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WHAT WE BELIEVE.

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN AN INQUIRER AND AN "INCOMPLETE" POSITIVIST.

I NQUIRER. I understand you do not believe in a Personal God or great First Cause.

Positivist. We neither deny nor affirm respecting either. There *may* be a God such as Christians and Mohammedans generally accept as existing, but they no more than we can demonstrate the fact, if it be a fact.

Inquirer. Then your religion does not recognize any God at all.

Positivist. Oh yes, it does. John Stuart Mill has done us grievous injury in saying that August Comte propounded a religion without a God or a future state; whereas we, with Comte, believe in both, if allowed to define what we mean. Our Supreme Being is Humanity, whom we love and serve. We say the only God man can *know*, or whose existence can be demonstrated, is the collective Man—the sum of all human personalities, past, present, and future.

Inquirer. This strikes me as vague. How can you make a Thing or a Person out of what is clearly an abstract conception?

Positivist. But the human mind does very readily personify abstract conceptions. The Town, the State, the Nation, the Church are no more actual things or entities than is Humanity; yet they *are*—they convey a definite impression to the rudest intelligence. Now Humanity clearly exists as a subjective conception no less than an objective phenomenon.

Inquirer. But how about the Creator? How do you account for the origin of the universe?

Positivist. We know nothing of the beginning of things. It is beyond our ken. So far as we *know*, matter and force are eternal. Science proves this in that no atom of matter can be destroyed or any force wasted. Each can take a different form, but the precise quantity or energy of the one or the other always exists in the same definite proportions. Hence to the human scientific mind there never was a beginning—there never can be an end. Eternity with us is a circle; in other words, the old Hindoo symbol—the serpent with his tail in his mouth. The ordinary conception is that of a straight line with a beginning and end.

Inquirer. When you discriminate between matter and force, do you mean that there is any real difference between them?

Positivist. Oh, I speak in a popular way of course. We want what Mr. Lincoln called the "plain people" to understand us. We know of matter only through force; that is, through its changes—by the impression it makes upon us; but this conception, which is simple enough to you or me, is too subtile for common comprehension, and hence we speak of matter and force as two distinct entities.

Inquirer. But the ordinary conception of God must have some valid basis.

Positivist. So it has. All gods are idealizations of man himself. They are man-made. Every attribute, with two important exceptions, which the human race in its past history have ascribed to its gods, is purely human. Thus love, justice, wisdom, mercy, as well as revengefulness, vanity, and lust—in short, all the emotions and passions which have been attributed to Deity, are purely human. To these have been added conceptions of the Infinite and Absolute, which are extra-human. The elements which compose the popular notion of God vary with every age. The Jewish Jehovah was stern, revengeful, jealous, vain; the Christian God is a tender, loving Father; the more human or man-like the God, the better he is—hence the noblest Deity of all is the man Christ-Jesus. In short, this brief and imperfect analysis shows us that Humanity is, after all, the only pure metal in this alloy of gods. Let us consecrate all our energies to the service of the only Supreme Being we can ever know—Humanity. There may be in addition an Infinite and Absolute Deity; we do not say there is not; but we hold with Sir William Hamilton, Prof. Mansell, and Herbert Spencer, that from the laws of our being we can never know or understand Him; He is out of all relation with us. Unlike Herbert Spencer, we regard the worship of an unknowable God as a rank absurdity. His ways cannot be as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts. He is for us as if he were not. Such is the verdict of modern Philosophy and Science.

Inquirer. How about Immortality? If a man die, shall he live again?

Positivist. We know we live upon this earth. We do not know that we shall continue our personal consciousness after death. It may be so, but we cannot demonstrate it by any scientific proof. If the phenomenon of Spiritualism so-called could be proven, all would be plain sailing; but it resists scientific tests. There is, however, a real immortality which we are scientifically sure of. We know that the materials of which we are composed are indestructible. Every atom which has formed a part of this body of mine from birth to death will exist forever. And so too of the forces I generate; they cannot be lost or wasted. "The good I do lives after me." I live in my children—in the work I do—in what I hand down from those who came before to

those who will follow me. The machine becomes unusable and decays, but the forces to which it gave birth live forever.

Inquirer. But does not life lose much of its interest and glory by being confined to this earth, and the few, the very few years we spend upon it?

Positivist. We must take things as they are, and not as we would like them to be. No doubt the hope of a personal, conscious immortality has done much in times past to soften and brighten the harsh lot of myriads of human beings who else would have been given over to despair from the wretchedness of their material surroundings; but notwithstanding the comfort men have got from this and other pleasant illusions, we Positivists decline countenancing the dogma of conscious immortality until it is proven. So far it has no basis of fact to rest upon. If it ever should be demonstrated, we should believe in it; but we do not think this possible.

Inquirer. Do I understand you to wish to unsettle the faith of the mass of mankind in a Personal Creator of the universe and a Personal Immortality?

Positivist. By no means. The prevalent disbelief and scepticism is to us a worse symptom of the times than the current theological illusions. Any religion, even the most baseless, is better than the bald atheism and materialism which is gaining such hold upon the age. We want to build up a religion to supply the spiritual needs of mankind, and one which is based upon the facts of nature. The old faiths rest upon supernatural authority and revelation; the new, upon demonstrated facts—in other words, upon science. The priest of the Past appealed to the Unknown; the priest of the Future will be the expounder, or rather the declarer, of the Known.

Inquirer. Does the belief in a future state do any harm?

Positivist. Yes; it attracts the best and purest minds of the race away from the solution of practical problems involving human well-being, to the consideration of insoluble questions. Now what is needed is that all the energies of the race shall hereafter be devoted to making this earth the fabled heaven. Human effort should be confined to human improvement, and to making the earth more habitable.