THE CENTRAL ERROR OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY.

WHEN a student who has made his own any modern text-book of Protestant philosophy, approaches the dogmas of the Catholic Church and sets himself to inquire into their philosophic basis, he finds himself face to face with very serious difficulties. He becomes gradually conscious of the existence in his own mind of an assumption which he has always been accustomed to regard as true and to take for granted as a first principle of mental analysis, but which, nevertheless, effectually destroys all objective truth. He detects a worm that is eating at the root not only of Transubstantiation and other distinctive doctrines of the Church, but of all belief whatever; so that, if he is to be consistent, he must either dig up the worm that causes all the mischief, or relinquish his search after absolute certainty and after the realities of objective knowledge. This cankering worm is deep, and to drag it from its lurking place is not an easy task. It is to be found in the modern theory of *Abstraction;* it vitiates the very entrance into our minds of the *ideas* or *concepts* on which all else depends. Unless these are introduced by the door of truth, truth itself has little chance of taking up its abode with us, and consistency becomes impossible. We propose, therefore, in the following pages to trace the method by which we form our mental concepts or ideas, and, after establishing the true doctrine, to explain the aberrations of modern philosophy on the subject, and to expose the fallacies by which it misleads the unwary student.

We must begin by tracing certain previous steps which precede the process of Abstraction and the formation of universal ideas.

When any object is presented to us, and we turn our minds to the consideration of it, the first thing that comes before us is the sensible impression made upon the inner sense or imagination. There is painted upon the material faculty of the imagination an image more or less distinct of the object to which we turn our attention. This image is either transferred from our internal senses to the faculties within us, or else is reproduced by the sensible memory recalling past impressions. If any one says to us the word "pheasant," and we hear what he is saying, a vague general picture of a pheasant, copied from the various pheasants we have seen, is present to our imagination. So far there is strictly no intellectual process. Animals share with man the faculty of imagination, and can call up from their memories a vague image of

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familiar objects. When we scratch, unperceived, the floor of our room and call out to our terrier the word "Rat!" there rises up in his mind an indistinct picture of the little animal that he loves to destroy. When the fox-hound comes across the fresh scent in the path which Reynard has but recently trodden, the confused image of a fox comes up before him and suggests immediate pursuit.

All this is a matter of the interior sense; there is no intellectual activity in the lower animals; they rest on the mere sensible impression, and cannot go beyond it. But an intellectual being does not stop here. The higher faculties of his rational nature compel him to go further than this. The intellect exerting its activity lays hold of the sensible image and makes it its own, at the same time transforming it from something individual and suitable to the apprehension of sense into something universal and altogether above and beyond sense. "Quicquid recipitur, recipitur per modum recipientis." Whatever we take into any faculty has to accommodate itself to the nature of that faculty. Whatever is received by the intellect must be received as supra-sensible and universal. We mean by *supra-sensible* something which is beyond the power of sense, outer or inner, to portray; something which cannot be painted on the imagination; something which belongs to the immaterial, not the material, world. We mean by *universal* something which the intellect recognizes as capable of belonging not to this or that object only, but to an indefinite other number of objects, actual or possible, which have the same inner nature, and, therefore, a claim to the same general name. For the individual representation or phantasm which belongs to sense, and to sense alone, is substituted the universal representation, or concept, or idea which the intellect alone can form for itself by the first operation of thought properly so called.

We shall, perhaps, be able better to understand the process of simple apprehension if we distinguish it from certain other processes which either are liable to be mistaken for it or are preliminary steps which necessarily precede it.

1. *Sensation*, the act by which we receive on some one or more of the internal organs of sense the impression of some external object presented to it. The object producing the sensation may be altogether outside of us, or it may be a part of our own bodies, as when I see my hand or feel the beating of my pulse.

2. *Consciousness*, or the act by which we become aware of the impressions made upon our senses and realize the fact of their presence. Every day a thousand impressions are made upon our bodily organs which escape our notice. We are but conscious of their having been made. We have heard the clock strike outside our ears, but have never been conscious of the sound. When our

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mental powers are absorbed by some interesting occupation or by some strong excitement, almost any sensation may pass unnoticed. In the mad excitement of the battle-field men often receive serious wounds and are not aware of the fact till long afterwards.

3. *Attention*, by which the faculties are directed specially to one object or set of objects, to the partial or complete exclusion of all others. The dog following the fox has his attention directed almost exclusively to the fox he is pursuing, and seems to forget all else. The soldier in battle has his attention absorbed by the contest with the foe, and for this reason his wound passes unobserved.

4. *Sensible perception*, the act by which the data of the external senses are referred to an inner sense which has the power of perceiving, comparing together and uniting in one common image all the different impressions made on the various organs of sense, whence it obtains the name of common sense (sensus communis). Sensible perception always implies some degree of consciousness and memory. A dog sees a piece of sugar; this draws his attention to it, and he becomes conscious of the impression upon his organs of sight. Next he smells it, and, if not perfectly satisfied as to its nature, applies his tongue to it to discover its taste. He then compares together the various impressions of sight, smell and taste, and the resulting image is that of a piece of sugar good for food.

5. *Memory* (sensible), which recalls the past by reason of the presence within us of certain sensations which recall other sensations formerly experienced. A certain perfume recalls most vividly some scene of our past life; a familiar melody stirs emotions long dormant; the fresh morning air brings with it the remembrance of some exploit of boyhood or youth. The memory of animals is exclusively a sensible memory dependent on sensation.

6. *Imagination*, which paints upon the inner sense some picture, the scattered materials of which already exist within us. It is the faculty which reproduces the sensible impressions of the past, grouping them, however, in a different order and arranging them differently. In this it differs from the (sensible) memory, which reproduces the impressions of the past as they were originally made. In dreams the imagination is specially active.

Hitherto we have been speaking of various processes belonging to the faculties of sense which man shares with the lower animals. We now come to those which belong to man alone, to the processes of *Thought* strictly so called. We have said that the first and simplest of these is that of simple apprehension or conception. But there is a preliminary process which is not really distinguishable from simple apprehension, and differs only in the aspect under which it presents itself to us.

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We have spoken of attention as a concentrating of our faculties on some one object to the exclusion of others. The object on which we concentrate may be an object having an independent existence, or it may be some quality or qualities out of the many qualities belonging to something which is present to our minds. In this latter sense it is often called *Abstraction*, inasmuch as it is the drawing away of our attention from some qualities in order to fix it upon others. We may abstract from the whiteness of a piece of sugar and fix our minds upon its whiteness—we may abstract from whiteness and sweetness, and concentrate our attention on its crystallization. We may abstract from whiteness and sweetness and crystallization, and mentally contemplate its wholesomeness for little children.

But abstraction has a further meaning which includes all this, but goes beyond it. In every object there are certain qualities which may or may not be there without any substantial difference being made in its character. There are others the absence of any one of which would destroy its nature and cause it to cease to be what it is. A man may be tall or short, young or old, handsome or ugly, black or white, virtuous or vicious, but none the less is he a man. But he cannot be deprived of certain other qualities without ceasing to be a man—he cannot be either rational or irrational, living or dead, possessed of that form we call human or of some other entirely different one. If he is not rational, living, possessed of human form, he ceases to be a man altogether, because these latter qualities are part of his nature *as man*, constitute his essence, make him to be what he is, a man.

Now, abstraction in this further sense is the concentration of the intellect on these latter qualities, to the exclusion of the former. It is the withdrawal of the mind from what is accidental, to fix it upon what is essential, or, to give the word a strictly unvarying etymological meaning, it is the intellectual act by which we draw out (abstract) from the individual object that determinate portion of its nature which is essential to it and is said to constitute its essence, and neglect all the rest.

In this sense it is the same process as simple apprehension, regarded from a different point of view. It is called apprehension inasmuch as the intellect apprehends or grasps the nature of the object. It is called abstraction inasmuch as this nature is abstracted or drawn out of the object whose nature it is; and as it cannot be grasped until the intellect has withdrawn it from the object, abstraction is, at least in thought, a previous process to simple apprehension.

Thus, when a horse is presented to us, abstraction enables us to withdraw our mind from the fact of his being a race-horse or

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dray-horse, chestnut or gray, fast or slow trotter, healthy or diseased, and to concentrate our attention on that which belongs to him as a horse, and thus to withdraw out of him that which constitutes his essence and which we may call his *equinity*. In virtue of our rational nature we fix our mental gaze on that mysterious entity which makes him what he is, to grasp or apprehend his equinity, to apprehend or perceive intellectually that hidden something which is the substratum of all his qualities, the root whence the varying characteristics which mark him out as a horse all take their origin. It is in the assertion of this faculty of abstraction as the power of drawing out of the object something which is really there independently of the mind that draws it forth, that consists the whole distinction between scholastic and the so-called modern philosophy. It is in the definition of simple apprehension as not merely the grouping into one certain qualities of the object selected by the mind, but the grasping by the mind of an objective reality in the object whence certain qualities flow quite independently of the mind which apprehends them, that consists of the central doctrine which gives to the philosophy of the Catholic Church a bulwark against the inroads of skepticism impossible to any system which has lost its hold on this central and vital truth. Modern error starts with misconceiving the very first operation of thought; with such a foundation we cannot expect the superstructure to be remarkable for solidity.

From the process of simple apprehension we must now turn to the result of the process, from the act to that which the act engenders, from conception to the concept.

We have seen that whatever is received into any faculty has to accommodate itself to the nature of the faculty, and consequently that the image of the external object received into the intellect must be something supra-sensible and spiritual. It has been grasped or apprehended by the intellect and transferred, so to speak, into itself, and it has consequently been purified of the materiality clinging to the image present to the imagination and prepared for its abode in the sphere of immaterial thought. It has thus no longer the representation of the single object and no more; it is now applicable to each and all of a whole class of objects; it is no longer a particular, it is a universal. It is not the sensible image stripped of those attributes peculiar to the individual as such and applicable to a number of objects by reason of its vagueness. It belongs to quite a different sphere; it is raised above the region of sense to the region of intellect and of thought properly so called. This distinction between the two images, the sensible image painted on the imagination and the supra-sensible image dwelling in the intellect, is of the greatest importance. The sensible image must

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precede the supra-sensible; we cannot form a concept of any object unless there has been previously imprinted on the imagination a material impression of that object. The sensible image must, moreover, exist side by side with the concept: the one in the imagination, the other in the intellect; and as long as we are thinking of the intellectual concept, the material phantasm must be present to our imaginations. This is the result of the union of soul and body: in virtue of our animal nature the phantasm is present to the material faculty, and in virtue of our rational natures the concept is present to the intellectual faculty. When we think of a triangle our intellects contemplate something which is above sense, the idea of triangle, an ideal triangle, if you like, and at the same time our imagination has present before it the material picture of a triangle. The intellectual image is something clear, precise, exact, sharply marked without any defects or deficiencies. The material image is something vague, indistinct, indefinite and applicable to a number of individuals only by reason of its indistinctness and indefiniteness. The intellectual concept we form of a triangle is as precise as it can be. We know what we mean in every detail belonging to it, we can define it and set forth all its characteristics one by one with perfect correctness. The picture of a triangle present to our imagination is the reverse of all this: it is dim, imperfect, undetermined. It is neither isosceles, rectangular nor scalene, but a sort of attempt to combine all these. If, in order to give it definiteness, we picture not only a triangle, but an isosceles triangle, still we have to determine whether the angle at the vertex shall be an obtuse angle, a right angle, or an acute angle. Even if we introduce a fresh limitation and decide on the acute angle, we are not much better off: our picture is still quite indeterminate. For the sides must be of a certain length, it must be drawn in a certain position, and some color must be chosen for the sides. But however many limitations we introduce, we cannot be perfectly determinate until we have thrown away altogether every shred of generality belonging to the triangle and are satisfied with some one individual triangle with individual characteristics belonging to itself and to no other triangle in the world.

But there is another important distinction between the immaterial concept in the intellectual faculty and the material phantasm in the imaginative faculty. If we examine the latter we not only find that it is vague and indistinct, but that it is not a true representation of the object; it is not what it professes to be. The picture of a triangle which is present in our imagination is not, strictly speaking, a triangle at all. For the sides of a triangle are lines, *i.e.*, they have length but not breadth, whereas in the picture of a triangle as imagined or actually drawn, the sides are not lines at all, but good thick bars of appreciable breadth. If they were lines

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they would be invisible, not only to the naked eye, but to the most powerful microscope. Worse still, they are not even straight. They are wavy bars with rough, jagged edges. They have no sort of pretence to be called straight lines, nor has the so-called triangle any real claim to the name.

Not so the intellectual concept formed by the process of simple apprehension. The image is purged of its materialism when it is adopted by the immaterial faculty, and so it is purged of all its indefiniteness and incorrectness. It is an ideal triangle; it is worthy of the noble faculty that has conceived and brought it forth. It is not the clumsy attempt at a triangle with all the imperfections which cling to the figure depicted on the imagination and drawn on paper or on wood, which in practice serves very well the purpose of a triangle, but which has no true lines for its sides and is crooked and defective in every portion of it. It is a true, perfect, genuine triangle dwelling in the spiritual sphere, the sphere of what philosophy calls *noumcna*, things capable of being intellectually discerned, as opposed to phenomena or mere appearances. When we argue about the properties of a triangle, it is about this ideal triangle that we argue, else nothing that we said would be strictly true. We argue about something which in point of fact has nothing corresponding, but in the world of phenomena only feeble and clumsy attempts to imitate its inimitable perfections. When we assert that an equilateral triangle has all its sides and angles equal, we do not assert this in reality of the triangle A B C or the triangle D E F, or any triangle that we have ever seen with our bodily eyes, but about an ideal equilateral triangle which is not realized in the world of sense, but is realized with the utmost precision in the world of intellect. When we say that the radii of a circle are all equal, we do not mean that any circle has ever been drawn by the most skilful limner in which any two radii were ever exactly equal, but that in the ideal circle the ideal radii are actually equal, and that in the attempts to draw a circle on the blackboard or on paper or on the imagination, the so-called radii are approximately equal in proportion as the circle approximates to an ideal circle and the radii to the ideal radii of that ideal circle.

It is true that the geometrician cannot pursue his researches without palpable symbols to aid him. This is the consequence of our intellect inhabiting a tenement formed of the dust of the earth. We cannot think of an ideal circle and its properties without at the same time imagining in vague fashion a circle which can be rendered visible to the eye. It is because of this that intellectual activity so soon fatigues; it is not the intellect which wearies, but the material faculty of the imagination which works side by side with the intellect. Very few men can argue out a single proposi-

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tion of Euclid by means of an imaginary triangle present to the imagination, and they therefore draw a picture which appeals to the external sense, in order to save their imagination the impossible task of keeping before the mind its own imaginary triangle. But whether the symbol be drawn on paper or on the imagination, we must remember that it is not about the symbol that we argue, but about the corresponding image in the immaterial faculty, the ideal triangle present to the intellect.

Before we discuss the strange aberration of modern philosophy on this subject, we must distinguish between the various images of every object of which we speak or think.

1. There is the intellectual immaterial image present in the intellectual faculty. It is something ideal. It belongs to the spiritual world, not the world of sense. It is engendered on man as the consequence of his being created in the Divine image, with an intellect framed after the likeness of the intellect of God. The intellectual image which he forms by the process of simple apprehension is a pattern or exemplar of the object which exists outside of him and corresponds to the pattern or exemplar present to the Divine mind when the external object was created. Man can idealize because he is a rational being and possesses within him this gift of recognizing the ideal of the object such as we conceive to be present in the mind of God. Brutes cannot idealize because they are irrational and do not possess this likeness to God. Their mental faculties can apprehend only sensible phenomena as such. They cannot think of anything except so far as it can be depicted on the imagination and is palpable to sense.

2. There is, moreover, the sensible material image present in the material faculty of the imagination. This necessarily accompanies the intellectual image, so long as the body is united to the soul. We cannot think of any object whatever without the material picture of it, or something resembling it being present to the fancy.

This picture is sometimes vivid and distinct, as when we think of some individual object very familiar to us. Sometimes it is utterly faint and indistinct, as when we think of something which is applicable to a number of varying external objects. In proportion to the number and variety of these objects is the faintness and indistinctness of the image representing them. When we recall to our thoughts our favorite little Skye terrier Die, whose winning ways and clever tricks have imprinted her image on our grateful memory, the picture is clear and vivid as if we saw her before us begging for one dainty morsel or chasing the nimble rat, just freed from the cage, over the meadows that border on the silver Isis or the sluggish Cam. But when we think of Skye terriers in general the image becomes blurred, other Skye terriers, the associates and

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predecessors of the much-beloved Die, come up vaguely before us. If we enlarge the circle and fix our mind on terriers as a class, the image becomes still more indistinct. Scotch terriers, Dandy Dinmont terriers, black and tan terriers have to be combined in one common picture. If we go still further afield and think of dogs in general, the picture lapses into a sort of confused indefiniteness, and this again increases a hundredfold when the subject of our thoughts is no longer *dog*, but *animal.*

But all this time the concept has remained clear and sharply marked. The intellectual image of animal is no less distinct than the intellectual image of Skye terrier; perhaps rather more so, inasmuch as we can define in precise terms what constitutes animal nature; but it is not so easy to expound what are the special and essential characteristics of a Skye terrier and constitute his peculiar nature as distinguished from that of other dogs. In fact, we may say, in general, that the vividness and brightness of the image varies in inverse ratio to the simplicity of the concept. It is easy enough to imagine an isosceles triangle, the sides and angles of which are of a certain determinate length. It is very difficult to imagine mathematical figures in general, or to paint any sort of corresponding image upon our material faculties. On the other hand, the concept mathematical figure is a far simpler one than an isosceles triangle. We shall have to recur to this subject when we treat of the extension and comprehension of concepts, and will reserve any further discussion of it till then.

But, whether the picture painted on the imagination be distinct or indistinct, vivid and lifelike or so faint and dim as to be scarcely perceptible; whether it be a real likeness of the object of thought or is merely a feeble attempt to give concrete and sensible form to that which is abstract and spiritual, still an image of some sort is always there. When we think of honesty, or truth, or courage, some sort of dim image, having some sort of relation to the abstract quality present to our intellects, paints itself without fail on the material faculty just as certainly as when we think of Skye terriers, or ocean steamers, or balloons, except that in the one case the resemblance of the image to the object of thought is a very remote one, in the other it is clear enough. We cannot too strongly insist on the necessary and universal coexistence of the two images in the spiritual and material faculties respectively, and at the same time we cannot too strongly insist on the points of contrast between them. There is just enough similarity between them to make the attempt to identify them a plausible one. We will, therefore, recapitulate the most signal differences between them.

In fact, it is scarcely too much to say that, as in the nobler ani-

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mals there is something which is a sort of shadow of reason, and so nearly resembling reason that the *a posteriori* observer cannot discern any wide distinction between the intelligence of the dog and the intellect of the savage; in the same way the common phantasm is so respectable an imitation of the concept that we can scarcely wonder that those who do not start from the solid foundation of philosophic truth have regarded the two images as identical.

But we must, first of all, notice that they have this in common, that they are both applicable to a number of individuals; the phantasm has a sort of universality (counterfeit though it be) as well as the concept. We also notice that one cannot be present without the other. The intellectual image is always accompanied by its material counterpart. It is these two circumstances which have misled so many modern schools of philosophy, and involved them in the fatal mistake of confusing together the immaterial and the material, conception and imagination—the region of intellect and the region of sense. This unhappy confusion has, in its turn, introduced the so-called relativity of thought, and has opened the door upon a boundless vista of contradiction and skep ticism.

1. The first difference between the *concept* and the *phantasm* is, that the concept is received into the intellect by the process of conception, or intellectual perception, and, as the intellect is a spiritual and immaterial faculty, removed altogether above sense, the concept, too, is a spiritual and immaterial and supra-sensible image.

The phantasm, on the other hand, is received into the imagination or fancy by the process of sensible perception, and, as the fancy or imagination is a material and sensible faculty, the phantasm, too, is material and sensible.

The intellect is, moreover, a faculty of universals; its special function is to see the universal under the particular; it does not recognize the individual object except so far as it possesses a nature capable of being multiplied. Hence the concept is also something universal, something which is found not in one individual alone, but in many, either really existing or at least possible. The *imagination*, on the other hand, is a faculty of individuals. All its pictures are pictures of individual objects as such. Hence, the phantasm is also something individual and united to the indivdiual. It is a picture of the individual object or of a number of existing individuals whose points of distinction are ignored in order that they may be depicted on one and the same individual image.

2. The concept, which is common to a number of objects of thought, is something precise, definite, distinct, capable of analysis.

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The phantasm, which represents a number of objects of thought, is something vague, indefinite, indistinct, incapable of exact analysis. It fades away before our attempts to analyze or define it. We can explain and define our concepts or ideas of triangles, but if we attempt to explain and render definite our picture of triangles, we find ourselves confronted with triangles of all sorts and descriptions dancing about before the eyes of our imaginations, some right-angled, some obtuse-angled, some acute-angled, some equilateral, some isosceles, some scalene. The picture is all, and yet none of these, utterly dim and uncertain, and existing only in virtue of its dimness and uncertainty. The larger the class of objects which this picture present to the imagination has to represent, the fainter and more indistinct does it become, until at length it fades away into space altogether. Thus we can form a sort of common picture of *man*, which stretches, as it has a sort of reality; but our picture of animal, which is to represent at once men and brutes, can scarcely be called picturesat all, while for living thing, which is to confine together the monkey of the animal and vegetable creation in a common picture, we cannot produce any respectable phantasm at all.

3. The concept is not interfered with by minuteness of detail. We can form as distinct and accurate an intellectual concept of an octahedron or dodecahedron as we can of a triangle or quadrilateral figure. We can argue with no greater difficulty about the number of degrees in the angles of the more complicated figures, or of any other of their distinguishing characteristics, than we can about the number of degrees in the angles of an equilateral triangle or a square.

But the *phantasm* becomes gradually more difficult as it becomes more complicated, until at last it becomes a thing impossible. We cannot imagine a dodecahedron with any sort of exactness. We can picture it only in the vaguest way. We cannot distinguish at all in our imaginations between an eicoshedron (or figure of twenty sides) and an eicosimiahedron (or whatever the name for a figure of twenty-one sides may be). When we attempt to imagine a figure with a much larger number of sides, say a myriahedron, or figure of ten thousand sides, we cannot for the life of us see any difference between it and a circle, unless, indeed, we have seen it drawn on an enormous scale.

4. The concept is peculiar to man. No brutes can form any ideas in the true sense of the word. They cannot rise above the world of sensation: they have no appreciation of the spiritual and the immaterial, and no faculties which can enable them to apprehend them—their knowledge is simply a knowledge of phenomena. They have no power whatever of perceiving the universal under

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the particular. They cannot idealize. They cannot attain to any knowledge of the universal.

The phantasm, on the other hand, is common to men and brutes. A dog can form a very vivid mental picture of some individual with whom he is familiar. When, during our sister's absence from home we said to her little toy terrier "Madge, where is Alice?" Madge would prick up her ears, look in our face, search the drawing-room, and finally run upstairs to our sister's room in anxious quest; when by a lengthened series of protracted sniffs beneath the door she had discovered that her mistress was not there, she would come back to the dining-room and lie down on the scrap of carpet provided for her, with a half petulant air as much as to say: "Why do you recall to me the image of one who you know perfectly well is not at home?" Every one who is familiar with the ways of dogs has noticed how during sleep all sorts of phantasms pass through their minds, often evoking outward expressions of surprise, or joy, or fear.

But animals have also certain common phantasms. A dog is able to form a sort of mental picture, not only of this or that rat, but of rat in general. The very word "rat" will often throw a little terrier into a perfect fever of excitement by reason of the common picture it summons up of many a rat happily pursued to the death. The smell of a fox at once recalls to the hounds not this or that fox, but fox in general, and there is present in their minds a vague phantasm representing a sort of common product of all their experiences of individual foxes.

It is this common phantasm which is so plausible a counterfeit of the universal concept that the whole of modern philosophy outside the Catholic Church has been misled into the fatal error of mistaking the one for the other, and of supposing that the gross, material, individual phantasm present in the imagination is identical with the intellectual, spiritual, universal concept present in the intellect.

We now pass to the uncongenial but necessary task of dealing with the aberrations of modern philosophers on this vital question, the importance of which it is scarcely possible to overrate. Just as in theology the central point of the "Reformation" of the sixteenth century consisted in the rejection of Papal supremacy, so in philosophy the new order of things. The philosophy of the "Reformation" had its point in the modern theory of the *concept* and of *conception.* It is not really new. Like all modern errors, it dates from pre-Reformation days, and is but an old fallacy refurbished and dressed up in new terms. But it never took root in Europe until it found a home under a congenial religious system, under which it grew and flourished, and to which it afforded the most

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material assistance. Without this new theory the confusion between intellect and imagination, which serves Protestantism in such good stead in its resistance to dogma, would never have gained a permanent footing; without this the philosophical skepticism, which is the offspring of the "Reformation," would have been checked at its outset. It is this theory which, once adopted, is fatal to the consistent acceptance of the Catholic doctrine of the Blessed Eucharist. It is this which in its ultimate consequences renders belief in God impossible.

It is a universal subverter; little by little all rational belief, all religious dogma, becomes under its influence faint and feeble, and at last altogether disappears. All truth becomes subjective to the individual. All knowledge becomes relative. If men who number it among their philosophical opinions nevertheless still retain some positive beliefs, it is only because the human mind so rarely follows out an opinion to its final results, or because in contradiction to all reason it holds opinions which are irreconcilable with each other. This last alternative we see realized in a most remarkable way in the cynical philosophy of our modern "thinkers." The antinomies of Kant, the contradictory propositions which Hegel admits as simultaneously true, the despairing agnosticism of Herbert Spencer, the open infidelity of the materialistic school, are all based on one or other of the different phases of the modern philosophical heresy respecting the concept and conception.

We ask our readers to keep carefully before their minds the essential difference between the common phantasm of the imagination and the abstract idea abiding in the intellect. This is the talisman to keep the Catholic philosopher unharmed of the modern foe. This is the touchstone of a philosophical system. If the root is corrupt, the tree will be unsound and the branches rotten. If a system of logic at its outset neglects this all-important distinction, we shall find that it is infected with a disease which will affect it from beginning to end and render it unsound in almost every part of it.

We will take as our two representatives of the modern teaching on conception and concepts, two men who in most respects stand widely apart, Sir W. Hamilton and John Stuart Mill. The former states the doctrine generally held outside the Catholic Church, with great clearness and at considerable length. We will give for brevity's sake only an abstract of his exposition of it, and will refer our readers to the original, if they desire to obtain a more detailed knowledge of it. When a number of objects, he tells us, are presented to our sight, our first perception of them is something confused and imperfect. But as we dwell more carefully upon them and compare them together, one with the other, we find that in the

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various objects there are some that produce *similar* and others dissimilar impressions. By the faculty of *attention* we fix our minds on the former of these, and by abstraction we turn away our thoughts from the latter. When we come to examine these *similar* impressions, we find ourselves compelled to regard them as not only similar, but actually the same. To use the words of Sir W. Hamilton, there are certain qualities in the objects "that determine in us cognitive energies which we are unable to distinguish, and which we therefore consider as the same." Having observed in succession a number of these similar qualities, and one after another identified them with each other on account of the undistinguishable character of the impressions they make upon us, we at length sum them up, bind them together into a whole, grasp them in a unity of thought, unite the simple attributes with the complex *notion* or *concept;* and inasmuch as each and all of the several qualities or attributes belong to each and all of the objects in which they have been observed, it follows that this common notion or concept which sums them up is the common notion or concept formed in our minds as belonging to each and all of these same objects. It is a *notion* inasmuch as it points to our minds, taking note of or remarking the resembling qualities of the object; it is a concept inasmuch as it is a synthesis or grasping together (*con capere*) of the qualities.[1]

We shall, however, make this process more intelligible by a concrete example: We are standing in a room in the Zoological Gardens before a cage containing a number of objects large and small, well looking and hideous, blue and gray and brown and black. As we watch one of them we observe in it movements which indicate life, and we mentally apply to it the attribute *living*. In a second we observe similar movements indicating the possession of similar endowments, and in a third and fourth in like manner. Though the life of the first is not identical with that of the second, nor that of the second with that of the third, yet the effects as observed by us are undistinguishable, and we feel ourselves compelled to regard all these objects as sharing in a common quality of life, and consequently to call them by the common name of *living*. As we continue to watch them, one of them seizes his neighbor by the tail and elicits a cry of pain; this cry of pain indicates the possession of what we call sensibility or feeling. A second receives from a visitor some highly esteemed delicacy, and gives vent to a cry of joy; and this sign of pleasure we attribute to a similar gift of sensi-

[1] Compare Sir W. Hamilton (Lectures on Logic, III. 131), whose words we quote almost verbatim.

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bility. A third and a fourth show corresponding signs of pleasure or pain, as the case may be, and though we cannot say that the feeling of the one is the feeling of any of the others, yet we cannot help identifying in all of them the common quality of sensibility, and of each we say that it is sensitive or possessed of feeling. As our examination of the objects before us proceeds, we find in each of them other qualities which we call hairy, quadrumanous, imitative; each of the females suckles its young, each of them has a certain shape of body, to which we give the name of ape-like or pithecoid, until at length, our detailed observation over, we sum up its results in one complex notion which comprises in itself all the qualities we have observed. We bind together into the common concept *monkey* the various attributes, living, sensitive, quadrumanous, imitative, hairy, mammal, etc. We *apprehend* these various objects as monkeys, and bestow on them the common name in recognition of their common characteristics.

Such is the process of simple apprehension or conception according to the majority of modern writers. We do not think that any one can say that we have misrepresented it. At first sight it seems plausible enough. But the reader who has borne in mind the distinction between the sensible and material phantasm existing in the imagination and the abstract and immaterial idea existing in the intellect, will perceive how this theory labors under the fatal defect of confusing them together, or rather of ignoring the universal idea in favor of the common phantasm. It tells us to strip off from a number of individual phantasms that which is peculiar to them as individuals, and to retain only that which is similar in all of them. But when the process is complete, and these similar qualities have, by the transforming power of the human mind, been regarded as identical with each other, as not only similar but the same; when, moreover, these identical qualities have been gathered together into a unity of thought, into a concept comprising them all into a composite whole of which they are the component parts, the whole has its home in the imagination, just as much as the various attributes originally observed in the individuals. The only difference between the individual objects and the common concept is that it has lost the distinctive characteristics of the individuals, and by reason of this dimness and indistinctness is capable of being fitted on to all of them. It is not an independent object of thought, it is essentially relative and imperfect; it is no longer the essence of the various individuals, that inner something which is the subtraction of all their qualities. We cannot even think it until we supplement it with all the various qualities which render it an individual thing. We cannot think of monkey as such; we must refer our concept to some individual monkey of which we form a picture in

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our mind. Hence the modern theory of the relativity of all human knowledge. Hence, too, the philosophical skepticism to which it necessarily leads is carried out to its ultimate conclusions. If all knowledge is relative, absolute truth disappears from the face of the earth. What is true to one man is not true to another. The identity of nature, which we attribute to the various individuals comprised under the common concept and called by a common name, is a pleasant fiction of the human mind and has no corresponding identity of nature in the individuals as they exist in reality. There is nothing but a certain similarity which we consider as identity because we cannot distinguish between the objects produced upon our cognitive energies by these similar qualities. The slovenly and inaccurate use of the words *thinking* and *thought* is one of the most fruitful sources of error in modern philosophy. Instead of being limited to intellectual knowledge, it is extended to every exercise of the inner faculties—sensible memory, imagination, attention, as well as to the acts peculiar to a rational nature. Hence the mischievous confusion between the nature of the lower brutes and of mankind. If a dog is capable of thought, he is also capable of *reasoning*, and has an intellect differing only in degree from that of man.

Thought is no longer the exclusive property of the intellect, but is concerned with the products of the imagination as well. It is true that a certain distinction is drawn between *thought* and *cognition*, on the one hand, and *representation* or *imagination*, on the other; but this distinction is an utterly inadequate one. It is explained as consisting in the manner of cognition, in the way in which the objects are known. The contrast between the immaterial faculty with which we *think* and the material faculty with which we *picture* or *imagine*, is certainly ignored. The contrast between the objects of thought which are essentially abstract and universal, and the objects of imagination which are concrete and singular, is in no way recognized. Thought is made out to be a process of the same faculty as *imagination*, and we think about exactly the same things as we have already pictured in our imagination, only in a different sort of way. Thus the gulf which separates the material from the immaterial is entirely ignored, and the fundamental confusion which is the necessary result extends itself to every part of the systems which, outside the Church, have succeeded the clear and consistent teaching of scholastic philosophy. But as yet we have been considering only one of the leading schools of English philosophy at the present day, the one which, strange to say, represents the more orthodox section of modern philosophers, and this in spite of the utter skepticism which is virtually contained in the fundamental doctrine from which it starts. The weak points

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which it presents are attacked with great vigor and success by what we may call the wise school of John Stuart Mill. We are not concerned with the dispute, but simply with the counter theory, which we may call that of the modern school of nominalists, according to which the process of simple apprehension, or rather of the formation of complex ideas, takes place as follows: We suppose ourselves, as before, in the same house in the Zoological Gardens; we fix our minds on a certain group of attributes in one of the objects before us, and banish all the rest. Living, sensitive, mammal, quadrumanous, hirsute, imitative, pithecoid, etc., these are the attributes which attract our attention. These we stereotype under the name *monkey*. We are thus enabled to argue about them as if there existed a corresponding entity which had these attributes only and was endowed with none of the accidental characteristics of individual monkeys. In another of the objects before us we observe another group of attributes which makes upon us the same impression as those already enumerated, and we say to ourselves, this, too, is a monkey. In a third and a fourth case the same process is repeated, and thus we form a class of monkeys and include under it all those objects which possess the attributes aforesaid. There is nothing really common in the individuals that form the class save only the *name*, and the upholders of this theory point out with good reason the inconsistency of the conceptualist doctrine, which makes concepts play so prominent a part in the whole of logic. Thus all the time its upholders confess that a concept is always something *relative* and has no existence apart from the concrete imagination of which it forms a part.

The nominalist theory is, it must be confessed, more consistent than that of conceptualism, but at the same time it is more directly and immediately skeptical and produces under its specious exterior the same distinctive fallacy as its rival. It is important that we should have this fallacy very distinctly before us, lying as it does at the root of the whole system and vitiating it from first to last. Mill and Bain, and the nominalist school generally, tell us that we are to select a group of attributes from an individual, and to bind them together by means of a common name. But what is to guide us in our selection of the attributes? Their answer is that we are to choose those which are similar in a number of individuals, and which, therefore, make upon us the same impression.

But what is the origin of this similitude? Why is it that we cannot help recognizing in a number of objects what we call common properties? We imagine that all would admit that it has at least some foundation in the objects themselves. If the impressions on our senses, which we are compelled to regard as not only similar but the same, represent no corresponding qualities with objects the

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identity of which we recognize, it is merely something subjective, a mere delusion by which we deceive ourselves without any counterpart in the objects, then our senses can be in no way trustworthy, and we soon arrive at a self-contradictory skepticism. Both nominalist and conceptualist desire to avoid this conclusion from their premises, and they therefore concede a certain likeness between one and another of the objects around us, which is the cause of the impression they make, appearing to us to be the same. But in what does this likeness consist? To a scholastic logician the answer is simple enough. The objects, he tells us, are alike, inasmuch as they possess the same nature and are made after the same ideal or pattern. There is the same form in all of them. The common name of *monkey* is given to a number of individuals because they have one and all the common form or *nature* of monkey. The common ideal (or concept) of monkey is not picked up from the mere observation of a number of the class of monkeys. It represents something which exists really and truly outside the human mind, an intellectual entity which is quite independent of the individuals. This entity stamps its stamp, so to speak, on all individuals; and the human mind by a sort of rational instinct, recognizes at once the common mark or type wherever it exists. The intellect claims it as its own, transfers it into itself, abstracts it from the individuals, not by shaking off some of their attributes and leaving others, but by the power it possesses to extract the immaterial form from the material object in which it is realized. Not so the conceptualists. They would tell us that what we call a common idea or concept has no reality whatever apart from the mind, that it is the mind that creates it, and that it has no sort of existence outside the creative mind of man. The nominalist goes still further and says that there is no such thing as a concept at all, but that the bundle of attributes common to a number of individuals that it is supposed to represent are but the selected attributes on which we choose to fix our attention, to the exclusion of all other attributes. The attributes which form the bundle are, in their first origin, and always remain, individual attributes. The fact that others similar often are found in other individuals does not alter their character. All, therefore, that is common about the bundle we have found is its *name*, which is applicable to all the individuals contained in it, as well as to its original possessor.

Thus the nominalist abolishes the very notion of anything like universality in the concept or idea that is the result of simple apprehension. All that is universal is the name. Here it is that he breaks with the conceptualist. The latter at least keeps up the theory of a universal concept applicable to a number of individuals,

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even though the mere fact of its being relative to each of them destroys any claim on its part to true universality: he still asserts the existence of *ens unum in multis*, one and the same thing found in a number of individuals, even though its unity is merely a factitious one, brought about by the action of the faculty of generalization, which enables us to regard the sensibility of one ape as one and the same with the sensibility of another. The nominalist, more consistent and thorough-going, does not attempt to keep up the sham of the universal. "Your concepts," he says to the conceptualist, and he says so very rightly, "are but the shadow of a shade, a convenient stalking horse of which, however, a closer examination shows the utter unreality. Why not throw over the delusion and frankly confess that universal names are but a sort of abridged notation very convenient for practical purposes, and as a means of classification, but having nothing really corresponding to them for the objects for which they stand?"

But nominalist and conceptualist alike leave one question unsolved. What is it guides us in the process of classification? What is it enables us to regard as the *same* the different attributes found in different individuals and to give them a common name? I imagine that the answer that both nominalist and conceptualist would make, would be that these attributes, though different, nevertheless so resemble one another that they produce upon our senses indistinguishable impressions. But if we pursue the question and ask them whether similarity is possible without identity, whether any two objects belonging to the same order of things can be *alike* without having something in *common*, whether language does not cease to have any meaning if resemblance does not imply a certain unity of nature, nominalist and conceptualist alike would find it hard to make any satisfactory answer. We shall see as we proceed what the true doctrine of universals is. We are at present concerned with it only so far as it affects the doctrine of simple apprehension. We are considering what is the underlying fallacy which vitiates the theory of conception or simple apprehension as put forward by post-Reformation philosophers, and leads them into the abyss of skepticism into which they are forced by the inexorable power of an unpitying logic. Their weak point does not consist merely in their confusion between the phantasm of the imagination and the *idea* of the intellect. This is the central error of modern logic, but it has a twin-brother in metaphysics no less subversive of truth. The radical and fundamental mistake of modern metaphysicians consists in the supposition that it is possible for two objects to resemble each other without having some *fundamentum in re*, something truly and really common to *both of them in*

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which this resemblance has its origin.[1] The metaphysical error is, however, very closely connected with the other errors we have enumerated above as introduced into the modern doctrine of simple apprehension. It is because Hamilton and Mill alike fail to recognize identity of quality as the basis of resemblance that they fall into the blunder of confusing together the material phantasm and the immaterial idea. If Hamilton and his followers had clearly perceived that in each and all of the individual objects which are classed together there must be, in virtue of their mutual resemblance, some one or more common qualities existing in each or all, and the same in each and all, they would have seen how the common phantasm arrived at by stripping the individual of his individual peculiarities could never furnish qualities common to the various individual members of the class. In the same way, if Mill and his disciples had borne in mind that the group of attributes on which they fix their attention in the individual are from first to last individual attributes inapplicable to other individuals, and incapable without some further process of a name which is really common, they would not have fallen into the error of attempting to classify without any real basis of classification.

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[1] Aristotle defines similarity as unity in some quality, and distinguishes it from identity, which consists in unity of essence. Hence two things that are alike must have some one quality which is one and *the same* in both. It is not enough that they should have similar quality or qualities, and that the mind should have the power *of regarding this* SIMILARITY *as* IDENTITY.

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