

Talk at Open Forum

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Original English



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Notes by Bijou Straun

Although I was feeling indisposed this evening, yet owing to the love I entertain for you I have attended this meeting. For I have heard that this is an open forum, investigating reality; that you are free from blind imitations, desiring to arrive at the truth of things, and that your endeavors are lofty. Therefore, I have thought it expedient to discourse upon the subject of philosophy, which is alike interesting to the East and the West, enabling us to consider the analogies and differences between the philosophical teachings of the Orient and Occident.

The criterion of judgment in the estimation of western philosophers is sense perception. They consider that which is tangible or perceptible to the senses to be a reality — that there is no doubt of its existence. For example, we prove the existence of this light through the sense of sight; we visualize this room; we see the sun, [pg 356] the green fields; we use our sense of sight to observe them. The opinion of these philosophers is that such perception is reality, that the senses are the highest standard of perception and judgment, in which there can neither be doubt nor uncertainty. In the estimation of the philosophers of the Orient, especially those of Greece and Persia, the standard of judgment is the intellect. They are of the opinion that the criterion of the senses is defective, and their proof is that the senses are often deceived and mistaken. That which is liable to mistake cannot be infallible, cannot be a true standard of judgment.



ORIGINAL



AUDIO

Among the senses the most powerful and reliable is that of sight. This sense views a mirage as a body of water and is positive as to its character, whereas a mirage is nonexistent. The sense of vision, or sight, sees reflected images in a mirror as verities, when reason declares them to be nonexistent. The eye sees the sun and planets revolving around the earth, whereas in reality the sun is stationary, central, and the earth revolves upon its own axis. The sense of sight sees the earth as a plane, whereas the faculty of reason discovers it to be spherical. The eye views the heavenly bodies in boundless space as small and insignificant, whereas reason declares them to be colossal suns. The sense of sight beholds a whirling spark of fire as a circle of light and is without doubt as to it, whereas such a circle is nonexistent. A man sailing in a ship sees the banks on either side as if they were moving, whereas the ship is moving. Briefly, there are many instances and evidences which disprove the assertion that tangibilities and sense impressions are certainties, for the senses are misleading and often mistaken. How, then, can we rightly declare that they prove reality when the standard or criterion itself is defective?

The philosophers of the East consider the perfect criterion to be reason or intellect, and according to that standard the realities of all objects can be proved; for, they say, the standard of reason and intellect is perfect, and everything provable through reason is veritable. Therefore, those philosophers consider all philosophical deductions to be correct when weighed according to the standard of reason, and they state that the senses are the assistants and instruments of reason, and that although the investigation of realities may be conducted through the senses, the standard of knowing and judgment is reason itself. In this way the philosophers of the East and West differ and disagree. The materialistic philosophers of the West declare that man belongs to the animal kingdom, whereas the philosophers of the East — such as Plato, Aristotle and the Persians — divide the world of existence or phenomena of life into two general[pg 357] categories or kingdoms: one the animal kingdom, or world of nature, the other the human kingdom, or world of reason.

Man is distinguished above the animals through his reason. The perceptions of man are of two kinds: tangible, or sensible, and reasonable, whereas the animal perceptions are limited to the senses, the tangible only. The tangible perceptions may be likened to this candle, the reasonable perceptions to the light. Calculations of mathematical problems and determining the spherical form of the earth are through the reasonable perceptions. The center of gravity is a hypothesis of reason. Reason itself is not tangible, perceptible to the senses. Reason is an intellectual verity or reality. All qualities are ideal realities, not tangible realities. For instance, we say this man is a scholarly man. Knowledge is an ideal attainment not perceptible to the senses. When you see this scholarly man, your eye does not see his knowledge, your ear cannot hear his science, nor can you sense it by taste. It is not a tangible verity. Science itself is an ideal verity. It

is evident, therefore, that the perceptions of man are twofold: the reasonable and the tangible, or sensible.

As to the animal: It is endowed only with sense perception. It is lacking the reasonable perception. It cannot apprehend ideal realities. The animal cannot conceive of the earth as a sphere. The intelligence of an animal located in Europe could never have planned the discovery of the continent of America. The animal kingdom is incapable of discovering the latent mysteries of nature — such as electricity — and bringing them forth from the invisible to the plane of visibility. It is evident that the discoveries and inventions transcend the animal intelligence. The animal cannot penetrate the secrets of genesis and creation. Its mind is incapable of conceiving the verity of ether. It cannot know the mysteries of magnetism because the bestowals of abstract reason and intellect are absent in its endowment. That is to say, the animal in its creation is a captive of the senses. Beyond the tangibilities and impressions of the senses it cannot accept anything. It denies everything. It is incapable of ideal perception and, therefore, a captive of the senses.

Virtue, or perfection, belongs to man, who possesses both the capacity of the senses and ideal perception. For instance, astronomical discoveries are man's accomplishments. He has not gained this knowledge through his senses. The greater part of it has been attained through intellect, through the ideal senses. Man's inventions have appeared through the avenue of his reasonable faculties. All his scientific attainments have come through the faculty[pg 358] of reason. Briefly, the evidences of intellect or reason are manifest in man. By them he is differentiated from the animal. Therefore, the animal kingdom is distinct and inferior to the human kingdom. Notwithstanding this, the philosophers of the West have certain syllogisms, or demonstrations, whereby they endeavor to prove that man had his origin in the animal kingdom; that although he is now a vertebrate, he originally lived in the sea; from thence he was transferred to the land and became vertebrate; that gradually his feet and hands appeared in his anatomical development; then he began to walk upon all fours, after which he attained to human stature, walking erect. They find that his anatomy has undergone successive changes, finally assuming human form, and that these intermediate forms or changes are like links connected. Between man and the ape, however, there is one link missing, and to the present time scientists have not been able to discover it. Therefore, the greatest proof of this western theory of human evolution is anatomical, reasoning that there are certain vestiges of organs found in man which are peculiar to the ape and lower animals, and setting forth the conclusion that man at some time in his upward progression has possessed these organs which are no longer functioning but appear now as mere rudiments and vestiges.

For example, a serpent has a certain appendage which indicates that at one time it was possessed of long limbs, but as this creature began to find its habitation in the holes of the earth, these limbs, no longer needed, became atrophied and shrunk, leaving but a

vestige, or appendage, as an evidence of the time when they were lengthy and serviceable. Likewise, it is claimed man had a certain appendage which shows that there was a time when his anatomical structure was different from his present organism and that there has been a corresponding transformation or change in that structure. The coccyx, or extremity of the human spinal column, is declared to be the vestige of a tail which man formerly possessed but which gradually disappeared when he walked erect and its utility ceased. These statements and demonstrations express the substance of western philosophy upon the question of human evolution.

The philosophers of the Orient in reply to those of the western world say: Let us suppose that the human anatomy was primordially different from its present form, that it was gradually transformed from one stage to another until it attained its present likeness, that at one time it was similar to a fish, later an invertebrate and finally human. This anatomical evolution or progression does not alter or affect the statement that the development of man was always human in type and biological in progression. For the human[pg 359] embryo when examined microscopically is at first a mere germ or worm. Gradually as it develops it shows certain divisions; rudiments of hands and feet appear — that is to say, an upper and a lower part are distinguishable. Afterward it undergoes certain distinct changes until it reaches its actual human form and is born into this world. But at all times, even when the embryo resembled a worm, it was human in potentiality and character, not animal. The forms assumed by the human embryo in its successive changes do not prove that it is animal in its essential character. Throughout this progression there has been a transference of type, a conservation of species or kind. Realizing this we may acknowledge the fact that at one time man was an inmate of the sea, at another period an invertebrate, then a vertebrate and finally a human being standing erect. Though we admit these changes, we cannot say man is an animal. In each one of these stages are signs and evidences of his human existence and destination. Proof of this lies in the fact that in the embryo man still resembles a worm. This embryo still progresses from one state to another, assuming different forms until that which was potential in it — namely, the human image — appears. Therefore, in the protoplasm, man is man. Conservation of species demands it.

The lost link of Darwinian theory is itself a proof that man is not an animal. How is it possible to have all the links present and that important link absent? Its absence is an indication that man has never been an animal. It will never be found.

The significance is this: that the world of humanity is distinct from the animal kingdom. This is the teaching of the philosophers of the Orient. They have a proof for it. The proof is that the animals are captives of nature. All existence and phenomena of the lower kingdoms are captives of nature; the mighty sun, the numberless stars, the kingdoms of the vegetable and mineral, none of these can deviate one hair's breadth from the limitation of nature's laws. They are, as it were, arrested by nature's hands. But man breaks the laws of nature and makes them subservient to his uses. For instance, man is

an animate earthly being in common with the animals. The exigency of nature demands that he should be restricted to the earth; but he, by breaking the laws of nature, soars in the atmosphere high above it. By the application of his intellect he overcomes natural law and dives beneath the seas in submarines or sails across them in ships. He arrests a mighty force of nature such as electricity and imprisons it in an incandescent lamp. According to the law of nature he should be able to communicate at a distance of, say, one thousand feet; but through his inventions and discoveries [pg 360] he communicates with the East and with the West in a few moments. This is breaking the laws of nature. Man arrests the human voice and reproduces it in a phonograph. At most his voice should be heard only a few hundred feet away, but he invents an instrument which transmits it one thousand miles. In brief, all the present arts and sciences, inventions and discoveries man has brought forth were once mysteries which nature had decreed should remain hidden and latent, but man has taken them out of the plane of the invisible and brought them into the plane of the visible. This is contrary to nature's laws. Electricity should be a latent mystery, but man discovers it and makes it his servant. He wrests the sword from nature's hand and uses it against nature, proving that there is a power in him which is beyond nature, for it is capable of breaking and subduing the laws of nature. If this power were not supernatural and extraordinary, man's accomplishments would not have been possible.

Furthermore, it is evident that in the world of nature conscious knowledge is absent. Nature is without knowing, whereas man is conscious. Nature is devoid of memory; man possesses memory. Nature is without perception and volition; man possesses both. It is evident that virtues are inherent in man which are not present in the world of nature. This is provable from every standpoint.

If it be claimed that the intellectual reality of man belongs to the world of nature — that it is a part of the whole — we ask is it possible for the part to contain virtues which the whole does not possess? For instance, is it possible for the drop to contain virtues of which the aggregate body of the sea is deprived? Is it possible for a leaf to be imbued with virtues which are lacking in the whole tree? Is it possible that the extraordinary faculty of reason in man is animal in character and quality? On the other hand, it is evident and true, though most astounding, that in man there is present this supernatural force or faculty which discovers the realities of things and which possesses the power of idealization or intellection. It is capable of discovering scientific laws, and science we know is not a tangible reality. Science exists in the mind of man as an ideal reality. The mind itself, reason itself, is an ideal reality and not tangible.

Notwithstanding this, some of the sagacious men declare: We have attained to the superlative degree of knowledge; we have penetrated the laboratory of nature, studying sciences and arts; we have attained the highest station of knowledge in the human world; we have investigated the facts as they are and have arrived at the

conclusion that nothing is rightly acceptable except the tangible,[pg 361] which alone is a reality worthy of credence; all that is not tangible is imagination and nonsense.

Strange indeed that after twenty years training in colleges and universities man should reach such a station wherein he will deny the existence of the ideal or that which is not perceptible to the senses. Have you ever stopped to think that the animal already has graduated from such a university? Have you ever realized that the cow is already a professor emeritus of that university? For the cow without hard labor and study is already a philosopher of the superlative degree in the school of nature. The cow denies everything that is not tangible, saying, "I can see! I can eat! Therefore, I believe only in that which is tangible!"

Then why should we go to the colleges? Let us go to the cow.

