

SCIENTIFIC TRANSCENTALISM

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649524839

Scientific Transcendentalism by D. M.

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Cover @ 2017

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BY

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WILLIAMS AND NORGATE,
14, HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON;
AND 20, SOUTH FREDERICK STREET, EDINBURGH.
1880.

265 . j . 295 .

LONDON:
G. NORMAN AND SON, PRINTERS, MAIDEN LANE,
COVENT GARDEN.

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indicates nothing that resembles the discovery of resemblances.

And not knowing what Science is, the man of science cannot say whether it is a good or a bad thing to be scientific. It is an agreeable thing, certainly; but some agreeable things are not good, and Science, for anything the scientific man knows to the contrary, may belong to the class of agreeable bad things.

In short, he has nothing at all to say respecting the ultimate or moral value of things. He has fine moral instincts himself, but he cannot account for them. He loves a brave, pure, truthful man, and hates one of an opposite character; but he cannot tell why. His atom has no moral character, and therefore he is unable to explain the morality of organisms that are nothing but aggregates of atoms.

2. In no age, however, not even in the last three centuries, have the facts of Mind been wholly neglected. A few men are always to be found whom nothing can hinder from studying their mental processes, and giving the world the benefit of their experience. It is well that such is the case; for, after all is said that can be said to the contrary, the mind is something we cannot dispense with, and we ought not to be wholly ignorant of its manner of working. If we knew it more intimately, perhaps we might turn it to better account than we do.

Mental knowledge ranges from the bass string of

Logic to the highest tones of Poetry and Transcendentalism. What we have to consider here concerns some of the higher tones.

The transcendentalist, like the materialist, ends by formulating a theory which he puts forth as a universal theory—as a theory, that is, from which he believes that all the facts of the universe may be deduced. His experience, he says, has led him to conceive that above the sky there resides a Person (or Persons) who made the universe out of nothing, and now keeps it in motion by an infinite power; that this Person loves and protects good men in a special manner, and is angry with the wicked every day; that He sees everything which takes place in the universe and can at His pleasure prevent anything from taking place, or cause anything to take place, without reference to the previous state of the universe: and so forth.

If this theory were put forward as an explanation of Mind alone, by those who had made Mind their special study, no one whose attention had been wholly directed elsewhere would have any right to question the truth of it. But the moment the Personal theory is offered as an explanation of Matter also, it becomes a fair subject of criticism to the materialist. And he makes short work of it. "There is not," he says, "the faintest trace of external, personal influence discernible in the phenomena of Matter. Every material effect takes place by virtue of impersonal laws, habits or

tendencies inherent in the things themselves. I believe, though I cannot prove it, that personal conduct is itself an effect of impersonal law. I wholly fail to see that the righteous are protected in any special manner from the ills of life: a bad ship is as likely to founder with a cargo of missionaries as with a cargo of convicts. And I know that every material effect is determined by its antecedents."

From which we are justified in concluding that although the theories of the transcendentalist and of the materialist may each of them embody a great deal of truth, neither of them can embody all of it—neither of them can be accepted as the universal theory.

3. Assuming for a moment that the universal theory is a desirable thing,—and if it were not there would be fewer attempts to find it,—how ought we to set about discovering it? We all have a certain amount of experience in the construction of everyday theories on common subjects; from this experience is it not possible to elicit rules for the discovery of great theories—of the greatest theory?

For instance, it is a very common event to see a machine whose use or purpose we desire to know. To discover that purpose is to formulate a theory of the machine. If now we consider attentively the mental process that takes place every time we divine the use of a strange machine, we shall find that it is

simply this,—we see a *resemblance* between the new machine and a machine we have seen somewhere before and of which we know the use, and we now conclude or theorize that the use of the new machine is the same as the use of the old one. If, on the contrary, we cannot divine the use of the new machine, we shall find, on consideration, that this inability arises solely from the fact that we do not see a sufficient resemblance between the new machine and any other we have ever seen before. To theorize, therefore, is nothing more mysterious than to find a resemblance between the thing to be known and something else that is already known.

Applying this conclusion to the great question alluded to above, we get the following result:—

To the transcendentalist, who already knows Mind, the thing to be known is Matter. Therefore to complete his knowledge of the universe, all that the transcendentalist needs is to see the resemblance—if there be one—between Mind and Matter. To the materialist, who already knows Matter, the thing to be known is Mind. Therefore to complete his knowledge of the universe, all that he needs is to see the resemblance—if there be one—between Matter and Mind. Obviously, then, the universal theorist—supposing always that a universal theory is possible—must be one who is at the same time a transcendentalist and a materialist. These are the sole