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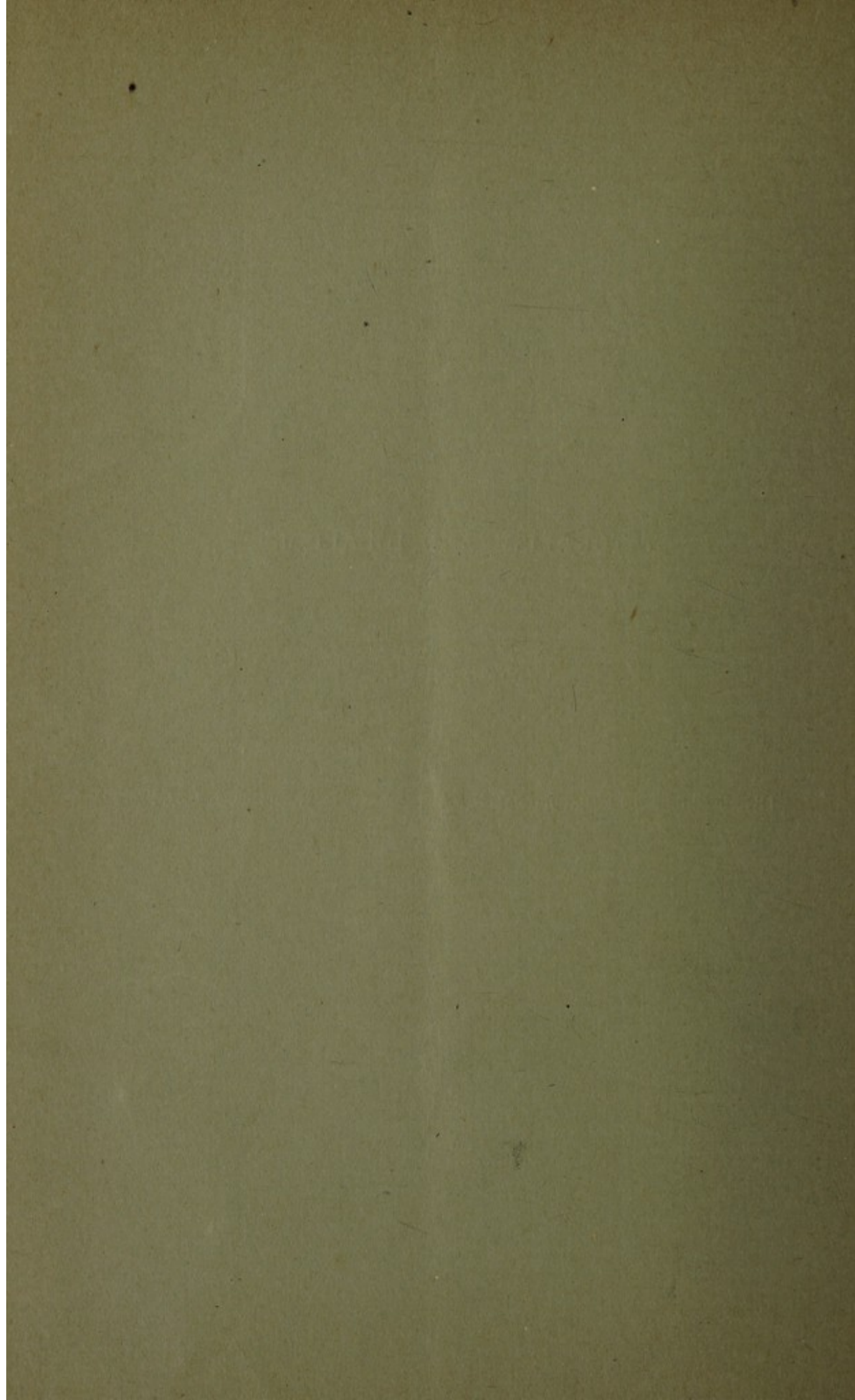


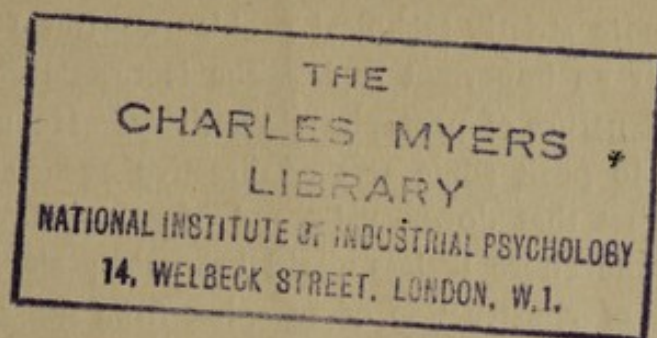
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NATURALISM AND IDEALISM.

CHARLES S. MYERS.

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NATURALISM AND IDEALISM.

MORE than three years have now passed since Professor James Ward delivered at Aberdeen a course of Gifford Lectures, subsequently published under the title *Naturalism and Agnosticism*. The following notes, criticising some of the views therein expressed, were written during a prolonged stay abroad, where an acquaintance was impossible with the replies which these lectures were at the time provoking. As, however, on my return I find that I have approached the subject from a standpoint somewhat different from that adopted by others, I have thought fit to offer them in the present paper.

The main object of Professor Ward's lectures is never for one moment disguised. Yet—perhaps inevitably in a work of such scope—there appear statements and arguments which are with difficulty reconcilable. For instance, we read repeatedly that the mechanical theory of the universe is "approximate," "incompetent" and "absurdly inadequate," "landing us in a nihilism"; yet elsewhere we are told that "the course of nature *can* be summarized by mechanical formulæ" (II, p. 274), and that "whatever be its meaning, its purpose, or its life, the cosmos in one aspect is but matter in motion" (I, p. 247). Or again, while in one place the lecturer asserts that "science . . . has been driven to a species of hybrid monism" (II, p. 202), yet in another he willingly accepts the view that science "contents itself only with descriptions."

Moreover, the work contains suggestions towards a revision of current scientific theories, which, although not essential to estab-

lish his arguments, are serious defects when Professor Ward deals with more strictly technical problems. But I pass on now to consider an important topic,—the lecturer's conceptions of the general nature of protoplasmic activity. He urges that we are bound to posit some sort of directive agency ever striving to counteract that downward trend of energy towards dissipation which the entire lifeless world bespeaks; since anabolism, the process of construction of complex from simpler bodies, is the characteristic feature *par excellence* of vital activity. He infers that, because a very imperfect observation of the world's working has been summed up in a certain terse phrase generally known as the second law of thermodynamics, therefore not only must this law be unquestionably true, but the law must proceed in an undeviating unopposed path straightway to declare itself. All I wish here to point out is that even within lifeless nature there are many 'ups and downs' in the gradual degradation of energy. The world has extricated itself more than once from a glacier period into which it had been plunged. Chemists have repeatedly shown in a given system of chemical action the simultaneous occurrence of reversed chemical action. They have proved how many chemical changes may under appropriate conditions be exactly reversed. Yet, Professor Ward, arguing, as it will presently be seen, that phenomena are irreversible, concludes that the world cannot be satisfactorily stated in mathematical equations. And, arguing as it has just been shown, that the lifeless world shows only a downward trend of energy, he concludes that some new conception, a directive agency, must be introduced when we pass from the lifeless to the living world. If, perchance, I point out how from the simplest the most complex bodies are made in the test-tube, or how even from the elements the products of protoplasmic metabolism may be manufactured in the laboratory, the idealist will retort that the conditions of these phenomena are arranged by man and do not occur in nature. To this I reply that there is no reason why the conditions under which a complex sugar is synthesized artificially in the laboratory should not occur naturally in the field. What, however, I want mainly to emphasize is that within the lifeless world there are

numerous examples of a temporarily upward trend of energy, and that the difference between protoplasmic and other chemical activity is one of degree and not of kind. Anabolism is to be found outside protoplasm, where one system improves its energy at the cost of another. But in no substance, as in protoplasm, do we find this process so marked, nor instability and ceaseless change consequently so characteristic.

Professor Ward goes on to tell us that "Natural selection, it is allowed, is metaphorical. The common environment is not an agent, and selects as little as it conserves. Its tendency, if we consider it alone, is not to produce variations any more than to produce life; on the contrary, its tendency is towards uniformity and quiescence, as we may see in the dust and ashes to which in the end it reduces all" (I, p. 297). I doubt whether these twenty lectures contain any passage more astounding to the biologist than such a conception of natural selection. For who, imbued with the modern spirit of evolution, has asserted that natural selection *produces* variations? Who again is there to deny that the play of external conditions (*i. e.*, natural selection) actually *selects* variations? Surely in nature and in experiment, the evidence is sufficient to prove that by organisms themselves variations are even being produced, of which some are adapted, others unfitted for the environment of the organisms, and that those organisms which display (and tend to transmit) unsuitable variations ultimately perish.

But here again Professor Ward will enter a protest. He objects to the evolutionist's use of the term 'adaptation' or 'fitness' which he condemns as metaphorical; metaphorical, of course, because it implies a teleological meaning. And he suggests its replacement by the Spencerian word 'equilibration,' which, by the way, is obviously not less teleological. But I would urge that we are able entirely to free ourselves of teleological implications, when we say that by any particular variations an organism is 'fitted' to its environment. We do not mean, as Professor Ward would have us mean, that the organism, realizing that it was wanting in a certain particular, has straightway called forth that particular, satisfied its needs, and adapted itself to its surroundings.

Indeed no one, acquainted with the state of modern biological knowledge could admit the truth of this origin of variations. Nor could he help parting company with a psychologist who makes a so-called 'metaphorical' natural selection *subservient* to a 'real' subjective selection, where "the individual positively selects what is pleasant, that is what conserves, for appetition; and negatively selects what is painful, and so detrimental, for aversion. By such selection is constituted its proper and *specific* environment," (I, p. 297). Is it necessary in these days to point out that, so far as we know, the modifications, brought about by individual voluntary reaction towards the satisfaction of a given want, are *not* transmitted as inherited characters in the species? A man cannot increase the height of his progeny by stretching himself daily, nor their musculature by employing himself as a blacksmith. People may circumcise each other, or cut off the tails of their mice for untold generations, yet they never witness the least effect on succeeding offspring. Only in the direction of temporarily modifying the action of natural selection can subjective selection at present be considered. For example, if the positions of the torrid and frigid zones of the world were to be gradually reversed, naturally the greater part of the inhabiting animals would be induced to migrate from the one to the other zone; while with a smaller portion the psychical 'hedonic' factor would prevail, whose stay would be insured by the influences of custom, the devotion to family, the love of home, and so forth. Yet the changing environment would be fatal to this stay-at-home portion, unless the variations fortuitously occurring in their young were such as fitted them to their new surroundings. Can any one conceive that such animals, feeling, say, that they would be warmer with a longer coat of hair, could call forth their desired protection? Or has life this theosophist's power of 'materialising' psychical ideas? Only if it has this power, is Professor Ward justified in saying, "Thus, even if there were no natural selection of variations fortuitously occurring, and even if there were no struggle for subsistence, still—the will to live, the spontaneous restriction of each individual to so much of the common environment as evokes reaction by its hedonic effects

(with the increasing adaption and adjustment that will thus ensue), and, finally, the pursuit of betterment to which satiety urges and novelty prompts—these conditions, really implying no more than the most rudimentary facts of mind, will account for definite variations to an apparently unlimited extent" (I, pp. 299, 300).

Let us for the present leave aside the further consideration of these and kindred matters, and turn to a general aspect of Professor Ward's lectures. Their aim, as I have said before, is never for one moment disguised. The concluding pages of the second volume perhaps most clearly express it: "if we allow the conception of a Supreme Mind and First Cause to be valid at all, we shall not have God *and* interminable mechanism as His medium and instrument; really, fundamentally, ultimately, we shall have God only and no mechanism. It is verily a case of all or none; which we find, God or mechanism, depends upon our standpoint. . . . From the one standpoint, for rational reflexion, for philosophy, the conception of Nature as a pure mechanism is an obvious fiction" (II, p. 274). Accordingly, between teleology and mechanism, between spiritualism and agnosticism, the writer keeps a fierce battle raging, until in the end he gives victory to the former. He insists that we *know* we are not mechanisms, that mechanism cannot explain life and mind, and that we can measure but a very small fraction of the world. He considers that not only is mechanism of this limited application, but that it is always abstract, approximate, and incomplete. To abstract, argues Professor Ward, is successively to ignore essential characters. Applied to physics, abstract mechanics passes over the complications arising from apparatus, and merely abstracts its equations from the entire system. Mechanism is, moreover, approximate and incomplete, because by abstraction it proceeds to analysis, which is itself never complete until it has insured a backward synthesis from the previous analysis; and mechanism insures no such reconstructive process. The lecturer proceeds to demonstrate that the application of the abstract to the concrete is hypothetical, that the world is one of individuals, no two of whom are exactly alike, and that the concrete alone has reality

and individuality. Finally he draws the moral : Never let go the concrete for the abstract in speculation.

Mechanism thus driven from the field, teleology under the guidance of idealism makes its *début*. Why, we are asked, should monotonous uniformity be the only or the highest indication of the spirit of order, since with life and mind enters teleology where aim, direction, and worth supplant the blind regularity of mechanism ? Professor Ward sees a teleological principle in vital activity ; for all life would long ere now have ceased owing to the action of the second law of thermodynamics, were it not for the existence of a hypermechanical directive agency. He sees another teleological principle in evolution ; for new species have originated because each individual mind of preëxisting species has always realized its changing wants, and conceived the means of adapting itself to its altered environment. Of course it is assumed throughout—to be “not a matter of theory but a matter of fact—that the characteristics of the side of life and mind are *prima facie* essentially teleological,” that life consists in “the guidance and control of the known forms of energy.” “The *ποῦ στῶ*” which natural selection “seems to demand” is hence furnished by the principles of subjective and hedonic selection, where the will to live and the pursuit of happiness and self-interest reign supreme as the teleological directive agency of evolution. Having thus gained a footing, teleology claims all as its own. Nature, which must conform to human intelligence in order to be intelligible, and is likewise amenable to human ends, is in both these respects teleological. Natural laws are teleological, in so far as they are hypotheses or postulates, a means of controlling or of interpreting nature. Finally, knowledge itself is teleological, “since it is prompted and sustained by practical motives.” Everywhere, the teleological underlies the mechanical. Everywhere, the reality of activity and choice in the one looms beyond the fiction of inertia and determinateness in the other. The subject takes the lead, mind works upon matter. Thus we arrive at the idealist’s monistic interpretation of the universe. For, “to a monism of some sort we must, no doubt, in the end come,” and a monism, free from the doctrine of psycho-

physical parallelism, would be worth having. "Calculation will never content us, rational insight, spiritual light, is what we want." Naturalism had assumed perceptual experience to be phenomenal, and, turning for guidance to agnosticism, was assured that mind is no more real than matter, that both are the expression of one Unknowable. This is Agnostic Monism. Idealism, on the other hand, finding everywhere the directive agencies of mind, sets up subject or spirit as the basis of its philosophy. This is Professor Ward's spiritualism. It sets up teleology everywhere and declares mechanism to be illusory. It declares the universe to be a life rather than a mechanism. We are a world of spirits, of subjects, of things in and for themselves. "It is only in terms of mind that we can understand the unity, activity, and regularity that nature presents. In so understanding we see that nature is spirit." Establish a world of spirits, and from that "to a Supreme Spirit is a possible step." Thus we reach that ideal of idealists, "that recognition of the intelligible by intelligence, that greeting of spirit by spirit." Without spiritualism the world must remain meaningless and empty!

I can see the upholders of idealism exclaiming that they require no more, and the upholders of naturalism rejecting me as a traitor among their ranks, when I declare my thorough satisfaction with Professor Ward's able proofs that mechanism in itself is inadequate, that experience is a unity within which is the duality of subject and object, and that mind makes nature. Nevertheless, I will ask both classes of readers to bear with me a little longer. For although I have just confessed the inadequacy of mechanism, I cannot bring myself to concede the all-sufficiency of idealism. The keynote of my theme is that neither the idealism of the teleologists, nor the naturalism of the mechanists is one whit the more real, the more adequate, or the more true than the other. Each, if pursued far enough, will be found to fall short in its own direction. Each is a creation of consciousness, of mind, or whatever term be used to denote that experience which consists merely in a duality of subject and object. The subjective and objective sides of this experience are responsible for the two sides which find expression in idealism

and naturalism. So, it is just when Professor Ward assumes that the results of one half of experience are to be exalted at the expense of the other half, that I find myself parting company with him. This is the gist of all that I shall have to say in the following pages, and indeed of all that I believe can and will be ever said on the matter.

I have no intention of recapitulating the arguments by which Professor Ward admirably establishes his thesis that experience is a unity within which is a duality of subject and object. This thesis—which he would call a fact, a reality, something that we know—I prefer to treat as a fundamental assumption, necessary as a starting point for further epistemological enquiry, and comparable to the Cartesian article of faith, *Cogito, ergo sum*. I think it may be advantageously expanded into the form: States of consciousness exist as a unity, which consists in a duality of subject and object.

Holding fast to the “strictly psychological standpoint” of individual experience (“my experience as it is for me,” not as it is for any one else), Professor Ward proceeds to prove the unreality of the objects of Universal Experience. Here again I will not represent the array of argument whereby he shows how through “the union of naïve realism, based on the notion of the trans-subjective, with the hypothesis of introjection or animism,” each of us comes falsely to believe that things exist apart from our individual experience of them. We arrive here at the Kantian maxim: the intellect makes nature.

Thus, quality and quantity, embracing the entire world of outside objects, vanish save when they are ‘really,’ ‘individually,’ experienced. Now let us turn to the entire world of outside subjects, and we shall here find no corresponding denial of their independent existence. Professor Ward states that the only things “of which we have positive knowledge are subjects with intrinsic qualities, things that are something in themselves and something for themselves” (II, p. 279). “We know best, the interaction of mind with mind” (*ibid.*). It is “fact, not analogy, albeit fact reached only by understanding” that “a large part of human activity consists in communication and coöperation be-

tween man and man" (II, pp. 263, 264). By this inter-communication, individual experience begets universal experience, perception is over-shadowed by conception, the concrete gives place to the abstract. And since "only thoughts admit of communication," Professor Ward seems reduced to the absurdity of proving that thoughts have resulted in two divisions of universal experience, the one being that intersubjective intercourse, "which we understand best," which is presumably not less *real* than individual experience, the other consisting of the relation of object to object, *i. e.*, the abstract *unreal* principles and assumptions of "modern science"! Have we not here an imitation of "the piece-meal fashion in which Kant was led to discuss experience"?

But Professor Ward must recognize that one is entitled no more to assert the real existence of the outside world of subjects or mind than to assume the real existence of the outside world of objects or matter. The truth is, we know "the interaction of mind with mind" no better than we know the interaction of mind with matter. From the agreed standpoint of individual experience, subjects are not more real than objects, outside mind not more real than outside matter. All that each of us has is his own unity of experience, one undivided continuum of states of consciousness, which gives him equally a subject—and an object—relation.

We have accepted Professor Ward's contention that experience is the unity within which is a duality of subject and object. Now it is certain that of this experience or mind in itself we can know nothing. No state of consciousness can ever be ours but that we immediately recognize an answer in it either to "whose consciousness," or to "consciousness of what." And while the materialists exalt the latter alternative, the idealists concern themselves with the former. So, more particularly, Professor Ward, having rightly supposed that experience is a unity consisting of a duality of subject and object, proceeds to the end of his lectures with a total disregard of this truth, and makes one term of the duality, the subject, supreme as a divinity to which the other must bow down, in and by which the other must find recognition and expression. He says: "Now the point on which

I have to insist is this: not only is subjective synthesis necessary before experience can really begin, but it is only by means of this synthesis, and the conative activity by which it is prompted and sustained, that experience can advance and unfold. To the subject belongs the lead and initiative throughout" (II, p. 255). Here we clearly discern the besetting sin of idealism, which, assuming that "something must be real," confounds the known subject—half of experience—with the unknown unity of experience. And we conclude that idealism is an abstraction just as much as mechanism, and that each neglects one or other of the equally known moieties of experience.

Indeed the idealist, who asserts that with mechanism all is easy-going so long as it confines itself to the obviously mechanical, is apt to forget that idealism appears no less preposterous when applied beyond the regions of consciousness. Mind raises the question 'why,' matter raises the question 'how.' Naturalism gives an answer solely to the latter question, idealism replies only to the former. So the idealistic solution of the world-riddle can never suffice us. Moreover, the activity of a "Mind that lives in the whole of things and the minds that are confined to parts" becomes unintelligible the moment when we attempt to figure to ourselves the mode of their action. How can we picture minds guiding "the material mechanism without the expenditure of work?" Where can we conceive guidance without work? Professor Ward tells us that "we can imagine finite intelligences disequalizing temperature and undoing the natural diffusion of heat, or assorting atoms and undoing the natural conglomeration of matter, and so reversing the downward trend, and even disturbing the final quiescence, to which the dissipation of energy or 'cosmic equilibration,' to use Mr. Spencer's term, inevitably leads. The conception of such intelligence we have in the 'sorting demon of Maxwell' as Lord Kelvin has called it" (I, p. 201).

Exactly so. We can imagine such finite intelligences acting in the manner just described. But the point is, can we imagine the performance of their actions (or of any actions whatever) without the expenditure of work? Can we do otherwise than locate

these intelligences in their own system, and infer that their activity means some transference of energy from one to another portion of their system? Is not mechanism our one intelligible 'how' of things? Let us briefly examine the nature of Maxwell's sorting demon. Clerk Maxwell—having proved that in any vessel the molecules of a gas at uniform temperature are moving with velocities by no means uniform, though the mean velocity of any great number of them, arbitrarily selected, is almost exactly uniform—asks us to imagine such a vessel "divided into two portions, A and B, by a division in which there is a small hole," and to imagine a being (the sorting demon "who can see the individual molecules") to open and close the hole, "so as to allow only the swifter molecules to pass from A to B and only the slower ones to pass from B to A. He will thus, *without expenditure of work*, raise the temperature of B and lower that of A in contradistinction to the second law of thermodynamics."¹ But my argument is that he does expend work. True, the work is not spent in the system within the vessel. It is nevertheless spent in the system within the sorting demon. For we can conceivably replace the psychical selecting activity of this demon by the physical sorting activity of a mechanism. We can just as well imagine a mechanical contrivance which only lets through the swifter molecules from A to B or the slower from B to A. Where now is work expended?

Says Professor Ward: We know that we have activity, we know that causes exist, we know that mind acts on matter. And he appears to conclude that this knowledge is necessarily true and real. Now what would a savage, nay an ordinary man in the street say, were we to tell him that color and sound have no independent existence outside ourselves? What would he say, were we to demonstrate the varieties of memory (visual, auditory, and tactual) among his fellowmen or expose to him a series of optical and tactual illusions? Yet for him his knowledge of the identity of his own with his fellows' mental working, and his knowledge of the existence of sound and color outside himself

¹ The portions within inverted commas are borrowed from Professor Ward's quotations (I, p. 202). The italics are my own.

are as real as the knowledge of minds outside our own is for Professor Ward. If Professor Ward says that our activity and volition really exist because we know that we have them, he goes as far as the man who declares redness and blueness to be realities because he knows that he feels them. So—when he says that “we know best the interaction of mind with mind”—I reply that I recognize that what I feel I know may have to be corrected, if it falls counter to other parts of my knowledge. Certainly, we feel that we have volition, just as we feel that we see redness, taste saltiness, and the like. Yet, whether or not such feelings can be said to have reality must depend upon the extent of further experiences on which we base our reality. Our entire mental life is sustained as a unity, because conventionally certain experiences are posited as real to which all other incongruent experiences must subsequently be accommodated, either by being ignored or by being suitably assimilated.

So when Professor Ward asserts, “I know that I feel the activity of directive agency in one direction,” I would retort, “I know that I feel the passivity of mechanism in the other direction.” To me it is as real and as true that a torrent, falling from the mountainside, is conditioned mechanically, as that the thoughts, at this moment falling from my pen, are conditioned teleologically. When Lord Kelvin said that he could never satisfactorily understand a thing until he had made a working model of it, he merely confirmed the truth that the principles of mechanism are ultimately derived from the results of our individual handiwork. Not less surely than teleology, mechanism is the outcome of our individual experience.

However, apparently in opposition to this dictum of Lord Kelvin Professor Ward insists that, in applying mechanical principles to practice, we have never sufficient knowledge of the conditions of phenomena. In the simplest problems, for instance, molar mechanics passes the complications arising from apparatus over to experimental physics and merely abstracts its equations from the whole system under consideration. Professor Ward elsewhere compares this gulf between pure and applied mechanics to the gulf between the living and the lifeless worlds.

But can he not see that the difference between pure and applied science is merely a difference between the simple and the complex? Can he not see that in any great piece of machinery the wear and tear of every particle of steel or leather is truly a mechanical process and as calculable as the horse-power or steam pressure of the driving engine? Because we cannot predict upon which face the thrown dice will fall, are we to conclude that they are governed by hypermechanical laws? Surely, Professor Ward will not deny that, if we had adequate knowledge of all the conditions by which the dice were influenced in their fall, we should be able to foretell the result.

By this time, I can hear the idealists exclaiming, "To what have you now brought us? You have denied the reality of mechanism, and you have denied the reality of idealism. What do you now offer us? 'Something must be real.' 'To a monism of some sort we must no doubt in the end come'" (II, p. 35). Yes, something, I reply, must be real, and that something is the unity of states of consciousness which we have called mind or experience. This is the reality, where subject and object lapse not into the single subject-half of experience, which is idealism, not into the single object-half of experience, which is materialism, not (as Professor Ward describes naturalistic monism) into concomitant aspects of a single unknowable process which is "neither life nor experience," but into concomitant aspects of a single unknowable process which is *both* life *and* experience.

We have thus to conclude that neither idealism nor naturalism, neither teleology nor mechanism is in and by itself satisfactory—the former, because it is a notion gained from the contemplation of individual activity, and because we feel certain that there is much among phenomena determined in a purely mechanical fashion; the latter, because it is a notion gained from the contemplation of our own handiwork, and because it tells us, what we each feel certain is untrue, that we are conscious automata. We conclude that it is because of this essential inadequacy of idealism and naturalism that neither language succeeds in solving the world-riddle. The psychical terms of the one express the origin of phenomena, the physical terms of the other express the re-

lation of phenomena; for teleology, cause spells 'why,' for mechanism, 'how.' And so the two languages remain now and always distinct. The universe may be ever viewed from two distinct standpoints. I may start from myself—my subjective individual feeling of the Inside, with its attributes of activity, will, purpose, and so forth,—and I shall arrive ultimately at the teleological aspect of things, the 'why,' only because subjectively I have no knowledge of the 'how.' Or I may start from my not-self,—my objective universal feeling of the Outside, with its attributes of passivity, order, uniformity, and the like,—and I shall, with equal certainty, deduce the mechanical aspect of things,—the 'how' only, because objectively I have no knowledge of the 'why.' From either standpoint the world is viewed in language by an 'I.' This 'I' is the unity of experience, whereof subject and object are the duality. Subject-relation and object-relation, each is an equal and equally potent half of experience, and the resulting systems of teleology and mechanism are equally real or unreal, satisfactory or unsatisfactory. Thus, monism based on unknowable experience, is at once the source and haven of all philosophy, while dualism must still "suffice for ordinary life." We shall still have not "God *or* mechanism" but "God *and* mechanism." As Professor Ward admits, "Mankind will be content to get along without a final philosophy."

Experience, divested of all knowable attributes, appears finally as a two-edged sword of which the subjective and objective relations constitute its two edges. Attempting to cut a way through the dark forests of the Beyond, the weapon presents either of its edges, each of which works in its own manner towards success. But the blade is so slender and the jungle-timber so thick, that one edge can never cut through any knot completely, unfollowed by the other; nor are the two edges to be used at the same time before the same obstacle; while the weapon itself remains as the one invisible, unknowable reality.

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