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The Reality of Me

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DO I exist, and if so, what am I? Does anything exist other than myself, and if so, how do I know? The questions which are answered by the child and the rustic off-hand are still matters of debate by philosophers. These questions are not so academic as they seem. Civilization hangs suspended on the answer to them. All law and order, life and property, human right, the home, family, religion, government, are in the balances to-day; and the questions of philosophy, metaphysics, and theology which are being debated in schools, associations, and current literature are basic to human welfare, and to all life and progress in the world. A battle is being waged between civilization and anarchy, between religion and stark materialism and atheism. In a debate in presbytery, not long since, Dr. Alexander MacColl said: "Our universities are teaching a scheme of the universe which is sheer mechanism." In saying this, Dr. MacColl was quite right (as he sometimes is). A mechanistic universe means a universe without God, and man minus a soul. It is a short and inevitable step from this belief, or rather unbelief, to lawlessness, banditry, bootlegging, murder, anarchy, and every other crime of which a perverted mind and heart are capable. Philosophy and religion make or unmake the world. As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. If a mechanistic philosophy is taught in our universities, and it is true of many of them, and our educated youth go out without belief in God or a soul, the situation is serious enough and the dangers are imminent enough.

Dr. W. E. Orchard, of England, one of the ablest modern writers on subjects theological and metaphysical (and generally excellent), says: "Man has an immediate consciousness of the world outside, he only *infers* the existence of the soul, and only rises to the idea of God by an argument based on the reality of both." He further says, "Theology accepts this position." This quotation raises some weighty questions. That we have an immediate consciousness of the world we will not dispute if properly explained. It means that our knowledge that there is a world is not an inference, does not come as a conclusion of a syllogism or argument, is not demonstrated by mathematical equations, but is the apprehension of our senses. We know there is an external world by sight and touch. Men may quibble over the mediacy or immediacy of our sense perceptions; but that they give us knowledge of an external world no sane man can deny. If any man denies the trustworthiness of our senses, he may leap over that precipice if he pleases, the common sense of the world will not follow him. Sense perception may not give us universal knowledge, nor is it absolutely perfect, as no human thing is, but that it gives

us knowledge, and such knowledge as we act on and live by, is or ought to be beyond dispute.

But does it not seem somewhat remarkable, without argument, that man should have an immediate consciousness of the world outside of him, and *no* consciousness of himself, who perceives the world and is subject to the impressions made by it? Is it not paradox to begin with, that a man is more conscious of what is outside of him than he is of himself? Which lies nearer to me, myself or the world? But the question will require some further discussion.

As to the third question in the quotation, it is not our purpose to discuss it in the limits of this article. Whether the idea of God is an intuition, or an inference, or a conclusion drawn from a series of cumulative proofs, is an interesting question finely discussed by Dr. Hodge on one side, and Professor Flint on the other, though not strictly antithetical. Suffice it to say that we see no need to throw away one proof because another is equally good or better.

But, returning to the question of consciousness of self, we desire to make it plain, and burn it in, that Dr. Orchard and others, in denying the consciousness of self, are conceding entirely too much to a dangerous unbelief. One has only to appeal to his own reflection and introspection to be sure that man is very far from being devoid of a consciousness of self. He may have to discriminate very carefully as to the elements of that consciousness, but it is impossible in sound thinking to eliminate the self. A man is conscious of himself as thinking, feeling, willing, etc. These are acts of the self of which he is indisputably conscious; but he is not only conscious of the acts, but of *himself as acting* and as *the actor*. It is sheer confusion of thought to say that we are conscious of the act, but not of the self as acting. The one is as clear and distinct to the consciousness as the other.

Is this only metaphysics? No, it is civilization, religion, moral order. To undermine belief in the reality of the soul as a spiritual entity is the aim of a skeptical philosophy. The drift of college and universities is to the philosophy of Hume, James Mill, and his more illustrious son, John Stuart Mill. The tendency is almost dominant in the psychology of the present day, and threatens the world with grave dangers. The whole behavioristic psychology is a recognizable current in the stream. If the metaphysics of our universities would get back to the common sense of the Scottish philosophy, and to the clear discrimination and realism of Dr. McCosh in his *Defense of Fundamental Truth*, it would be better for metaphysics and also for the moral life of the world.

Prof. A.B. Wolf, of the Ohio State University, is quoted as saying: "One who is able to take a scientific point of view sees the universe as mechanism"; and then goes on "to eliminate the whole idea of personal responsibility." A mechanistic universe is just a materialistic universe, a universe without God, without an intelligent Creator, and a human race with no soul, no future life, no immortality, no reward or punishment. There is no practical difference between this and the materialism of Thomas

Hobbes. The old mechanistic materialism says that the brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile. The mechanistic materialism says that the phenomena of thought and feeling and volition are but the behavior of material atoms. The one is as grossly materialistic as the other. And this is the philosophy of some of our leading universities. The inevitable conclusion from a mechanistic universe is the denial of personal responsibility. That follows as a logical consequence; and what follows after that in the moral life of the world it is not hard to guess.

Philadelphians need not travel far to find materialistic or mechanistic philosophy taught in the high seats of learning. The argument is this: Men once thought that heat was a something, a substance, an entity separate from the iron and added thereto, so that a hot iron was iron plus an entity or substance called caloric. But we now know that there is no such substance as heat; that the difference between a hot iron and a cold one is in the behavior of the atoms. A behavioristic philosophy is all that is necessary to account for heat; and the supposed caloric substance is relegated to the shades. Similarly man has been thought to be a body plus some other substance, called spirit. The phenomena of thought, feeling and will, etc., have been attributed to the functions of this added substance, called spirit or soul. But we now see that it is not necessary to account for these mental phenomena by the assumption of a soul or spirit, since they may be referred to the correlations and agitations of the bodily constituents under changing conditions and circumstances. Mental phenomena in this philosophy are but the behavior of material molecules. To this behaviour of material molecules the term "mind" is applied, which is but the purloining of a mental term for a materialistic purpose. No matter what atomic behavior is *called*, if the spiritual entity or substance which we call a soul is denied, the materialism is complete. No camouflage of perverted terms can hide its true nature. This materialistic philosophy allied to a materialistic science attributes certain mental or spiritual conditions to the presence or lack of some definite element in the material organism. For instance, it is said that an overdose of insulin produces manifestations of fear, but that sucking a lollypop re-establishes normal courage. The difference between cowardice and bravery is then only a question of sugar. We are told that "a courageous man should no longer be said to have sand, but sugar." Consequently, it follows that a slacker or deserter from the army should no longer be subject to court martial, but presented with a box of candy. That matter and spirit are separate entities is evident from the mutually exclusive attributes of each. We cannot attribute to thought and spirit any weight, size, color, temperature or any other quality applicable to matter. The two spheres are entirely different, with different phenomena, functions, and attributes. Hence we believe in two different substances, matter and spirit.

Belief in matter, self, and God has been the common possession of the human race. But philosophies and philosophers innumerable have sought for a monism that would reduce the three to

one. Some have said that all is matter, there is nothing but matter. But the materialist, in being a materialist, casts doubt on the reality of matter if he does not dissipate its reality altogether. For, if there is nothing but matter, then there is no mind to perceive it, and wherein is the reality of anything vouchsafed if the perception of its is an impossibility? Hence the materialistic discredits the reality of matter.

Some have said that all is mind, there is nothing but mind. But this is but to raise doubt as to the reality of mind. For the external world is an indubitable impression; and if the mind is deceived in its apprehensions, what guarantee have we that it is not deceived in its introspections? If one source of impression is deceptive, how can we be sure that the other is not deceptive also? Neither can everything be a delusion. For nothing can be a delusion unless there is another something normal and rational with which it is compared or by which it is measured. If everything were delusion, there would be no delusion, for delusion can exist only as an exception to that which is not delusion.

Another says that all is God, and gives to the world the philosophy of pantheism. But he who asserts that all is God, denies that anything is God. For if all is God, man himself is the highest known existence-form of that God. But if man is the highest, and there is nothing supernatural or transcendent to him, then man has no God. So pantheism ends in the denial of anything that can be called God.

I am different or distinct from the world without, for it is more or less subject to my control. I am different from the impression that the world makes on me, for I am the subject that receives the impression. I am different from my own thoughts, for they are the products or activities of my soul or self. And I am not identical with God, because I need to be explained as to my whence, what and whither. I am not ultimate, I am not a reason for myself.

The reality of matter, self and God is indispensable to a rational system of the universe. To deny any one of these is to bring confusion of thought and degeneration of moral and spiritual life. But especially is belief in the reality of self irrefutable and undeniable. No man can get away from himself. No man can think himself out of existence. The starting point of all knowledge is the reality of the self. We rise from the reality of self to the reality of the world and God. If a man discredits his own reality, nothing is certain. Knowledge is possible only on the basis of my own reality; and this means a spiritual reality, for matter is not capable of any knowledge whatsoever. Moreover, it is not possible to doubt one's own existence, for if I do not exist, it is not possible to doubt it. The reality of a soul that thinks, feels, wills and judges is the most certain of all things; and to confuse these functions with atomic behavior is irrational and disastrous to all moral and religious life.