Science et apologétique*. Paris 1908.

<sup>28</sup> *Die Grundlagen des Glaubens*. König's translation, Leipzig 1896.

<sup>29</sup> *Der Wille zum Glauben*. Lorenz's translation. Stuttgart 1899.

<sup>30</sup> *Natuphilosophie*. Munich 1907.

<sup>31</sup> *Wissen und Glauben*. Munich 1904.

