A CALL FOR SPECIFICATIONS.

OPPONENTS OF SPENCER'S PHILOSOPHY
MUST POINT OUT ITS IMPERFECTIONS -- COUNTELESS PROPHECY
HAVE BEEN BASED ON IT.

To the Editor of the New-York Times:

When "Outsider," in your last Sunday's edition, threw out his wholesale challenge to evolutionists it would have seemed the part of fairness for him honestly and squarely to state where and why he objected to their doctrine. To offer a general denial without particularizing indicates at the outset timidity on his part. He is doubtful of his own positions, and so fears distinctly to express them. Such at least is the honest inference drawn by a candid reader from what he has written. The only quotation he makes from Herbert Spencer has absolutely no bearing on the question raised and is the same as if some critic of the law of gravity should assert that it 'could not be true because Newton believed in the corpuscular theory of light or held odd notions on political economy. A subtle problem in logic that may or may not be true in no way can invalidate the law of evolution when it has no possible bearing thereon. The hunting of the most abstract expression of a million divergent opinions is not Mr. Spencer's philosophy, and "Outsider" should be intelligent enough to know it, even if he does think that such a hunt would, for astrology, land him in a belief that the stars somehow control our destinies. If Mr. Spencer was in error when he penned the words quoted by "Outsider" it should only put us on our guard concerning his ability as a reasoner and teach us that he is in no sense infallible. If we must discredit all his other work because of a slip at the beginning of his First Principles, then, perhaps, that which will apply to his must apply with equal force to "Outsider." Let us, then, accept the challenge and its conditions, however unfair they may be, and we will soon discover who is to be discredited.

The process advocated by Mr. Spencer is simply that of cancellation. If fifty disinterested witnesses testify on a point and contradict each other in particulars he would strike out one by one all the elements of disagreement until finding at last wherein they agreed as to fact, not theory, he would pronounce that true. It might simply amount in the end, after such treatment, to a statement that something did happen. That would be the most abstract expression of the agreement within their divergent opinions. The assumption is that ideas are not causeless. When large
numbers of men without collusion hold opinions having elements of agree-
ment one câlendr. "Outsider" tells us that astrology treated in this way would have led us to the belief that the stars somehow influenced the destinies of men. This seems to think
would be a preposterous conclusion. But when astrology was believed to be
so well established, it is time that it did not suspect that the power was one of their own making, but they did know that the
to this doctrine for some reason was not altogether foundational. But this
does not carry us back to the most abstract expression of the doctrine. The
belief in the stars had a beginning in fact somewhere, and we do not have
while we are free to look for it. Are not the movement controlled the changes
of the stars and propagates only such changes in the stars as are
not the most abstract expression of astrology? Is it not true
Unconsciously, then, "Outsider," by beginning his attack on Spencer here,
themselves as a reasoner and sustains the man he can talk. If
he asks us if thinkers are "ever really obliged to give all opinions
without educational qualifications" more emphatically, no.
But we wonder at the abruptness of the man, we could put silly
and imagine that he was candidly expressing the opinion of the
party he attacks. "Because Mr. Spencer tells us that the ideas and notions
entertained by large bodies of men in common cannot be correct, but must
in their most abstract form be the outgrowth of facts of experience, it in no
way follows that the imaginings of every crank equal value with the
carefully determined facts and conclusions of a Tylor or a Darwin.
Does "Outsider" really believe Herbert Spencer to be the 4diot he here
depicts him? If he does, then why does he take pains to vary war against
him? Is it not to his credit to attack such a fool? If so, he, on the other
hand, considers Mr. Spencer to a man of good, sound sense, how
we shall criticize as flagrant a misrepresentation as this is?
the "Outsider" waited until his last paper appeared before writing that
Mr. Spencer "is one of those who build Babylon systems to scale the
heights of knowledge" we might have looked upon him as a candid disbe-
Iever. But when he makes such a statement at the outset, without giving
a single reason for the assertion, the analogy of a monkey barker that
does nothing but force itself upon us. He objects to the "hard, unchange-
able foundations of first principles" and apostrophizes a system of in-
stability that he voluntarily chooses the word "fluid" to describe.
Possibly he will in his next issue us whether or not he believes there is
any data insuperable from consciousness. If there is, then we can
hasten over to the more secure cornerstone for a philosophy. If not, then
he is wasting his time by starting or prolonging this controversy,
since there can be no such thing as truth, either in principle or fact.
His rhetoric is exceedingly faulty and, compared with his logic,
will he inform us how a foundation can be "unchangeable" if it is on
"quaggy ground?" Will he likewise tell us what is more likely to produce
"quaggy ground" than the "fluid" state which he so highly considers?
To all of his questions concerning Mr. Spencer's attitude to his own
system any disciple can unhesitatingly return an affirmative reply and
patiently wait to see what "Outsider" will do therewith. When he tells
us that the English have gone to extremes in philosophy, it is quit
true. However that the Germans, French, Italians, and all others have
done precisely the same. This he should know without being told it.
In the nature of things, it is impossible to have an incomplete or par-
tially-developed system without doing so. No philosopher can be conscious
of the imperfections of his own philosophy. If he was he would correct
them. Imperfection necessitates extreme utterance when it is not known
as imperfection. To call imperfection perfection is to be extreme. The
crowning grace of Mr. Spencer's philosophy lies in the fact that it is
a synthetic chaos embraces in a symmetrical whole the elements that were
stable of all preceding systems. Because his predecessors were extremists
might have led us to suppose that he also was if he had offered a substi-
tute philosophy to theirs. Then, however, he gives the word a significative
philosophy the charge becomes ridiculous. "Outsider" tells us that there
are certain things which his [Mr. Spencer's] somewhat clumsy conception of
evolution has left him no room to explain in any evolutionary sense.
This is certainly news to evolutionists. Where did "Outsider" find this
fact, if fact it is? If Spencer's is a somewhat clumsy conception of
evolution, perhaps he can tell us where to find one that is more graceful.
To say that man is one of the things left out of the problem of evo-
lation is simply to prove the utter ignorance of the writer concerning
Mr. Spencer's philosophy. Matter was the very first thing in our visible
universe to evolve, and evidences that it is a product of evolution have
been presented more than once. Yet it evolved from no one pretends to
know. Here we strike the borderland of that existence which transcends
consciousness, and to extend our speculations beyond is idle. Both time
and space have been dealt with by Mr. Spencer in his philosophy. "Outsider"
has no concern whatsoever in the contrary notwithstanding. Let him read the two volumes on the
Principles of Psychology and he will discover how both space and time, as
known, are concepts, when seen into being. Beyond this they can not go, and
beyond this they can not go into.

But, in the meantime, we are called upon to try to see what will be done
by some one or other or the other. We are told by Mr. Spencer that a philosopher will not deny
him that sweet privilege. Can
"Outsider" not see how absurdly, how senselessly ridiculous his questions
and arguments are? Where did he ever meet an evolutionist that had to
know anything about the unknowable beyond the fact of its mere existence?
That an all-pervading eternal something presents itself to our senses under
the guise of worlds and their contents we have every reason to believe.
That this something follows a definite order in its manifestation, known
under the name of evolution, is also clear. We perceive its effects upon
our consciousness, but to get out of our consciousness to find out what
it is we cannot. Try as we will we are utterly unable to picture it in any
other form than that of our own feelings, yet the notion that there is a
process of transmutation and that the analysis of these feelings we are convinced that in no sense can it be like
then. It may be as " Outsider" evidently believes, " the practical, working
God of religion," but the writer hopes that it is something transcending
that conception as far as or further than that transcends are savages' gods
of wood and stone. This so-called " practical, working God of religion" is
but the ideal of a past race enlarged somewhat by the average intelligence
of our own times. Any God knowable and describable by man now must prove
an exceedingly inadequate conception of Deity when the race reaches an
intellectual level as far above this as we are above the savage. As evolu-
tionists believe in adaptation, they can coolly leave " Outsider" to the
enjoyment of his semi-barbarous anthropomorphism until his environment
enables him to outgrow it.

It is quite evident from his next argument that they must do so. It
is useless to try to teach a boy fractions until he has acquired a know-
lage of the multiplication table. It is equally useless to endeavor
to explain why certain things are unreasonable to one who is too young
Spencer's definition of life, and thinks that he tries to prove that living,
growing things come from lifeless elements. That the doctrine of the conser-
vation of energy combined with the law of trend of evolution is adequate
to explain the merely physical side of life can be easily defended as a
single proposition. To introduce that defense here would extend this al-
ready too long article into unreasonable proportions. As the attack is merely
a general denial it will be as well to await specific charges against the
authors' positions of evolutionists on this subject. When he
assures that " the dir um of the conservation of energy" has no back-action,
reversed universe as possible as an evolutionary one, he asserted what
would be true if there was no such thing as sentient existence. Given a
world of unconscious beings with our present law of conservation and
no doubt this would be correct. Unfortunately for such logic, we have no
such universe. Such back-action would mean a journey toward non-adap-
tation, toward misery, and would be resisted at every step. If the evolu-
tionist is but the objective aspect of something in which every
step by which it can be traced, reveals 4 subjective one as well. The
conservation of energy is due to such a kind of matter, and is therefore
quite a different thing from what it would be in a universe of pure mechanics.
Given, therefore, the very kind of matter which we perceive is here, and
given the conservation of energy as found, and the law of evolution as
taught by Herbert Spencer is a necessary result. But even if all of this
were false, he would not be in the least discredit that law. It is independent
of all such considerations and independent of everything " Outsider" seems
to deem essential to its existence. Newton taught that the particle of
matter attracts every other particle with a force that varies inversely as the
square of the distance and directly as the mass. This is the law of
gravity. Spencer teaches that beings in general is first and foremost to the
discordant similarities, but that it changes to a union of harmonized diver-
sities by giving up its super-abundant energy and coming together in closer
compact. This is the law of evolution. To force the
life. To insinuate all his books have been written. Here is the
central sun, around which revolves all else in his philosophy. Improve
this line is proved using a blind leader of the blind. Acknowledge it and
you are an evolutionist. As a source of provision of no law ever was more
fertile. Its implications are endless, and by it to-day every science and
every line of business gains that foreseeing vision that distinguishes
the present time from a generation or two ago. Man use it who do not
know themselves that they are doing so. The histologist seeks and expects
to find below every organized mass of diversities some preceding uniformity
by which to explain it, and he is never disappointed. Millions of such
prophecies have been fulfilled and millions more are yet destined to be
by virtue of this same law. The paleontologist groups spid carriees and
mines for links in the chain that leads from some present harmonized di-
erisities down to the preceding discordant similarities and he is steadily
discovering them according to prophecy. Even in the organization and
classification of science itself we observe the law. We may in advance
that every new fact will in time find a place in a harmonic sequence:
first at are a chaos of discordant similarities, but we can always see
in advance that they will form a union of harmonized diversities. If we
for the first time take the study of a new department of science
that is properly organized, we can be quite sure in advance that we will
find the facts cohering together in definite places and in harmonic unison.
In every line of business that starts we can predict that as it grows it
will become force and more definite, more and more coherent, and that
the division of labor will extend with its expansion. What is this if not
prophecy? Could we do it unless we had faith that it would necessarily
follow that course. I. e., have faith in the law of evolution? Every
men not only believes, but actually knows that evolution is true in everything
where he has definition of knowledge at all. Many men do not believe, even
of the division of labor and of the greater definiteness and coherence
that an existence possesses assumes, and yet they profess not to be
able to explain in evolution. They make a wide distinction between
half a dozen. They are astounded when informed that evolutionists simply
assert that as a sort of accidents which they see and know went on in the busi-
ness or study with which they are familiar go on in every place else in
nature and in everything and for precisely the same fundamental reasons.
Progress is not a going along a straight or even a curved line. It is due
to a spreading out, a diversification of form and function, a growth like a
tree, has innumerable branches pointing in all sorts of directions. Every
form of existence expands like a tree. Every department of knowledge ex-
pands like a tree. The mind of the child is becoming like the same.
Nations develop in the same way. Industries of all kinds appear
as they grew just as the branches appear and develop in a growing tree.
Governments, city, State, and national, follow the same lines. There is
des not universal uniformity in all the changes that things undergo and that
is typified here by the growth of a tree. This is the law of evolution. All
change that seriously fails to conform to this method is weeded out. Nature
tolerates no such trifling. Everything must nature submission by those made by everything else. To fail to do so is to court ex-
tinction. To fail to do this perfectly a business, a society, an animal, or a
man adapts itself to the universal movements around, the smoother the
course of life and the longer it will live. Our ability to do so is directly
as our power of foreseeing danger and avoiding it. To see and know these
interventions of movement is to possess prevision in corresponding degree.
To hold such power of foresight is to be able to make our adjustments
wisely. He is a wise man whose mind is so ordered that its contents match
accurately with the conditions of the world around him. Insanity, idiocy,
and all forms of mental aberration are but misadjustments of minds with
things. Such misadjustments within limits are tolerated for a time, but
their tendency is always toward the injury and final extinction of the
person. Thus the mind is forced to place its contents parallel with the
contents of the world without. As the contents of the material world are
all traveling, incessantly toward greater and greater harmonic diversity
and cohesive unity, the contents of mind must do the same thing or perish.
If "Outsider" will scan this last sentence he will observe that it is a
very positive prophecy and one of millions on which evolutionists unreserved-
edly stake the fortune of their law. If he will read "First Principles,"
"Principles of Biology," "Principles of Psychology," and, in fact, all the
works of Spencer, without prejudiced eyes, he will find them teeming with
prophecies, hundreds of which have already met fulfillment. If he will
inquire of any scientific discoverer of the century what ideas were actuating
his mind when he made his discoveries, he will soon learn that he
had evolutionary notions concerning the little corner of nature where he
was working, and that these notions led to the discoveries. He may have
been as far from an avowed evolutionist as "Outsider," but, in spite of
that, the thought that gave him his leverage to pry into the secrets of
nature, we venture to predict, would, on analysis, prove to be one of pure
evolution. Mr. Spencer's great work in promulgating this law simply con-
sisted in telling every human being that his useful knowledge that governed
his movements intelligently began as discrete, inharmonious facts or ex-
eriences that in time unified themselves into a harmonic system having
various unlike parts; that what was true of his was true of every other
person's, and that such a harmonic unification of experiences was a picture
of a precisely similar arrangement of things in the world without.
Let, then, those who would oppose evolution or test its prowess bring
forth cases of progress that do not accord with this law, or of retrogression
that do accord with it. Let them show us, if they can, anything that has
reached a high stage of development without unification of interests and
division of functions. Where can they find an organism, a society, or a
theory adjusted in perfect accord with a changing environment that has
been sessile or retrogressive? Until these are found, Mr. Herbert Spencer
is in no danger of being supplanted from his position as chief among philo-
sophers.
R. G. E.