

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Editor: DR. PAUL CARUS.

Associates: { E. C. HEGELER.
MARY CARUS.

VOL. XXII. (No. 3.) MARCH, 1908. NO. 622

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THE MONIST

A QUARTERLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Philosophy of Science

DR. PAUL CARUS
EDITOR



ASSOCIATES { E. C. HEGELER
MARY CARUS

"The Monist" also Discusses the Fundamental Problems of Philosophy in their Relations to all the Practical Religious, Ethical, and Sociological Questions of the day.

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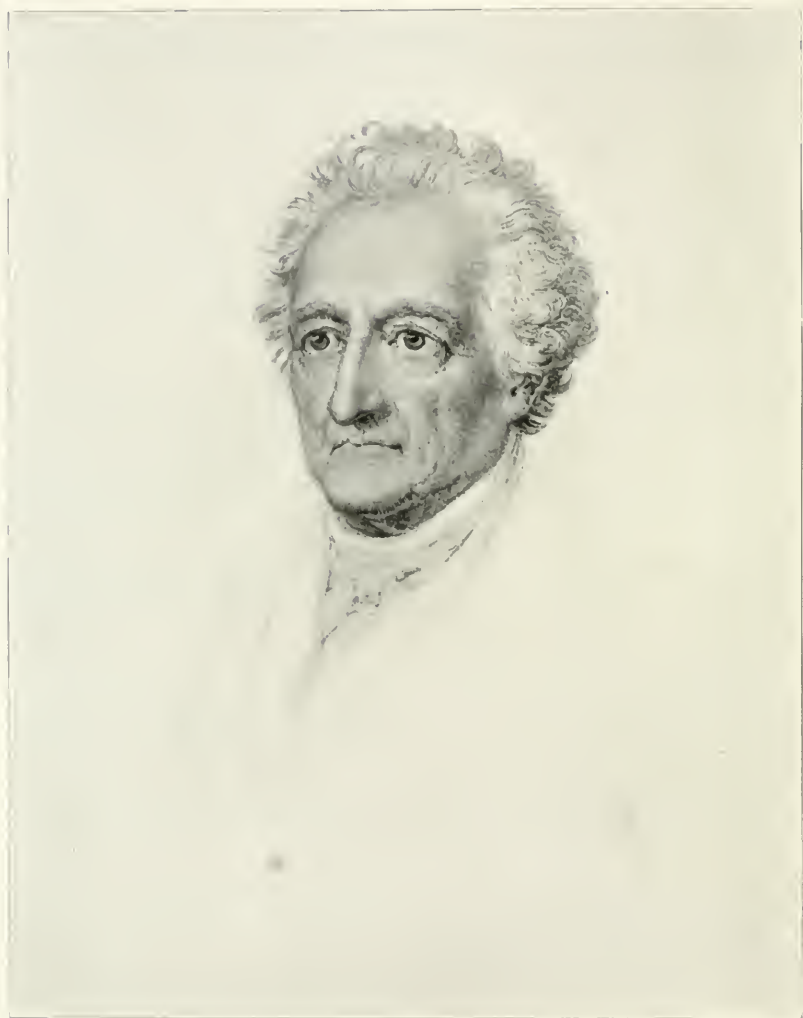
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GOETHE IN HIS LAST YEAR, 1832.
Drawn from life by C. A. Schwerdgeburth.

Frontispiece to The Open Court.

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AN EXPERIENCE AND A CHALLENGE.

BY ALBERT J. R. SCHUMAKER.

I WOULD like to bring forward for discussion a few points which I think will prove of interest to the readers of *The Open Court*. In bringing these together in this way I would emphasize the fact that we are to consider several separate issues, and that it will not be enough to reply to my position in but one instance.

In considering first, the appropriateness of your theological terminology, it may be well to begin with the history of my acquaintance with your writings. They came to my notice during my last year in high school, when a not uncommon passion for philosophical studies was becoming decidedly manifest. And as it happened, yours were the only works of the kind to which my attention was at that time directed.

I began reading them with avidity, and was shortly a willing disciple. An ardent young Christian, whose religious life was feeling the profound stirrings of adolescence, I responded eagerly and enthusiastically to the work of one who, seemingly irresistible as a philosopher, was also a devoted defender of the faith. I was convinced that historic Christianity had received a new and profound apologetic. To be sure, there was a pantheistic passage in the *Nature of the State* (p. 40), and a disturbing sentence with regard to prayer in the *Primer of Philosophy* (p. 202), but my attitude toward these divergencies was liberal.

Your distinct avowal of trinitarian convictions, your asseverations regarding the immortality of the soul, and your announcement of the finality of the Christian religion, sufficed to cover any minor departures. If you criticised the churches, you did not criticise Christ, and I was quite willing to admit that the former deserved all they received.

I was especially interested to follow up your views on immortality, and to this end, in due time, I secured the *Soul of Man*. And then the process of disillusionment began. It was a painful process, not because of doubts engendered, but because of the changed personal relations involved. It is difficult to repudiate friends and books on whom one has long relied.

It is not your fault that I read the books in the order I did, and had I read the *Soul of Man* first, there would be a different story to tell. But on the other hand, there are doubtless many young students who are in a fair way to repeat my experience.

The limitations of the average reader, for whom your books are ostensibly written, must be considered. Each work should be complete and intelligible in itself. That this is not the case, my own experience shows. It would be easy to prove it, also, by a large number of book reviews which indicate that the reviewers have often totally misapprehended your meaning.

Any one otherwise ignorant of your position would certainly conclude that the *Primer of Philosophy* sets forth individual conscious immortality. Not only would he do so, but, as language is commonly used, he would have the right to do so. The very rhetoric as well as the religious implications stated would confirm this conclusion. "True religion is based upon the immortality of the soul; and the immortality of the soul is no mere phrase, no empty allegory, no error or fraud: it is a fact provable by science. . . . it is the cornerstone of religion and the basis of ethics" (p. 189). This seems clear, but one is startled to find an equally clear, but contradictory, statement in the *Soul of Man*: "Moreover we have reason to believe that there will be a time when the chain of conscious states will be broken forever. This consummation is called death" (p. 26). Reading further, we learn that what is meant by immortality is the fact that what we are and do enters into the life of humanity and perdures. But even with this explanation, the use of "eternity" and "immortality" appears to us to be a strange inconsistency. For, according to your own statement, the humanity in which I am to have my immortality is not itself immortal. It may sometime tire of life (*S. of M.*, p. 438), our solar system in due time will fall to pieces (*Primer*, p. 171). The consolation is offered us that "there are other suns with their planets developing in which, *no doubt*,* the same principle is as active as it is in this world of ours." Granted—can my character enter into any of these developments? And if even the very matter of this earth be used over again in such a

* The Italics are mine.

process, will the second chain of sentient creatures have any connection with the first?

Not only is your immortality thus seen to be a futile evasion, but it ought to be clear that personal conscious immortality (with all the difficulties involved, such for example as are entailed by the mechanical theory of memory) which you dogmatically declare would be unbearably monotonous, would afford far greater opportunities for real development, than the ceaseless grinding out of ephemeral solar systems with their attendant perishing humanities, which, according to your assumption, is the actual case.

Not infrequently are we amazed to see the abstract conceptions which men dare to call God, and to note the absurd estimate which they place upon these conceptions. It was especially so in your case. For, after having denied the existence of the Lord of heaven and earth, you insist that your view of God as the universal norm is the only possible view and that you do not believe in a God but in God. Not to mention the sham logic by which this process is carried through, our chief contention at this point is the inappropriateness of using a term to denote synechological or validative reality, which is universally considered to denote existential reality. There is a tremendous difference between the *existence* of an eternal, infinite and unchangeable personal Spirit, of whom and in whom and unto whom are all things, and His *non-existence*,—a difference that cannot be bridged by a single term.

There are many other terms to whose misuse we would object if space permitted. That which renders you thus liable is a very common policy:—"When men leave the beaten tracks of religious belief, they usually continue to employ the familiar terms of the forsaken faith, giving them new and as they flatter themselves, higher meanings. Their motive is, apparently, an unwillingness to break altogether with sacred past, mingled, in some cases, perhaps, with a secret doubt of the security of the ground which they tread. 'It is a sad satisfaction to them to repeat the language though they have lost the faith of their forefathers.' They conceal from others as well as from themselves the fact or at least the extent of their aberration. It is, therefore, not surprising that superficial readers should find so little in them, and should wonder what others can find to which to object. It is only on close examination that we discover that their theology is one of those 'juggling' witcheries,

'That palter with us in a double sense;
That keep the word of promise to our ear
And break it to our hope';

and that their gospel is a very different one from that which we have been accustomed to hear.”*

It is not long since I read the following comment on the works of a certain writer: “There is a free use of terms which the author has carefully emptied of their commonly accepted meaning; not to mislead, of course, but because he sincerely believes the usual meaning is incorrect.” Taking this latter statement as applicable to your case, I would say that your course of action would be partially justified if Christianity were in the moribund condition which you imagine. I am not blind to certain weaknesses of the present situation, but there are other things to consider as well. Witness the reaffirmation of the evangelical basis at the great International Convention recently held in Washington.

It is surprising to note that your claim to be called a Christian is based upon the pretence that no one knows just what Christianity is. (*Open Court*, XIX, 584.) You very wisely refrain from recapitulating the history of Christianity. I am somewhat familiar with the remarkable diversities its course presents, yet I venture to affirm that to no future historian will it ever occur to describe the Religion of Science as a Christian development. It will, on the contrary, be set down, in accordance with its name, as an independent gnosticism, which had a perverse affinity for Christian forms of expression.

Your accusation against us theologians, viz., that we have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, and have stultified our intellects in that we have not followed after you, on the path which every honest man must tread, hardly requires refutation.

It would seem that you are anticipating too much. Since your break with current Christianity (which is still very much alive) is complete and fundamental, your policy is bound to be peculiarly ineffective. Your controversies with offended dogmatists and atheists alike, will simply be endless.

I would add by way of a note a comment on your view of the freedom of the will. While not remarkably profound, the view itself is not entirely objectionable and the strange thing about it is that you seem to imagine yourself at this point especially, in conflict with the theologians. What theologians, pray? The scientific theologians are all strict determinists. For one to say “The old theological or metaphysical conception defines Freedom of Will as the freedom of a man to will whatever he wills,” is to suggest that he has never read Augustine, Calvin or Edwards.

* Dr. John Todd.

It is also remarkable that you should confuse willing with doing and fail entirely to see the force of Calvin's observation that Attilius Regulus, when confined to the small extent of a cask stuck round with nails, will possess as much free will as Augustus Cæsar when governing a great part of the world with his nod. (*Inst.* Bk. II, ch. IV, § 8).

It was my original intention to offer at this point some reflections on your ontology and epistemology, but with your permission I shall at a later time discuss these topics in a separate article. The purpose of said discussion would be largely to confirm what I present below and to make clear the fact, that while you represent that "no one who would take the trouble to let the light of science have an influence upon his convictions can escape traveling the same path" which you have, your most fundamental conclusions are singularly in want of scientific support. You have set forth your unfounded private opinions as the dicta of science. Your jaunty dogmatism rather exceeds that of the professional Christian theologians against whom you bring such grave accusations. If your propositions were as demonstrable as the first law of multiplication, as you hint in one place they are, your position would be worthy and honorable. But in view of the lack of cogency which your proofs almost invariably present your position is decidedly uncomfortable.

To deal with specific instances requires much time and labor, but to show that my staple is not innuendo merely, I will present a consideration of one of your most fundamental positions. By quoting your own words I hope to avoid misstating your position. You say:

"Our material existence is constantly changing and yet we remain the same persons to-day that we were yesterday. How is this? It is because man's life consists not of his material presence alone, but of his formal being.... The identity of memory structure does not depend upon an identity of the very same material particles, but upon an identity of form in tissues of the same kind.... The solution of the problem of memory, accordingly, solves the problem of the personality of man also. The personality of man and the continuity of his soul-life can find their explanation only in the preservation of all the living forms of his organism." (*Soul of Man*, pp. 421-422).

... "Materialism has established a most important truth by insisting upon the fact, that there is no reality but in material existence. But matter, although a most essential feature of reality, is not the whole of it. Man's personality is not his material being; he is not the sum total of the atoms of which he consists. Man's personality, his mind, his character, is the special form in which the atoms have taken shape. Break this form and his personality is destroyed. Preserve this form, or build it again, and his personality is preserved." (*Fundamental Problems*, pp. 94-95.)

It is quite manifest that the above quotations afford an explanation of our personal identity as observed by our friends. The preservation of our form and features, our ideas and purposes, guarantees our identity to the world. But can it do more than that?

"Sleep is a reduction, or total obliteration of consciousness" (*S. of M.*, p. 272).

"The existence of the central soul, it thus appears, is for a short time periodically wiped out." "In the deepest sleep all consciousness disappears." (*Ibid.*, p. 260.)

It would thus appear hypothetically possible to destroy, during time of sleep, the form in which the atoms of a certain individual's body have taken shape, and seasonably to rebuild it again, without doing violence to his personality. The destruction might be total and complete. The matter might be scattered to the four winds. Nothing can depend upon the identity of material particles, for the matter of our bodies is in a constant flux.

Now viewing the disintegration as accomplished, this man's soul, you say, is to be regained, by "building again" the form in which the atoms of his body had taken shape. Though this is far removed from the realm of practical achievement, it is by no means hypothetically impossible. But forms are duplicable, the same form may be repeated endlessly. We might therefore construct one, two, or a hundred living bodies matching each other structure for structure with perfect precision. When waking consciousness returns to each, in which instance, if in any, may we imagine that we have restored the consciousness of the first individual in question? A previous quotation shows that you are a believer in personal identity. You are also doubtless aware that identity of any kind is not duplicable. These personalities which we have imagined coming into being through the proper collocation of atoms, while alike in every respect, are just as much distinct individuals with distinct personal identities as though of dissimilar character.

If it be said that it is my place to solve this difficulty, I need only reply that I am prepared to do so. Enough has been said to show that your view of the soul is in grave need of reconsideration.

In conclusion I feel that I ought to acknowledge my indebtedness to you for the excellent introduction to philosophy which your works afforded me. That my attainments are meager does not at all detract from the credit which is due to you.