

**THE CONCEPTION OF THE INFINITE,  
AND THE SOLUTION OF THE  
MATHEMATICAL ANTINOMIES: A  
STUDY IN PSYCHOLOGICAL  
ANALYSIS. PP. 1-128**

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The Conception of the Infinite, and the Solution of the Mathematical Antinomies: A Study in Psychological Analysis. pp. 1-128 by George S. Fullerton

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**GEORGE S. FULLERTON**

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A STUDY IN PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS.

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## PREFACE.

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THE question treated in this little volume is one of no small interest from several quite different points of view. To one interested in lucid and systematic thinking, the tangle of thought which has always obtained in this corner of the philosophic field cannot but be repulsive and irritating. To be told that of two impossible things one must be true; that of the same two lines one may be looked upon as, at pleasure, equal to, less than, or greater than the other, both remaining unchanged; that Achilles, running rapidly, can never overtake the tortoise, moving slowly; to be told all this seriously, by men whose calling it is to think and to teach others to think, is well calculated to bring not merely suspicion but contempt upon speculative thought, and deservedly. Who has not puzzled, on his first

introduction to Logic, over some of these antinomies, and been silenced unconvinced by the practical demonstration,—as by walking, in the case of the argument against motion,—which cuts the knot but does not solve it, leaving in the mind a disagreeable sense that the argument must be wrong somewhere, and yet a consciousness that it certainly seems perfectly sound? When the metaphysician proves to us that a rhinoceros is a mosquito, his chain of reasoning is rendered innocuous by the striking incongruity of the conclusion; but if we observe no flaw in his reasoning, we cannot help recognizing the perplexing truth that it is the experienced fact alone which has prevented assent, and that a precisely similar argument, the conclusion of which cannot be similarly tested, may yet induce assent, though equally erroneous. If we have no better reason for rejecting an argument, what can be our criterion when we leave the sphere of the immediately palpable? He who has convinced himself that the minute hand of a clock cannot overtake the hour hand, will be enlightened when the clock strikes at noon; but he who has followed Mr. Spencer into his discussions regarding our no-



tions of infinite space or time, will be filled with inward dismay if he hang his hope upon any such practical expedient. Civil history cannot be studied in the laboratory, nor erroneous ideas as to infinite space rectified with the aid of the foot-rule. In this sphere, too, the question of a careful and thorough analysis of our conception of the infinite is of more than a merely intellectual interest, and any erroneous conception which can blossom out into such a development as the "Philosophy of the Conditioned," with its implications, has a religious significance which cannot be overlooked. The analysis of this single conception is, moreover, of importance as throwing light upon the procedure of thought in general, and will to many be of more interest in this connection than for its own sake. I have endeavored to write with extreme clearness and simplicity, and to avoid, as much as possible, all issues not directly connected with the immediate subject; and whether my discussion meet with assent or dissent, I do not think it will be charged with the obscurity characteristic of discussions upon this much-mooted topic.

Portions of the book are reprinted, with ad-

ditions and alterations, from the American *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* and from the British periodical *Mind*, in which they originally appeared.

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA, December, 1886.

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