

Chapter IX

DARWIN

Whereas the apparition of Das Wesen des Christentums in 1843 was hailed by Marx and Engels as having once and for all replaced materialism on the throne, the apparition of The Origin of Species in 1859 was embraced as affording a universal basis for the doctrine of evolution by conflict and contradiction. Its theses have since become an integral part of dialectical materialism. The fact that Darwin, studying nature, had arrived independently at much the same conclusion at which Marx and Engels had arrived by the study of history and economics, was accepted as the complete corroboration of the system. Like Engels and Marx, Darwin presents his conclusions, not as hypotheses, but as truths forced upon him by experience. However, it is quite easy to conjecture that man in revolt against God, would necessarily encounter a nature in revolt also, since revolt is accepted as the law of existence.

Although Darwin and Marx-Engels appear to have attained their unanimity from two different points of approach, the one from eighteenth-century French materialism and the other from Hegelian idealism, their starting points can be identified in the common basis of both materialism and idealism, namely their unobjectivity.

The idealist and the materialist mutually presuppose one another. In order that the materialist may posit matter as the sole reality in an apparently incontrovertible way, it is first necessary that the idealist establish the independence of thought from any objective control. Likewise the idealist presupposes the materialist in the sense that it is only by concentrating on his own finite, created self to the exclusion of the primal and immaterial truth, that he can begin to build the world of his dreams. Fundamentally, the inordinate conception of one's own singular excellence is at the source of both. It is the same pride by which man wishes to be like God through his spiritual powers that leads him to posit matter as the one creative source, since the powers which he attributes to matter are originally figments of his own mind and thereby matter and creation are ultimately subject to him. One can even see in this the further assumption of a divine prerogative since it is more indicative of power to produce effects indirectly than directly as in the case of a king who has his orders executed by his servants.

That Darwin set out on the same falsely humble base as Kant whereby God is subjected to the supreme insult of being, not attacked, but simply ignored as an encumbering hypothesis is plain from his deceptively modest assertions. Thus he writes at the end of his chapter on religion in The Descent of Man, first published in 1871: "The mystery of the beginning of all things is insoluble

to us; and I for one must be content to remain an agnostic." (op.cit. p.313) As G. Schwalbe says in his essay on the book: "...Darwin was too modest to presume to go beyond the limits laid down by science. He wanted nothing more than to be able to go, freely and unhampered by belief in authority or in the Bible, as far as human knowledge could lead him." (Evolution in Modern Thought, New York, p.115) Since human knowledge is never done, it entitles the adherents of creative evolution to set aside any such thing as absolute truth and accept only the principle reasons for eliminating absolute truth is the supposed necessity of knowing each material individual as the end of science. Thus the intent of knowledge is diverted away from knowing the higher things that are first in themselves to knowing things under their lowest aspect, that of material individuality. Such is the attempt of science to bury itself in matter. Yet all this is proclaimed in the name of man's unlimited progress. Thus Professor Hoffding writes: "All knowledge is systematic, in so far as it strives to put phenomena in quite definite relations one to another. But the systematisation can never be complete. And here Darwin has contributed much to widen the world for us. He has shown us forces and tendencies in nature which make absolute systems impossible, at the same time that they give us new objects and problems. There is still a place for what Lessing calls 'the unceasing striving after truth, 'while 'absolute truth' (in the sense of a closed system) is unattainable so long as life and experience are going on. ... Science,

...till now has mainly occupied itself with general laws and forms. But these are ultimately only means to understand the individual phenomena, in whose nature and history a manifold of laws and forms always cooperate." (Evolution and Modern Philosophy, p.212-213)

The lot of the immortality of the soul in Darwinism may be seen in Huxley, who proclaimed himself "Darwin's bulldog." Starting from the conception nowadays common to both the idealists and the materialists since the time of Hume and Kant, namely that: "In the case of the soul, as in that of the body, the idea of a substance is a mere fiction of the imagination," (Thomas H. Huxley, Hume, New York, 1896, p.199), he goes on to investigate whether that "series of mental phenomena which make up an individual mind...terminates with the end of the corporeal series, or goes on after the existence of the body has ended." (ibid.) This problem is dismissed as of no great importance in the terms of Hume: "As the same material substance may successively compose the bodies of all animals, the same spiritual substance may compose their minds: Their consciousness, or that system of thought which they formed during life, may be continually dissolved by death, and nothing interests them in the new modification. The most positive assertors of the mortality of the soul never denied the immortality of its substance; and that an immaterial substance, as well as a material, may lose its memory or consciousness, appears in part

from experience, if the soul be immaterial. Reasoning from the common course of nature, and without supposing any new interposition of the Supreme Cause, which ought always to be excluded from philosophy, what is incorruptible must also be ingenerable. The soul, therefore, if immortal, existed before our birth, and if the former existence noways concerned us, neither will the latter."

(from Hume's Essay on the Immortality of the Soul, published after his death, quoted by Huxley, op.cit. p.203)

Huxley has nothing but scorn for the inconsistent devotees of modern materialism who somehow think that man may somehow evolve into immortality. Thus he writes: "It is remarkable that Hume does not refer to the sentimental arguments for the immortality of the soul which are so much in vogue at the present day; and which are based upon our desire for a longer conscious existence than that which nature appears to have allotted us. Perhaps he did not think them worth notice. For indeed it is not a little strange, that our strong desire that a certain occurrence should happen should be put forward as evidence that it will happen. ...As Hume truly says, 'All doctrines are to be suspected which are favored by our passions;' and the doctrine that we are immortal because we should extremely like to be so, contains the quintessence of suspiciousness." (ibid. p.207-208) This is spoken like a true dialectical materialist. As Huxley remarks, the speculations

on immortality put forth by the modern exponents of materialistic humanism have a decidedly hollow ring and more than a tinge of sentimentality. Such is a necessary consequence of accepting premises which make of man something only a little more than the animals and trying to distil therefrom an immortality which the premises preclude. As Kant is constantly reiterating, a philosophy should be consistent, and such modern elucubrations are certainly not consistent with the philosophy they represent. However, they may possibly be accepted to denote that even when perverse reasoning appears to prove that man is nothing more than a high-class ape caught in the eternal cycle and ceaseless flux of matter, common sense and man's nature itself will break through to immaterial things even at the cost of being inconsistent to the system, this latter being the supreme sin, since consistency is more valued than truth which will not ply itself to the demands of man.

Chapter X

MODERN IMMORTALITY

However, to say that all who have favored immortality among the modern philosophers are mere inconsistent sentimentalists, would be going too far. Just as modern philosophers laud themselves for no other reason than that of having rejected all authority and dogmas, even though they have substituted nothing definite in their place, so also they should be committed to respect those who refuse to be coerced by the authority and dogmas of modern materialism, especially if this critique is performed with a great deal of common sense and in a way which their own principles cannot refute.

Thus William James, in the first of the Ingersoll Lectures, in 1897, set out to show that the arguments hitherto advanced against immortality had not yet disproved its possibility, pointing out "the conceit of projecting one's own incapacity into the vast cosmos, and measuring the wants of the Absolute by our own puny needs." (op.cit. p.37) The hypothesis that thought is a product of the brain as urea of the liver is strictly a hypothesis, since the brain could just as easily be an organ of transmission, as a lens or a prism, receiving the source of its activity from elsewhere than from the senses. He sets his finger upon one of the principal reasons for resentment against immortality, namely that an immortal life falls out of human control. (ibid. p.31) The

prospects are so vast that the "incredible and intolerable number of individuals" who would be immortal becomes a kind of affront to one's individual dignity. Chinese would be immortal, negroes would be immortal, something rather hard to stomach for the Back Bay elite, taught to consider immortality in terms solely of a select group of Bostonians. But William James tells his audience mercilessly: "Each of these grotesque or even repulsive aliens is animated by an inner joy of living as hot or hotter than that which you feel beating in your private breast." (*ibid.* p.39) Thus Wm. James implicitly struck also against such pious egotists who would deny immortality as a natural attribute of man's soul, while reserving it to the privileged few. "It is absurd to suppose a plethora or glut in the heart of infinite being (*ibid.* p.40)," and to think that the heavens are measured by one's own imagination.

In terminating his lecture Wm. James takes a final blow at the egotistic promptings of those who are led to deny immortality, because it would deprive them of their sense of superiority acquired in this world and subject them to the determinations of another than themselves: "Let us at any rate not decide adversely on our own claim, whose grounds we feel directly, because we cannot decide favorably on the alien claims, whose grounds we cannot feel at all." (*ibid.* p.45)

Josiah Royce, on the other hand, in his Ingersoll

Lecture of 1899, relapses again into misty Hegelianism, decried by Feuerbach and Huxley. Immortality becomes the postulate for the unfolding of individuality. "The incompleteness of your present self-expression of your own meaning is then the sole warrant that you have for asserting that there is a world beyond you. ...You know not consciously, just now, the whole of what you even now genuinely mean." (op.cit. p.59) Life is the inner striving for identity in difference, singularity in multiplicity, through purpose, "the only-begotten Son of the Divine Will." (ibid. p.64) There are no true individuals in this world yet, but that is what we desire. (ibid p.74) Says Royce, with the usual complacent abuse of the Scriptures: "I wait until this mortal shall put on - Individuality." (ibid. p. 89) Such pietistic yearnings, however, which appear as an over-confident attempt to absorb the lingering traces of religious belief within the Hegelian system, are suspect to modern idealists of the Dewey school, since any appeal to a world beyond the one we know opens up an uncertain vista where subjection and laws other than man's might well be lurking. It is only permitted when its nature is purely poetical and symbolical and devoid of any menace to the status quo, as in the most recent outpourings of that other Harvard seer, Ralph Barton Perry.

A welcome note of objectivity was again injected into the Ingersoll Lectures in 1904 by the physician William Osler. In the spirit of the greater Greek philosophers he regards as a sign

of decadence that the desire for a future life can no longer be considered a fit topic of drawing room conversation. (op.cit. p.11)

He perceives the note of fear which is latent in materialism's rejection of the immaterial which it tosses off so lightly and in such a scholarly way. To this end he quotes Oliver Wendell Holmes: "We may love the mystical and talk much about the shadows, but when it come to going out among them, we are not of the excursion." (ibid. p.13)

He is not impressed by Jowett's remark in the Introduction to the Phaedo concerning heaven, that the monotony of singing psalms would be to him as great an affliction as the pains of hell.

Although in observing five hundred deaths it appeared to him that the great majority gave no sign one way or other of firm convictions concerning a continued life, nevertheless he is not in accord with modern psychological science which dispenses altogether with the soul. (ibid. pp. 19 & 25)

He is quite aware that the trends of man's emancipation are leading to the destruction of the very desire for singular excellence and independence which is at the root of it. Thus commenting upon a passage in the Revue of Neurology and Psychiatry (1904) which states: "The individual organism is transient, but its embryonic substance, which produces the mortal tissues, preserves itself imperishable, everlasting, and constant," he notes how science "minimises to the vanishing point the importance of the individual man," in contrast to belief in a God whose solicitude goes even to the number of the hairs of the head. (ibid. p.32)

He perceives the calculated misery and despair in science. "If any belief is especially pleasing or consoling to us, forthwith does Science lay upon us her austere command to mortify the flesh and treat the belief in question with exceptional disdain and suspicion." (ibid. p. 36)

Yet Osler refuses to be cowed. He asserts that the only enduring enlightenment is through faith (ibid. p.36) and manifests his admiration for such mystics as St. Theresa of Avila who "compel admiration and imitation by the character of the life they lead and the beneficence of the influence they exert." (ibid.) He terminates with his profession of faith in immortality, which coming from an eminent physician not easily to be accused of "supernaturalism," holds a note of disdain for the materialists: "I would rather be mistaken with Plato than right with those who deny it." (ibid. p.43)

In the utterances of men like James and Osler, although they do not presume to affirm an explicit delineation of immortality, there is nevertheless that same respect for truth and reverence before the divinity which characterizes the greatest of the Greeks. Thus Wm. James writes to his sister Alice a letter of which passages are distinctly reminiscent of Aristotle, De Anima, 408b: "These inhibitions, these split-up selves, all these new facts that are gradually coming to light about our organization, these enlargements

of the self in trance, etc., are bringing me to turn for light in the direction of all sorts of despised spiritualistic and unscientific ideas. Father would find in me today a much more receptive listener all that philosophy has got to be brought in. And what a queer contradiction comes to the ordinary scientific argument against immortality (based on body being mind's condition and mind going out when body is gone), when one must believe (as now, in these neurotic cases) that some infernality in the body prevents really existing parts of the mind from coming to their effective rights at all, suppresses them, and blots them from participation in this world's experiences, although they are there all the time. When that which is you passes out of the body, I am sure there will be an explosion of liberated force and life till then eclipsed and kept down." (The Philosophy of Wm. James, New York, pp.319-321)

On the other hand, the enthusiastic utterances of the modern post-Kantian and Hegelian philosophers who have evolved immortality out of materialism by the sheer dignity of their unfettered and blooming egotism have a certain morbid, starry-eyed ring about them that convinces nobody and appears as a sickly travesty of religion. Thus Seth Pringle-Pattison, in his Idea of Immortality, eventually arrives at a concept of immortality which is nothing more than a prolongation of the Ego. It is concepts like these which bring out the full force of Pascal's cry: "le moi est hais-

sable!" However, it is far from hateful to Mr. Pringle-Pattison. As usual, man's very weakness is made the source of his strength, his indetermination the source of his grandeur. "Every other being is, as it were, a channel of the Universal Will; but man, as self-conscious, can distinguish himself even from his Maker, and set his own will against the divine. Is it then unreasonable to conclude that an individuality so real, and the goal apparently of an age-long process must be capable of surviving the dissolution of the material frame through which it was brought into being? The body, ceasing to be a living body, may relapse into its elements when it has 'fulfilled' itself, while the true individual, in which that fulfilment consisted, pursues his destiny under new conditions." (op.cit., p. 105)

This individuality which survives the body is not a self-subsistent reality, a part of man's nature. It is rather his own creation. "A man's self will then be for us the coherent mind and character which is the result of the discipline of time, not some substantial unit or identical subject present in his body all along ... the spiritual self, created through the bodily medium. It is indeed only the self-conscious spirit-a being who can make himself his own object and contemplate himself as a self-that attains individuality and independence in an ultimate sense." (ibid.) The eternal contemplation of oneself: what a horrible punishment! Especially of a self which does not contain a spark of the divine,

but is rather an offshoot of matter, with no substantiality of its own. What God may not create, matter is made to create, a matter with which man is supposed to identify himself, since that is the source and permanence of all his being.

This immortality which the self-conscious mind gradually develops may be, among other things reflected in art, for there as Schopenhauer insists the objects have the eternity and universality of the Platonic Ideas: 'Art is everywhere at its goal, for it plucks the object of its contemplation out of the world's course, and has it isolated before it. And this particular thing, which in that stream was a small perishing part, becomes to art the representative of the whole, an equivalent of the endless multitude of space and time. The course of time stops; relations vanish for it; only the essential, the Idea, is its object. (Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Idea, Bk.III quoted by Pringle-Pattison, p.138) This contemplation of art is supposed to be selfless, yet the very notion of art is that it is a production of man, a translation of objective reality into his own terms. This contemplation thus reveals the core of Pringle-Pattison's immortality; a universe created by man for man and where he is sole lord.

To reassure those for whom the idea of retribution might be a deterrent to a belief in immortality, Pringle-Pattison dispenses with the idea of God's justice. The better man will

become the saviors of the others. "And if the idea of merit is foreign to the genuinely moral consciousness, the very idea of 'justice' as the satisfaction of an individual 'right' seems to disappear in the atmosphere of religion; 'service', 'sacrifice's brotherhood are the terms which take its place. ...This, as he (Professor Bosanquet) reminds us, is the fundamental truth of the doctrine of vicarious atonement." (*ibid.* p. 179) Unfortunately, one cannot help feeling that the readiness of the moderns to dispense with the notion of "merit" as something selfish is somewhat prompted by an equal desire to dispense with the uncomfortable notion of guilt. Pringle-Pattison disagrees with the notion that such a retributive mortality is necessary to keep baser men in line, as was voiced by Pomponazzi during the Renaissance. He quotes Sidgwick as saying: Morality can take care of itself, or rather the principle of life in human society can take care of morality. (*ibid.* p. 183) Fortunately he does not attempt to offer any experiential corroborations of this.

True immortality is the creation of the individual, for "it does not follow that we are to think of personal immortality as an inherent possession of every human soul, or a talismanic gift conferred indiscriminately on every being born in human shape." (*ibid.* p. 195) It is a question of degree, how much personality, how much of a coherent soul has the experience of life developed within the animal creature? This is not a question of conquering

oneself, but of conquering everything but oneself. As the soul is self-created, so also is it self-annihilated. "People talk as if the being of the soul were something which almost defied annihilation, which at any rate could be brought only by a special fiat of the Deity. But surely it is quite the other way. It is but the relaxing of central control, and a process of dissociation at once begins. Nothing seems more fatally easy than the dissolution in this fashion of the coherent unity which we call a mind, if the process is allowed to continue and spread." (ibid. p. 197)

It is not so necessary to be either good or bad as to develop one's personality in order to attain immortality. If necessary one life may succeed another until finally goodness is secured, otherwise the divine plan would be a failure. This "is the solution that commends itself to us as appropriate wherever a real self has come into being, were it only through rebellion and active sin." (ibid. pp. 202-203) Thus, if there is a divinity, he is subject to man's good pleasure, and must patiently look on as man gradually perfects himself. The immortality fully attained is a "realized possession." (ibid. p. 205) What is it? "It is the supreme assertion of human values, above all an assertion of the infinite value of the human spirit that has realized its vocation and entered into its heritage." (ibid. p. 206)