

**TYPICAL MODERN CONCEPTIONS OF
GOD OR THE ABSOLUTE OF GERMAN
ROMANTIC IDEALISM AND OF ENGLISH
EVOLUTIONARY AGNOSTICISM WITH A
CONSTRUCTIVE ESSAY**

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Typical Modern Conceptions of God or the Absolute of German Romantic Idealism and of English Evolutionary Agnosticism with a Constructive Essay by Joseph Alexander Leighton

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CONCEPTIONS OF GOD**

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OR

THE ABSOLUTE OF GERMAN ROMANTIC IDEALISM
AND OF ENGLISH EVOLUTIONARY AGNOSTICISM

WITH

A CONSTRUCTIVE ESSAY

BY

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INTRODUCTION.

The chapters which constitute the present volume, with the exception of the one on Schleiermacher, which has been written merely to round out the work, had their origin in a thesis presented to the Faculty of Cornell University some seven years ago in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

The original essays on Fichte and Hegel were published in the *Philosophical Review*. These have since been very much altered and greatly enlarged, and, indeed, the whole work has been rewritten.

The four men whose views are considered, viz., Fichte, Hegel, Schleiermacher, and Spencer, were chosen by the writer for a comparative study because of the typical and partially complementary character of their respective treatments of the problem of the Absolute—the problem of the metaphysical conception of God.

Fichte and Hegel represent first parallel and then diverging growths from the common root of the Kantian critiques. Fichte's earliest writings on the philosophy of religion exhibit clearly the effects of Kant's criticism, particularly in its prac-

tical aspects, on a mind of great speculative power, but with a predominant bent towards the realization of the good will and with the conscience of a reformer. And Fichte's development exhibits in a very interesting fashion the growth of such a mind, which, starting from purely ethical premises, finds itself impelled to lay a distinctively metaphysical groundwork for life and religion. Every one of his writings reflects afresh the restless ethical will which is the motive of them all. His system is pan-ethelism or voluntarism.

Fichte embodies in his writings the principal stages of the transition from Kantian criticism to an idealistic metaphysics. Hegel, on the other hand, offers but slight traces of this development. Aided by the imaginative pantheism of Schelling, he passes at once to a speculative, metaphysical conception of the Absolute as wholly immanent in the temporal world of human experience. He labors to subjugate all spheres of existence, every phase of human experience, to the dominion of the immanent Divine Reason. In the development of his conception of the Absolute we mark no pronounced transitional stages, no severe inward struggles, no apparent change of view. From first to last his thought moves in the serene ether of pure speculation, and its development, in spite of the contradictions which it swallows and digests in its all-devouring maw, is a placid logical growth. Hegel is the type of the metaphysician *pure and*

simple. His doctrine is pan-logism in its most thoroughgoing expression.

Schleiermacher denies the possibility of a purely speculative knowledge of the Absolute-in-himself; *i.e.*, of God conceived out of relation to man. In this denial he is truer to the spirit of the Kantian critique than either Fichte or Hegel. But Schleiermacher goes beyond Kant, and on a road independent of Fichte's and Hegel's, in his doctrine of the Absolute as the immediately felt unity of thought and being, of man and the universe. His distinctive doctrine is that man possesses an immediate consciousness of the Absolute, that there is in man a unique and direct sense or feeling of God's presence; and although he makes use of the then prevailing dialectic method—*i.e.*, of the union of opposites—he holds that the immediate God-consciousness transcends the dialectic process.

Schelling I have not taken up for two reasons. First, his many and chameleon-like changes of view would demand a more extended treatment than falls within the scope of this work, and, secondly, I do not think such an exposition would be worth the trouble expended on it, for the most valuable ideas of Schelling are to be found either in Fichte, Hegel, or Schleiermacher, since Schelling started from Fichte, Hegel from Schelling, and Schleiermacher developed an independent philosophy of identity.

Spencer stands as the philosophical representa-



tive of modern physical views of the universe. His Unknowable is the indestructible energy of our text-books and popular works on physics, raised to the n th power. His method of speculation stands in sharp contrast to the methods of Fichte and Hegel. This contrast of method, together with the currency which Mr. Spencer's views have gained, have led me to incorporate a treatment of his views. Mr. Spencer's system is pan-dynamism.

So we have four absolutes—that of Will, finding its completion in the intuition of perfect attainment; that of Reason, comprehending itself as the eternal process of the world and finding that all is good; that of Feeling, which apprehends the unity of things in a single and immediate act of consciousness; and finally that of Blind Energy, which seems, in a cross-section of time and as viewed by the average spectator, to have a definite direction, but which in reality has neither whence nor whither, and no other goal than the meaningless eternal oscillation between states of motion and states of rest.

To state and criticise these typical views was the primary object of this work. But in this criticism certain positive views are of necessity implied. In the fifth chapter these positive philosophical doctrines are outlined. I am conscious of the meagre and sketchy treatment of the subject in this final chapter. It would require a separate large volume to deal at all adequately

with the subject. Such an extensive treatment would, however, fall outside the scope of the present work. On the other hand, the views implied in the other chapters seemed to call for a more positive statement on those aspects of the whole subject most emphasized in the previous pages. The last chapter is therefore offered as an outline treatment of the questions which were most in my mind in my studies of Fichte, Hegel, and Spencer. These are the problem of the relation of the One and the Many, and even more prominently the relation of the Absolute to Time. It is hoped that the method of treatment and the direction of the work towards a constructive conclusion have given a unity to the whole which would not be apparent from the table of contents.

I have purposely limited myself to a treatment of but two phases of the problem of the Absolute—a full treatment would involve especially an extended consideration of the growth and nature of an Individual and of the place of Error and Truth, Evil and Goodness, and Ugliness and Beauty in the universe. On these latter subjects I do not feel ready to write at present, even in outline, but I hope within a few years to return to the treatment of some of them. They constitute respectively the central questions of the metaphysics of knowledge, of ethics, and of æsthetics.

I am glad of this opportunity to express my