

# REFUTATION OF MATERIALISM AND PHILOSOPHY IN THE LIGHT OF MODERN SCIENCE

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In modern times Hegel, Feuerbach, Darwin, Comte and John Dewey are those philosophers who principally contributed to the development of a materialistic outlook and a mechanistic world view. We do not include Karl Marx because he is not considered to be a philosopher by many scholars, although he is an archmaterialist.

“In Schelling things proceed from the Absolute which for that reason remains outside of them. In Hegel the absolute is in the process itself. It does not produce life and movement, it is life and movement. It does not exceed the things but is wholly in them nor does it in any way exceed the intellectual capacity of man. If we mean by God *the being transcending human reason*, then Hegel is the most atheistic of all philosophers, for none has laid more emphasis affirming the immanency and perfect knowableness of the absolute”. It should also be borne in mind that Hegel’s idealism furnished the foundation for Karl Marx’s materialistic interpretation of history.

Auguste Comte, the philosopher of positivism propounded the theory of three stages. The first stage was the theological stage in which facts were explained by super natural means, the second stage was the Metaphysical stage. In the second stage facts were explained by abstract methods and in the third stage they were explained by the laws of cause and effect. This division of human history into three stages is absolutely out of keeping with facts. Except in the mythological stage, what Comte calls the theological stage is the stage when philosophical wisdom had begun to enlighten human mind. For example, the *Qur’an* appeals to man’s rational faculty, proves the existence of God by rational arguments and gives rational explanation for

many of its commands. Theology and philosophy overlap each other and sometimes it is hard to make a distinction between them. As regards the stage of positivism when things are decided on the basis of positive facts, what comes forgotten is that facts have to be interpreted and coordinated before they can lead to any conclusion.<sup>23</sup>

If the protest of positivism against philosophy were just, then physics, chemistry and the natural and moral sciences would have to give up formulating universal theories, for every scientific theory is a *relatively apriori* hypothesis, so long as no new facts are adduced to contradict it and as this probability always exists, scientific theory cannot lay claim to the dignity of an axiom.

Positivists tend to forgets absolute certainly concerning the first causes of the universe may not be easy, one can attain to a relative certainty or probability which approximates absolute certainty.

Now, let us come to the German philosopher, Feuerbach. Accounting to him, in the present age, “religion can be preserved only by abandoning the religious other worldly form. The doctrine of God (theology) must be changed in the doctrine of man (Anthropology). Everlasting happiness will begin with the transformation of the kingdom of heaven into a republic of earth.”<sup>24</sup>

Commenting on this, Hoffding says “the negation of religion had begun with Hegel’s transformation of logic into anthropology.”<sup>25</sup>

What Feuerbach ignores is that man is not an isolated being. He is part of the universe and unless the universe as a whole is understood, man himself cannot be understood. How can we have a republic of the earth without understanding of man depends upon our understanding of God.

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<sup>23</sup> Hoffding: A History of modern philosophy pp - 496,499

<sup>24</sup> Hoffding: Ibid p.269

<sup>25</sup> Hoffding: Ibid p.268

Godless materialism with its terrible picture of the world coming to a standstill, offers no promise of the future. It destroys the spirit of helpfulness which Theism sustains. Discussing the picture of man and the universe, A. Burt writes:

“That man is the product of the causes which had no pre-vision of the end they were achieving, that his origin, growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs are but the outcome of the accidental collection of atoms, that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling can preserve an individual life beyond the grave, that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the moon-day brightness of the human genius are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system -- only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the foundation of unyielding despair can the soul’s habitation henceforth be safely built”<sup>26</sup>

Let us now come to Darwin. The American philosopher John Dewey has written an article “The Influence of Darwinism on philosophy”, in which he says that “Darwin’s origin of species introduced a mode of thinking that, in the end, was bound to transform the logic of knowledge and hence the treatment of morals, politics and religion tended to leave the impression that the issue was between science on the one hand and theology on the other. Such was not the case; the issue lay within science itself”<sup>27</sup>

Darwin’s theory of Evolution did away with the need of a transcendental creator, because according to him, the species multiplied by a process of automatic reproduction. Each new generation of a particular species is not a replica of the preceding generation. It possesses some different qualities which Darwin calls chance variations. Any particular species which is fortunate enough to be born with favourable variations survives in the struggle for existence, while the species which lacks these favourable

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<sup>26</sup> E.A. Burt, *Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science*, London, 1950, pp.142, 143

<sup>27</sup> Perry Miller, *American thought - Civil War to World War I*, New York, 1954, p.224.

Please also see John Dewey’s article “Intelligence and Morals” in the same book.

variations dies out. John Dewey denies that there is anything pre-designed or purposive in the process of evolution. There is neither purpose nor design in the Universe. Everything goes on mechanically and automatically. Thus the need for an outside creator disappears.

Now, if we dispense with the need for a transcendental creator three questions remain unsolved which should be answered by Darwinists like Dewey. Firstly, when and how did life appear on this universe, was the appearance of life pre-designed by a transcendental creator did it emerge accidentally. Secondly, how did sexual differences appear in the species, since it is difficult to imagine that the multiplication or the evolution of species could have gone on with out sexual differences. Of course, at the lowest level of life there was a sexual reproduction but this could not have led to progress or evolution. Therefore, nature evolved two sexes. Was this not pre-designed by an outside creator? The third question, which the Darwinists have to answer is why did evolution stop at man? The very concept of evolution implies an unceasing upward trend. So after the appearance of man, evolution should have produced supermen or angels or other beings superior to man. The fact that evolution stopped at man shows that the creator had predesigned the course of evolution and so arranged it that it would stop at the appearance of man.

Le Comte du Nuoy criticizing the Darwinian theory of the survival of the fittest says: “in opposition to Darwin, the survival of the fittest can no longer be considered as the origin of the evolving strain and fittest of a certain line can eventually give birth to a species destined to disappear, if the external conditions (climate etc) are modified or if other individuals more apt from the biological view-point displace them”.<sup>28</sup>

Bergson says about Darwinism, “Darwinism means presumably, the origin of new organs and functions, new organism and species by natural selection of favourable variations. But this conception hardly half a centry

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<sup>28</sup> Le Comte du Nuoy, *Human Destiny*: New York, 1947, p.83.

old is already worm eaten with difficulties. How, on this theory, did the instincts originate? It would be convenient to conceive them as the inherited accumulation of acquired habits but expert opinion closes the door in our faces -- though some day that door may be opened. If only congenital powers and qualities are transmissible, every instinct must have been on its first appearance as it natively is now, it must have been, so to speak, adult in full panoply for action, else it could not have favoured its possessor in the struggle for existence if on its appearance it was weak, it could have achieved survival value only through that acquired strength which (by current hypothesis) is not inherited. Every origin is here a miracle. And as with first instincts, so with variations; one wonders how the change could have offered, in its first form, a handle to selection. In the case of such complex organs as the eye, the difficulty are discouraging; either the eye appeared at once full formed and competent (which is as Johnah's introspection of the whale) or it began as a series of "fortuitous" variations, which by a still more fortuitous survival, produced the eye. At every step the theory of the mechanical production of complicated structures by a blind process of variation and selection presents us with fairy tales that have all the incredibility of childhood lore and little of its beauty".<sup>29</sup>

Now, let us examine what some of the modern philosophers have to say about the position and reality of matter in this universe. According to Grot, the knowableness of things is part and the most important part of their reality. Things are knowable he says, because they have in them the quality of adaptedness to reason". They can be known, in other words, because they are in themselves reasonable. This means that things (material objects) have mind in them.<sup>30</sup> Thus the distinction between mind and matter disappears.

Leibniz reduces matter to force. He asks the question; what are attraction and repulsion, heat and light, if matter is inert extension and

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<sup>29</sup> Will Durant, London, Plato to Russel: outline of philosophy 1962, p.394.

<sup>30</sup> J. Passmore: Hundred years of Philosophy London, 1962, p. 52

nothing but that? Does not extension, which constitutes the nature of the body, presuppose an effort or force that extends itself a power both of resistance and expansion? Matter is essentially resistance and resistance means activity. What seems inertia or lack of power is in reality more intense action or active force. There is action every-where.<sup>31</sup> Nobody without movement, no substance without effort. Thus the qualities ascribed to matter by Leibniz are very different from those ascribed to it by the materialists. In fact, the entire conception of matter has been changed by Leibniz.<sup>32</sup>

Kant came to very nearly the same conclusion. According to him, the individual atoms are points of force, not small extended particles, and the fact that they act and react upon one another according to law proves that there is no original and absolute separation between them...their reciprocal action would be impossible if they were not collectively dependent on a common ground. In this common ground both the mechanical order and the purposiveness of their nature find their explanation.

Bertrand Russell is more emphatic on this point. He says: "The distinction between mind and matter is illusory. The stuff of the world may be called physical or mental or both or neither, as we please"<sup>33</sup> Again, explaining the concept of matter in modern science, Russell says, "The modern conception of the matter (is that it is) as a centre from which radiations travel. We do not know what is happening at the centre: The idea that there is a hard lump there, which is the electron or the proton is an illegitimate intrusion of common sense notions derived from touch. For aught we know the atom may consist entirely of radiations which come out of it.

"Modern physics, therefore, reduces matter to a set of events which proceed outward from a centre. If there is something in the centre itself we

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<sup>31</sup> Will Durant, *Op. Cit* pp. 346, 347

<sup>32</sup> Hoffding: *Op. Cit*, pp. 42, 43.

<sup>33</sup> Bertrand Russell: *An outline of Philosophy* p.148.

cannot know about it and it is irrelevant to physics. The events that take the place of matter in the old sense are inferred from their effects on eyes, photographic plates and other instruments. What we know about them is not their intrinsic character but their structure and their mathematical laws.”<sup>34</sup>

Heisenberg regards a piece of matter as a centre from which radiations travel outward, the radiations are supposed really to occur but the matter at the centre is reduced to a mere mathematical fiction.<sup>35</sup>

In the De Broglie Schrodinger “system-matter consists of wave motion in this system also, we are led to construct matter out of some events which, just happen and do not happen “to” matter or “to” anything else” Writing about the notion of substance, Bertrand Russel says, “It was traditionally a property of substance to be permanent and a considerable degree matter has retained this property in spite of the loss of substantiality. But its permanence is only. approximate not absolute. It is thought that electron and proton can meet and annihilate each other. In the stars this is supposed to be happening on a large scale. And even when an electron or proton lasts, it has a different kind of persistence from that formally attributed to matter.”<sup>36</sup>

Sir James Jeans denies all possibility of the knowledge of nature by man. He says “Thus our understanding of the ultimate-processes of nature is for ever beyond our reach; we can never be able -- even in imagination -- to open the case of our watch and see how the wheels go round. The true object of scientific study could never be the realities of nature but only our own observations on nature.”<sup>37</sup>

Eddington is clearer than Bertrand Russel on the mental nature of matter. He says” “The stuff of the world is mind-stuff. The mind stuff, of

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.163

<sup>35</sup> Ibid p.289

<sup>36</sup> Ibid pp.290, 91

<sup>37</sup> The philosophers of science. Modern pocket Library, New York, p.365

course, is something more than our individual conscious minds, but we may think of its nature as not altogether foreign to the feelings in our consciousness. The realistic matter and fields of force of former physical theory are altogether irrelevant...The symbolic matter and fields of force of the present day theory are more relevant but they bear to it the same relation that the bursar's accounts bear to the activity of the college.<sup>38</sup>

After studying Bertrand Russel, Sir James Jeans and Eddington's observations on the natural processes and the concept of matter in modern physics what remains of the old materialism on which Karl Marx and the scientific socialists have built their edifice of thought?

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p.416.