

## GOD AND AGNOSTICISM.

THE recent controversy between Mr. Spencer and Mr. Harrison has had at least the good effect of defining more clearly than ever the position of Agnosticism and that of its sister infidelity, Positivism. Their attitude towards Christianity is more distinctly perceived, as well as those issues wherein each agrees and disagrees with the other. Mr. Harrison, as spokesman for Positivism, declares that it has accepted Mr. Spencer's doctrine of the inconceivability of the First Cause as enunciated in "First Principles." Reasoning logically from this premiss, furnished by Mr. Spencer himself, it has reached the conclusion that the function of religion cannot be to cherish, as an object of adoration and reverence, this Unknowable outside of human thought and consciousness. But, as religion is a necessity to human nature and to the regulation of human conduct, the proper object of such veneration is to be found in humanity itself. Mr. Spencer, on the other hand, scouts and ridicules the conceit of a creed and cultus founded either upon the abstract notion of humanity or on its collective concretion, and stoutly maintains that the only and proper object of religious worship is that infinite and eternal energy "from which all things proceed," and which, he warns us, is, at the same time, unknown and unknowable. The function of religion Mr. Spencer conceives to be the fostering of this mystery along with the perpetual incalculability of its insolubility.

Without attempting to pass judgment upon the antagonisms, which the late controversy has revealed between Mr. Spencer's Agnosticism and Mr. Harrison's Positivism, it will be interesting to go back to that premiss which both, in common, accept as indubitably true. Is Mr. Spencer's doctrine of the Unknowable upon the substantial footing that both claim? Has it that consistency with sound reason that both assert? The answer to these questions will bring us back to Mr. Spencer's "First Principles," wherein the doctrine of inconceivability is discussed fundamentally and at length. Accepted, as it has been, without dispute by a certain class of thinkers, it has established itself with many as a profound and irrefragable refutation of theological and metaphysical conceptions. Mr. Harrison says that Mr. Spencer, as much as any living man, has torn "the slip-slop of theologians finally to shreds;" and such is the current belief with those who either accept, without investigation, the authority of Mr. Spencer's dictum, or who,

finding the speculations of metaphysical science too labored and painful for their abilities or time, congratulate the weakness of their intelligence in the thought that theology and metaphysics are, after all, absurdities which Mr. Spencer's trenchant criticism has finally exposed. Metaphysicians and theologians, in consequence, have been rated as charlatans. It will, perhaps, be startling to Mr. Spencer's followers to call in question their master's first principles, and still more startling to learn that they do not rest upon as secure a basis as is imagined.

The second chapter of "First Principles" opens with an illustration of the incompetency of the human mind to conceive things as they are. This illustration treats of its failure to imagine the actual curvature of the whole circumference of the earth.

"We cannot conceive, in its real form and magnitude, even that small segment of our globe which extends a hundred miles on every side of us; much less the globe as a whole. The piece of rock on which we stand can be mentally represented with something like completeness; we find ourselves able to think of its top, its sides, and its under surface at the same time, or so nearly at the same time that they seem all present in consciousness together; and so we can form what we call a conception of a rock. But to do the like with the earth we find impossible. If even to imagine the antipodes as at that distant place in space which it actually occupies, is beyond our power, much more beyond our power must it be at the same time to imagine all other remote points on the earth's surface as in their actual places. Yet we habitually speak as though we had an idea of the earth—as though we could think of it in the same way we think of minor objects."

In this passage we first ascertain Mr. Spencer's notion of ideology. In proportion to the magnitude of the object, the greater grows the impossibility of conceiving it. Magnitude, then, is the gauge of our power of conception. The smaller an object is, the better we can represent it in thought, and the larger it is, the less chance it has of being conceived. We can, mentally, represent "the piece of rock on which we stand with something like completeness," because its likeness can be crowded more easily into the mind than if it were a thousand times as large. An elephant can be pretty well represented in thought, but if the animal were fifty times as huge, it would stand fifty times less opportunity of being mentally grasped. It is to be observed in the passage just quoted, that Mr. Spencer uses the words *imagine* and *conceive* in exactly the same sense. "We cannot *conceive* in its real form, etc.," and, "if even to *imagine* the antipodes, etc.," and, again, "the piece of rock on which we stand can be *mentally represented*, etc." Do *imagine*, *conceive*, and *mentally represent* express one and the same idea in Mr. Spencer's mind? Such, evidently, is the implication in this passage, and such must we infer it to be from the application of the principle he deduces from this illustration. It is here we must put in our demurrer. Mr. Spencer confuses two distinct

operations, imagining and conceiving, and would deduce from the impotency of one the defect of the other. Imagination is a faculty which concretely represents objects, and intellect is a faculty which abstractly represents them. Because the imagination fails to completely and adequately picture the total circumference of the earth's surface, it does not, therefore, follow that our abstract concept of the earth is unlike the reality. Mr. Spencer declares in the following paragraph that our conception of the earth is drawn from two ideas, that of "an indefinitely extended mass beneath our feet," and that of "a body like a terrestrial globe;" "and thus we form of the earth, not a conception properly so-called, but only a symbolic conception." As Mr. Spencer has not told us what is a "conception properly so-called," he leaves it to be inferred what a "symbolic conception" is. As nearly as we can ascertain from the passage we have quoted, a "conception properly so-called" is with Mr. Spencer simply the phantasm of the imagination, and a "symbolic conception" means an abstraction. Our idea of the earth is formed, he tells us, by coupling together the idea of "an indefinitely extended mass beneath our feet," and "a body like a terrestrial globe." What he really means is that, from the phantasms of this "indefinitely extended mass beneath our feet," and of this or that "body like a terrestrial globe," we abstract our idea of the earth. But it is not a legitimate deduction to conclude that our concept of the earth is merely symbolic and unrepresentative of the reality, because the phantasm of the imagination fails to picture in its totality the circumferential magnitude of the earth. By whatever methods, direct or indirect, we learn that the earth is a sphere, our conception of it, as a sphere, is a true and real representation, and not simply symbolic, which, according to Mr. Spencer, can only signify unrepresentative.

Mr. Spencer's next step in ideology is to show that a large proportion of our conceptions, "including all those of much generality," are of this symbolical order, or truly unrepresentative. "Great magnitudes, great durations, great numbers, are none of them actually conceived, but are all of them conceived more or less symbolically; and so, too, are all those classes of objects, of which we predicate some common fact." He proceeds to illustrate this by an example, beginning with a particular, and then, by process of abstraction, dropping out of thought, first one note and then another passes up the scale over a series of universals, each last more universal than the preceding. In proportion as he ascends the scale of universals, does the concept become less representative and more symbolic. His symbolic ideas are, therefore, nothing more than generalizations; and the more generic the idea, the more symbolic it becomes, and consequently less representa-

tive. All abstractions, according to this doctrine, are symbolic, and do not truly represent realities. It is only concrete phantasms which represent objects in their reality. When, then, I predicate the idea *man* of any individual, I am not attributing to him any reality; I am simply using a symbolic conception, to which there corresponds no reality in the individual. When I say, "this animal is a mammal," there is nothing in the animal itself corresponding to my predicate, which is simply symbolic. Such is Mr. Spencer's process throughout. Our symbolic conceptions, when they cannot be verified by "cumulative or indirect processes of thought," are "altogether vicious and illusive, and in no way distinguishable from pure fictions." But why they cease to be "pure fictions" when verified by "cumulative or indirect processes of thought," we are left vainly to imagine. Certainly no "cumulative or indirect process of thought" can ever make an abstraction a concretion, or a conception a phantasm; and, according to Mr. Spencer, it is only phantasms which are truly representative. Upon this system of ideology Mr. Spencer proceeds to build his doctrine of the Unknowable. If all he assumes be granted, he has, indeed, an easy task to convince the mind that accepts his premises.

The three systems of philosophy accounting for the origin of the universe, Mr. Spencer informs us, are, "that it is self-existent, or that it is self-created, or that it is created by an external agency." All three are alike unthinkable, Mr. Spencer asserts, and in their ultimate analysis evaporate into contradictions. Respecting the first of these Mr. Spencer argues that the idea of self-existence presents an inconceivability:

"In the first place, it is clear by self-existence we especially mean an existence independent of any other—not produced by any other—the assertion of self-existence is simply an indirect denial of creation. In thus excluding any idea of any antecedent cause we necessarily exclude the idea of a beginning; for to admit the idea of a beginning, to admit that there was a time when the existence had not commenced, is to admit that its commencement was determined by something, or was caused, which is a contradiction. Self-existence, therefore, necessarily means an existence without a beginning, and to form a conception of self-existence is to form a conception of existence without a beginning. Now, by no mental effort can we do this. To conceive existence through infinite past time implies the conception of infinite past time, which is an impossibility."

Mr. Spencer's reason for concluding the impossibility of thinking self-existence is, that this idea implies the notion of infinite past time. It is in this he is to be disputed. The idea of self-existence does not include that of infinite past time, but excludes it. Existence without a beginning necessarily means existence outside of time, for time necessarily begins, and self-existence, as Mr. Spencer himself admits, means existence without a beginning.

To conceive a self-existence which begins to be is impossible, no doubt; and when Mr. Spencer attempts to associate the ideas of self-existence and beginning, he naturally enough finds incompatible concepts. Time necessarily implies succession, but self-existence excludes the idea of succession, because it *implies* the idea of complete and perfect being, which is repugnant to successive being. Self-existence means the most perfect and complete existence which repudiates all mutations of time. Instead, then, of including the concept of infinite past time, which Mr. Spencer would saddle upon it in order to argue its inconceivability, our idea of self-existence transcends and negatives all notion of time. How, then, on this score it is mentally inconceivable, remains to be proved. It is easy enough to form a notion of an inconceivable by associating two incongruous ideas, and thereby develop a contradiction. I can associate the idea of *square* and *circle*, and get the inconceivable *square-circle*, which process is analogous to Mr. Spencer's method of arguing the inconceivability of self-existence. He would place the self-existent under the category of time, which implies beginning and succession, and then complacently conclude that self-existence is a contradiction, because it fails to agree with a notion intrinsically repugnant to it. This is making the man to fit the suit, and not the suit to fit the man. As long as Mr. Spencer argues that this universe cannot be self-existent, we must agree with him, and for the very reason which we have used against him, viz., that the mutable and successive are repugnant to the idea of self-existence. But when Mr. Spencer argues that the idea of self-existence is an intrinsic contradiction, because he would make it include the idea of infinite past time, which denotes succession and mutation, reason cannot agree with him; and if we refuse to call his argument sound, it arises from the fact that sound sense forces us to this view.

The hypothesis of self-creation does include the contradiction which Mr. Spencer argues. His exceptions to this theory we pass over, and agree with him in his conclusion. To what we mainly wish to turn our attention is his argument against the hypothesis, as he terms it, of an external cause as accounting for the universe. Passing by his argument in regard to the impossibility of conceiving the non-existence of space with the remark that this impossibility is but the figment of his own imagination, since he is really endeavoring to outstrip the phantasm of his own imagination by projecting one image beyond the other, as a foolish hound might endeavor to outstrip his own shadow, we will turn to the main consideration of the question. Of course he applies his supposed inconceivable self-existent to the external Cause of the universe, against which, he asserts, it equally holds. This we have seen to

be the result of a misconception on his part. Mr. Spencer admits, and, indeed, argues, back to a First Cause; but, like self-existence, he holds that this First Cause is inconceivable. It is in our endeavors to conceive the nature of this First Cause that we run against "intolerable contradictions." It is either finite or infinite; it cannot be finite, for that immediately throws us into the absurdity of supposing it to be dependent upon another, which is tantamount to saying it is not first. But

"to think of the First Cause as totally independent is to think of it as that which exists in the absence of all other existences, seeing that if the presence of any other existence is necessary, it must be partially dependent on that existence, and so cannot be the First Cause."

In this passage we observe, first, an assumption without warrant, to the effect that "to think of the First Cause as totally independent is to think of it as that which exists in the *absence* of all others." Why, in order to be independent, it is necessary that the First Cause should exist in the *absence* of all others, is not stated, unless it be upon the further assumption that the First Cause *necessarily* produces its effects. Then it remains to be proved that the First Cause necessarily creates, which Mr. Spencer not only fails to do, but which, upon his own hypothesis of the Unknowable, he could not possibly do. As long as the First Cause is conceived, as it must properly be conceived, to create voluntarily, it cannot be argued that the presence of its effects limits its independence. On the contrary, since its effects can be or can not be, that is, are contingent beings dependent upon the will of their Creator for existence, so much the more distinctly is its independence shown in the fact that its effects are totally dependent upon it for their being, and can be cancelled at the fiat of its will. Their contingency demonstrates indubitably the total independence of their cause. Whether they exist or not, it remains untouched in its existence, and its independence is more clearly seen in the light of their utter dependence upon it. Strange is that logic which argues that the First Cause is dependent upon its effect for its existence. We must, therefore, entirely deny Mr. Spencer's assumption, when he asserts that "to think of the First Cause as totally independent is to think of it as that which exists in the *absence* of all other existences." The presence of contingent beings does not in the slightest restrict the independence of their cause. Mr. Spencer's argument resolves itself briefly into this: If there be present to the First Cause any other existence external to itself, then is its independence restricted, and it, therefore, ceases to be first. But there are external existences whose presence is necessary; therefore the first independent is not independent. This is, of course, a con-

tradiction; *ergo*, the First Cause is inconceivable. The assumption is apparent that the presence of other existences is necessary, and limits the independence of the First Cause. It is, therefore, to be denied that the presence of other beings is necessary, and that their presence limits the First Cause; their presence is not necessary, for they are essentially contingent *unnecessary* existences, and altogether dependent upon the First Cause; nor does their presence shackle the independence of the First Cause, for the reason that they owe their being to it, and are entirely subject to its will, which may cancel their existence at any moment. In the face of the foregoing Mr. Spencer's inconceivable vanishes. As in his argument against the conceivability of self-existence, so in his argument against the First Cause, we find his fallacy to consist in an endeavor to consociate incompatible concepts, which he labels "inconceivables," and foists upon the unwary reader as true, metaphysical, and theological conceptions of the self-existent and first Cause. Between Mr. Spencer's perversion and the true metaphysical conception there is as wide a distinction as exists between being and its negation, as between a circle and the contradiction, a square-circle. To the reader whose intellect may not be acute or well versed in matters metaphysical, this substitution is not perceived, and naturally enough he casts the *odium theologicum* upon the science of natural theology for breeding such intellectual monstrosities and forcing them upon the consciences of men. There are not a few who believe, for they cannot be said to hold it upon "rational conviction, that Mr. Spencer, as much as any living man, has finally torn to shreds the slip-slop of theologians," and this credulity comes entirely from the ignorant adoption of Mr. Spencer's metaphysical nightmare.

Having endeavored to show that the presence of external existences throws our conception of a First Cause into an inconceivable, Mr. Spencer continues his discussion with an attempt to prove that any "internal relation" conceived in the First Cause shows a like contradiction. "Not only, however, must the First Cause be a form of being which has no necessary relation to any other form of being, but it can have no necessary relation within itself." What he seems to mean by *necessary relation within itself* we find in the next sentence: "There can be nothing in it which determines change, and yet nothing which prevents change." The change which Mr. Spencer speaks of can only mean, in the light of the context, change within the First Cause itself. Here is his reason for this assertion: "For if it contains something which imposes such necessities or restraints, this something must be a cause higher than the First Cause, which is absurd." • Respecting Mr. Spencer's position on this point, it is to be first said that a First Cause and self-existent being necessarily postulates immutability;

that is, it cannot be any other being, and furthermore *must* be; it could *not* be. It is, therefore, a *necessary* being; but that which determines its necessity to be is its own nature. Because it is an independent being, unproduced, self-existent, its existence is necessary. If the necessity of its existence, which is its very essence, be what Mr. Spencer terms a "necessary relation within itself," then is Mr. Spencer's assumption to be denied *in toto*. His language is altogether irrelevant and misleading, if by necessary relation he means the necessity of existence in the First Cause, for between the First Cause and its own essence there can only be complete and perfect identity.

The hiatus here in Mr. Spencer's argument is so wide that it is difficult to comprehend what he does mean. Necessary relation within itself cannot plainly mean the necessity of the First Cause's existence, and yet it is almost beyond effort to think that Mr. Spencer can mean anything else. In the light of this is the absurdity of Mr. Spencer's next sentence made evident: "There can be nothing in it which determines change, and yet nothing which prevents change." Certainly there can be nothing in a self-existent First Cause which determines change within itself, for there is *everything* within it to prevent change; the very immutability of its own essence, its own self-necessity, renders change within it an impossibility. To predicate change, therefore, of the necessary immutable is a flagrant contradiction, but it is by no means a proper conception of the First Cause. It is for the very reason that there is nothing within the First Cause to determine change that there is everything within it to prevent change. When, therefore, Mr. Spencer would draw his preposterous conclusion, or rather when he makes the naked assumption that the idea of a First Cause *necessitates* the concomitant notion of changeable immutability, we repudiate his illegitimate method as an insult to our intelligence, unfair to the metaphysical standpoint, and a perversion of truth. In this instance, as in every other we have considered, Mr. Spencer begs the question. He assumes each time what he wishes to prove. He asserts that the conception of a self-existence and a First Cause is a contradiction, and then proceeds to prove his point by an analysis of his own misconception. Instead of giving the true metaphysical conception, he substitutes in its place his own perverted notion made up of conflicting concepts, and then declares that the inconceivability of a First Cause is made manifest. This is what Mr. Frederick Harrison calls tearing the "slip-slop of theologians to shreds."

As if to pile Pelion upon Ossa, Mr. Spencer next proceeds to quote Dean Mansel on the side of the inconceivable. This is as if to say: "Reader, here is the argument of a *theologian*, who recognizes the truth of what I have said, and agrees with me that his



God, after all, is unknowable." But Mr. Mansel has fallen into exactly the same error of which Mr. Spencer is guilty. Mr. Spencer's auxiliary is as blind as himself, and their mutual error by no means makes truth. It is far from a triumph for the former to drag in the mistakes of the latter in vindication of his own position, even though Mr. Mansel "writes in defence of the current theology." Mr. Mansel's method is as far from the truth, and as antagonistic to true theology, as Mr. Spencer's. Having mentioned that Mr. Mansel has given preliminary definitions of the First Cause, of the infinite, and the absolute, Mr. Spencer quotes him as follows: "But these three conceptions, the cause, the absolute, the infinite, all equally indispensable, do they not imply contradiction to each other, when viewed in conjunction, as attributes of one and the same being? A cause cannot, as such, be absolute: the absolute cannot, as such, be a cause. The cause, as such, exists only in its relation to its effect; the cause is a cause of the effect; the effect is the effect of the cause. On the other hand, the conception of the absolute implies a possible existence out of all relation. We attempt to escape from this apparent contradiction by introducing the idea of succession in time. The absolute exists first by itself, and afterwards becomes a cause. But here we are checked by a third conception, that of the infinite. How can the infinite become that which it was not from the first? If causation is a possible mode of existence, that which exists without causing is not infinite; that which becomes a cause has passed beyond its former limits." By way of apprehending the real bearing of Mr. Mansel's implied contradiction, we will substitute analogous and more familiar terms for cause, absolute, and infinite, and see if the substituted terms suffer the same contradiction " . . . . these three conceptions, the artist, the man, the rational being, all equally indispensable, do they not imply contradiction to each other, when viewed in conjunction, as attributes of one and the same being? An artist, as such, cannot be man; the man, as such, cannot be artist. . . . ." No doubt this appears absurd, but it is not one whit more absurd than Mr. Mansel's comparison. In this last the terms are clearly understood, and the reader sees at a glance the nonsense of the comparison. A proper conception of the terms cause, absolute, and infinite, will make Mr. Mansel's paragraph equally absurd. It is because Mr. Mansel has put his own contradictory and arbitrary meaning into the terms that he finds them so absurdly incongruous, and for the same reason Mr. Spencer quotes him. Mr. Spencer has told us what he means by the absolute, viz., that which exists out of all necessary relation to external beings and without any necessary relation within itself ("First Principles," section 12, page 38); or (to concede as much as possible to him), the Absolute is that which exists

“in the absence of all other existences.” If the Absolute be that which can only exist in the absence of all other existences, then it must be conceded that the Spencer-Mansel absolute can never be a cause, and we may at once admit that the two notions are incompatible. If it be necessary for the existence of the Absolute that no other being should exist, then we grant Mr. Mansel’s inconceivable. But such an absolute is an absurdity, and to couple it with the idea of First Cause breeds contradiction. The proper term is not absolute in the sense which Mr. Mansel and Mr. Spencer have given it, but independent being. They have confused the two. Absolute in its proper sense means independent being, and Mr. Spencer in spite of himself has described it as such, for he concludes the paragraph wherein he has discussed the absolute freedom of the First Cause from external and internal relations in these words: “Or, to use the established word, it (First Cause) must be absolute.” We have already seen that an independent being does not necessarily imply a being which *can only* exist in the absence of all others, and that an independent being must be conceived as one in which at the same time there exists “nothing—which determines change, and yet nothing which prevents change;” and we have also seen that such an incongruous consociation of ideas is Mr. Spencer’s arbitrary assumption of an inconceivable, and not the true metaphysical conception. His absolute, then, really means independent. What incompatibility exists, therefore, between an independent being and the First Cause? The fact that it causes does not restrict its independence, as we have already seen. On the contrary, the contingency and dependence of its effects upon the First Cause heightens and defines more clearly our notion of its independence, for they can or cannot exist at the fiat of its will. It is true that there exists a relation between the First Cause and its effects, but this relationship adds nothing to, and takes nothing from, the First Cause, since the relationship is founded in the *creatureship* of the created. It arises from the *dependence* of the effect upon its cause, without which that effect could never have sprung into being, and upon which the effect, as long as it exists, *absolutely depends* for the continuance of its being. The effect gives no new entity to the cause, but, on the contrary, the cause gives total entity to the effect. The only novelty is the existence of the effect. Its existence constitutes on its side the relation of *total dependence* upon its cause, from which it receives everything. The cause must precontain in some way, and supereminently if First Cause, its effect; if then the creation of the effect could add anything to its cause, we would have the following absurdity, viz., a cause receiving from its effect what that cause never had; but the effect can only be what it is, inasmuch as it receives from its cause what it has; how, then, can the effect give to its cause that

which it had not? Nothing, therefore, can be in reality added to the cause by the creation of its effect.

If we are to accept the absolute as that which must necessarily exist in the absence of all other beings, we fall into the absurdity, as Mr. Spencer implicitly does, of conceiving an absolute which is dependent and coerced by a mere possibility; "the First Cause," says Mr. Spencer (if it is to be conceived at all, he understands), "must be in every sense perfect, complete, total: including within itself all power, and transcending all law. Or, to use the established word, it must be absolute." *An absolute which can only exist provided no other beings exist*, is no absolute, since that would force it into dependency upon the *possibility* that no other beings exist. How, then, can it be "perfect, complete, total, and including within itself all power, and transcending all law?" It is in this misconception on the part of both Mr. Spencer and Mr. Mansel of the true Absolute that their fallacy is to be seen. Here, as elsewhere, the contradiction is engendered by consociating incompatible concepts which were never meant to agree. The Absolute is not to be conceived as that which necessarily exists out of all relation to external beings other than itself; but the Absolute is truly that which exists entirely independent of all other beings, which are its effects, and the creatures of its will. When, then, we conceive the Absolute, it is not to be thought of as a being, which can only exist on the contingency that others do not exist, but exists whether they do or not. No wonder we find wretched contradictions in an unknowable manufactured to order, and fashioned to fit preconceived inconceivables. It is not strange that Mr. Spencer finds the First Cause unknowable, when at the start he makes it inconceivable.

Mr. Mansel's next step is to prove the inconceivability of the First Cause for the reason that we must conceive it to be a conscious Being, and to conceive it as such, he argues, is a contradiction. "Consciousness is only conceivable as a relation. There must be a conscious subject, and an object of which he is conscious. The subject is a subject to the object; the object is an object to the subject; and neither can exist by itself as the Absolute." Without quoting further we understand that Mr. Mansel's argument lies in the distinction between subject and object. There must, then, exist this distinction in the self-conscious Absolute. Here, therefore, we have a distinction in the Absolute which proves fatal; either the subject is absolute, or the object. If either, then the other is not the Absolute. If both are absolute, then we have two absolutes, which is a contradiction. In the first place, there is an assumption that consciousness implies a distinction which is real, viz., that the thinking of self either creates another self or an objectivity which is not self. As Mr. Mansel puts it, "the

object of consciousness, whether a mode of the subject's existence or not, is either created in and by the act of consciousness, or has an existence independent of it." In the first place, Mr. Mansel would implicitly apply a mode to the Absolute which cannot be permitted to him. To speak of the Absolute as having or being a mode of itself, is of course a contradiction. Our conception of the Absolute must explicitly eliminate all modes. It is to be denied that the object of consciousness is either created in and by the act of consciousness, or has, therefore, an existence independent of it. This is a pure assumption on Mr. Mansel's part, and lacks proof. When I conceive myself, or am self-conscious, the act by no means makes another self, distinct from or existing beyond myself. On the contrary, in order that I may be self-conscious the *ego* must already exist, and so far from creating myself by being self-conscious, I could not be self-conscious unless the *ego* already be. When I conceive myself in thought, if that be Mr. Mansel's self-conscious, I but make a logical distinction, a distinction *in thought* and not *in reality*. Much more, then, is the identity complete when we think of the Absolute, between whom and his thought there is not even this logical distinction, for his thought is himself. When we think of the Absolute we must conceive him to be absolutely himself without even logical distinction within himself; and while self-consciousness in a finite being implies logical distinction, though not real distinction or *in re*, self-consciousness in the infinite necessarily excludes even logical distinction. Instead, then, of finding an antagonism in the consciousness of the Absolute, the contradiction, like all the Spencer-Mansel inconceivables, arises from an endeavor to conceive the Absolute under concepts which it necessarily and absolutely repudiates. Instead of attempting to conceive the Absolute as a being plus that which is in direct conflict with it, in order to gain a proper conception of it, he must conceive it as in every sense "perfect, complete, total," minus all that which limits its omnipotence and its all-perfectness; in short, we must conceive it as infinite. But if we attempt to think of it as infinite and finite, which is the Spencer-Mansel method, we naturally strike on a contradiction. And this arises from the fact that we are not conceiving it properly, but striding our conception of the First Cause with notions repugnant to it.

Mr. Spencer's whole difficulty flows from a double misconception; firstly, he confuses the proper conception of the infinite with an element in what is called the process of removal, whereby the finite arrives at its conception of the First Cause. The human intellect reaches the First Cause by reasoning back from effects to cause, and then, on the principle that the cause must in some way precontain its effect, it conceives that cause to possess, not formally, be it noted, whatsoever perfections are perceived in the effect.

The effect is finite; therefore with limited perfection; the First Cause is infinite, therefore without limitation, and hence all perfect. The perfection of the Infinite must then be conceived as transcending all limits. But since the First Cause must contain all perfection to infinity, it stands to reason that it cannot contain the perfection of the finite formally, that is as the finite does. Our conception of the perfection of the First Cause contains three elements: first, that the First Cause possesses whatsoever perfection the finite does; secondly, that its perfection is beyond all limits, or infinite; and thirdly, that we can only conceive that perfection *analogically*, that is, we conceive the First Cause as possessing all those perfections which its effects do, yet not in the degree or kind in which they do, but transcending their imperfection infinitely. We may aid ourselves by an illustration, which of course falls short of the reality. An artist preconceives his statue and fashions it after the idea he has formed in his mind. While the statue possesses a perfection which the artist gives it, still it is not the same in kind or degree as the perfection in the artist's mind; the artistic prototype is in the intellectual order, and its expression in the material, and the one excels the other in perfection as the ideal excels the physical. As from the statue, which is effect, we can argue back to the artist's conception, so from effects we can argue back to the First Cause and glean some notion of its perfection. In none of these three elements is there the contradiction which Mr. Spencer advocates. That the First Cause possesses whatsoever perfection its effects do, in this there can certainly be no repugnance; that the First Cause possesses them to infinity must be true, for it could not be the First Cause if it did not. And just here comes in Mr. Spencer's misconception. He, as well as Mr. Mansel, mistakes the negative conception of the First Cause, *not* holding the perfections of the finite as the finite does under limitations, with the positive conception of the infinite possessing these perfections transcendently. The act of the mind here is to first deny limitations to the infinite, that is, negative the negation, which restricts the finite, and so take away the imperfection which makes the finite to be what it is. It then conceives the infinite as possessing all these perfections, which are the positive element in the human mind's thought, and moreover so transcendently that these perfections must be conceived through analogy with finite effects. This, the proper conception of the First Cause, is free from all contradiction. Mr. Spencer only argues a contradiction when he confuses the negative with the positive concept, and so asserts that we conceive the infinite under the limitations of the finite.

Mr. Spencer's second misconception takes its source from the confusion of the inconceivable with the incomprehensible. The inconceivable, as he uses the term, means that which is contrary to reason;

but the incomprehensible should mean that which is above reason. Now the First Cause is undoubtedly incomprehensible in its own essence, and beyond the conception of the finite mind. No created intellect can adequately comprehend the infinite. But this is a very different thing from not *apprehending* it at all. It is certainly within the grasp of the finite intellect to conceive the infinite inadequately, but because it does not grasp the infinite fully, it does not follow that its conception is a contradiction. When Mr. Spencer cites Sir William Hamilton as enumerating various "thinkers of note," who have held and advocated this doctrine of the inconceivable, both make the fatal blunder of supposing these thinkers to mean inconceivable in its strict sense, whereas they really meant incomprehensible, that which is *above* human reason, not contrary to it. Mr. Spencer cannot adequately comprehend the tiniest mote that floats in a sunbeam, yet what comprehension he has of it is not contradictory because, forsooth, he does not grasp it in its totality.

After his elaborate attempt to convince the reader that the First Cause implies contradiction in its conception, that it is "rigorously inconceivable," and that any hypothesis respecting the ultimate cause is "even unthinkable," what is our surprise to find Mr. Spencer endeavoring to demolish his own painfully constructed argument in the latter half of his chapter on "The Relativity of All Knowledge." After having approvingly quoted Mr. Mansel and Sir William Hamilton in favor of his doctrine, he turns and repudiates their reasoning, telling us "that there remains to be stated a qualification, which saves us from that skepticism otherwise necessitated!" Plainly, then, Mr. Spencer admits that his doctrine of the inconceivable leads to a skepticism, the burden of which he is not willing to take on his own shoulders. Skepticism, he sees, ends in absurdity, and so would involve him in a self-stultification. But he must escape from this "intolerable contradiction," and so he substitutes "a qualification" which serves him as does a plank a drowning man. Mr. Mansel's and Sir William Hamilton's "propositions are imperfect statements of the truth, omitting, or rather excluding, as they do, an all-important fact." What, now, is this all-important fact which makes the foregoing argument "an elaborate suicide," as Mr. Spencer characterizes it, and, at the same time, saves him from the absurdity of skepticism? Let us listen to Mr. Spencer himself: "Besides that *definite* consciousness of which logic formulates the laws, there is also an indefinite consciousness which cannot be formulated." What this indefinite is we will let Mr. Spencer himself say. "The error" (namely, of philosophers, like Sir William Hamilton, who are bent on demonstrating the limits and conditions of consciousness) "consists in assuming that consciousness contains *nothing but* limits

and conditions, to the entire neglect of that which is limited and conditioned; the abstraction of these conditions and limits is, by this hypothesis, the abstraction of them *only*; consequently, there must be a residuary in consciousness of something which filled up the outlines; and this indefinite something constitutes our consciousness of the non-relative or absolute. Impossible though it is to give this consciousness any quantitative or qualitative expression whatever, it is not the less certain that it remains with us a positive and indestructible element of thought." Mr. Spencer has been arguing with Sir William Hamilton that "to think is to condition;" hence, to think of the Absolute is to condition it, and thence arises the contradiction of a conditioned unconditioned. Mr. Spencer now asserts that there remains, in spite of this, a consciousness that there is some indestructible and positive element in thought, which rescues the mind from complete skepticism, notwithstanding the contradiction which the "*laws of thought*" force upon us. This positive element is an "indefinite something" which "constitutes our consciousness of the Absolute," and it suffers "no qualitative or quantitative expression whatever." Again he says: "The continual negation of each particular form and limit simply results in the more or less complete abstraction of all forms and limits, and so ends in an *indefinite consciousness* of the *unformed* and the *unlimited*." And this is the Absolute which is to save Mr. Spencer from the shipwreck of skepticism! A formless, vague abstraction, an indefinite consciousness of *something!*

Mr. Spencer's Absolute is nothing more than the indeterminate idea of being, which he reaches in ascending the categories by successive abstractions from the particular until he gyrates upwards into the dizzy transcendental being, that "indestructible" element, that "positive" something, which remains in spite of all laws of thought! Truly, this is a wonderful generation, an evolution worthy of Mr. Spencer's acumen, more miraculous than spontaneous generation, from the indeterminate, indefinite, vague, formless concept of being in general to create an Absolute "in every sense perfect, complete, total; including within itself all power, and transcending all law!" This, then, is that "ultimate reality" behind all phenomena, that "infinite and eternal energy from which all things proceed!" This is the mysterious reality which we are to regard as the cause of all things, and of which Mr. Spencer can only think with reverence and humility, if he thinks at all.

This is the transcendent infinite, for the mentioning of which as a conscious being, who cares for and loves the creatures of his own making, Mr. Spencer so bitterly castigates theologians. It seems singular that Mr. Spencer should fall into such an animated and vigorous speech over his unknowable, when, according to

his own teaching, it is like nothing in the waters under the earth, nor anything in the heavens above the earth, nor aught that is on the earth; of which all predication fails; which is neither conscious nor unconscious, being nor non-being, loving nor unloving, good nor bad; for all epithets alike are meaningless when applied to it. If, then, we should even call it a liar and a deceiver, where would be the impiety? If we should say that it is supremely evil, where the wrong, since our words have no meaning? If it has given us intellects to know the truth, and then forever withholds the truth from us, what wrong in cursing it for the deception it duly practices upon us, holding us but as its playthings and in implacable cruelty torturing us with an omnipresent riddle which we must ever seek to solve, and ever fail? Did Fijian or Indian ever torture his victim with more fiendish malice than this barbarous unknowable? This is the mystery, to keep which alive in man's grateful mind is the sole function of religion. This the object of adoration and reverence and belief (?), whence are to be drawn all consolations, all inspiration and aids to right-doing. The veriest fetich worshipper, who fancies his god to reside in the stick which his own hand has carved, renders a worship purer, more rational, higher, and more dignified a thousand times, incomparably, than all Agnostics together, who, in the arrogance of their conceit, would erect temples, richer than Solomon's, to this vague, formless, indefinite abstraction of their own vapid intellects.

Mr. Harrison has decidedly the advantage over Mr. Spencer in this matter of religious worship. He has accepted the latter premiss of the unknowable, and argued it out to its legitimate conclusion, wherein all religion evaporates into such rhetoric as Mr. Harrison wittily disperses over his pages. Mr. Harrison is logical at least, when he accepts the fatal doctrine of the unknowable, for it necessarily ends in that "ghost of religion," humanity! The flaw of both lies in the adoption of the absurdity which Mr. Spencer has laid down in the beginning, an utterly inconceivable god, which the human mind annihilates in its attempt to think of it. Neither humanity nor the unknowable can ever be the proper object of religious worship. Mr. Spencer rightly rejects Mr. Harrison's folly of humanity, and Mr. Harrison properly repudiates Mr. Spencer's absurdity of the unknowable. Both are *simulacra*, engendered by "persistent misconception along certain defined grooves of thought." Reason, so far from being exalted, is debased by the acceptance of either. Man's only dignity consists in having come from God, who has created him to know Him, the Truth. And "I, for one, cannot think there is such a radical vice in the constitution of things" as to suppose that man's intellect was made to conceive the highest truth a lie.