

**MAN'S PLACE IN
THE COSMOS, AND
OTHER ESSAYS**

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Man's Place in the Cosmos, and Other Essays by Andrew Seth

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ANDREW SETH

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MAN'S PLACE IN THE COSMOS

*“ Nach ewigen, ehernen,
Grossen Gesetzen
Müssen wir alle
Unseres Daseins
Kreise vollenden.*

*Nur allein der Mensch
Vermag das Unmögliche;
Er unterscheidet,
Wählet und richtet;
Er kann dem Augenblick
Dauer verleihen.*

*Er allein darf
Den Guten lohnen,
Den Bösen strafen,
Heilen und retten;
Alles Irrrende, Schweifende
Nützlich verbinden.”*

—GOTTHE, “Das Göttliche.”

2 } **MAN'S PLACE IN THE COSMOS**

AND

OTHER ESSAYS

BY

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PREFACE

THE title of this volume may seem disproportioned to its contents. A systematic discussion of "man's place in the cosmos" would obviously involve the whole range of science and of metaphysics. These essays make no pretence to be such a discussion. Nevertheless it is not unadvisedly that the title of the first paper has been extended to the volume as a whole, and thus used to indicate the general character of its contents. The papers of which it is composed were written within the last six years, and are, in the first instance, a criticism of some of the more significant contributions to philosophy which have appeared during that period. They cannot, therefore, be taken as a series, in which there is a systematic progress from the earlier essays to those which follow.

But it will be found that they are all, at bottom, treatments of the same theme, man's relation to the forces of nature and to the absolute ground of things, or, in the words of the title, man's place in the cosmos. The books or pamphlets criticised were originally selected for criticism because of their bearing upon this fundamental question, in which all vital interest in philosophy centres. And whatever the starting-point of the discussion may be, the main concern of every essay is to enforce the same view of the world and of man.

That view I have described in one of the papers as humanism, in opposition to naturalism; in another reference, it might be described as ethicism, in opposition to a too narrow intellectualism. Man as rational, and, in virtue of self-conscious reason, the free shaper of his own destiny, furnishes us, I contend, with our only indefeasible standard of value, and our clearest light as to the nature of the divine. He does what science, occupied only with the laws of events, and speculative metaphysics, when it surrenders itself to the exclusive guidance of the intellect, alike find unintelligible, and are fain to pronounce impossible—he *acts*. As Goethe puts it in a seeming paradox, *Man alone achieves the impossible*. But inexplicable, in a

sense, as man's personal agency is—nay, the one perpetual miracle—it is nevertheless our surest datum and our only clue to the mystery of existence.

This position is maintained in several of the essays against the lower monism of the naturalistic systems. In the long essay entitled "A New Theory of the Absolute," it is defended against the Spinozism which permeates Mr Bradley's statement of metaphysical monism. This essay emphasises, on the one hand, the necessary limitations of human insight and, on the other hand, the validity or practical truth of our human rendering of the divine. Such a view of the cosmos must rest ultimately, I think, upon a conviction of the absolute value of the ethical life. For there is no such thing as a philosophy without assumptions. Every idealistic theory of the world has for its ultimate premiss a logically unsupported judgment of value—a judgment which affirms an end of intrinsic worth, and accepts thereby a standard of unconditional obligation.

On account of this unity of contention, the essays have been brought together, in the hope that they may serve a useful purpose. The paper on Professor Huxley's "Evolution and Ethics" appeared in 'Blackwood's Magazine,' three of the others in the 'Contemporary