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### Nature of the Universe: Monistic or Pluralistic?

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# Nature of the Universe: Monistic or Pluralistic?

The next step in the development of our knowledge of the universe brings us to the question as to whether it is monistic or pluralistic. Monism is described to be the doctrine which refers all phenomena to a single, ultimate, constituent or agent, and is used in contra-distinction to dualism, or pluralism, of which more later.

*Systems: (a) Monism.*<sup>a</sup> The doctrine of monism has been held in three generic forms: first, matter and its phenomena are explained as modifications of mind, resulting in what is known as idealistic monism; second, mind is explained by and “resolved into matter”; this is known as materialistic monism; third, matter, mind, and their phenomena, are held to be manifestations or modifications of some one substance, an “unknown something,” which is capable of an objective and subjective aspect.<sup>1</sup>

*(b) Dualism.*<sup>b</sup> Dualism stands for two-foldness, a system which is founded on a double principle or two-fold distinction. A conception of the universe, arising from the existence of the two original elements, ~~and~~ spirit and matter, with action and re-action of these, resulting in the phenomena of the universe.

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<sup>a</sup>Monism is the belief that there is no difference between mind and matter. Such a view does not recognize a physical and a spiritual realm, but only one domain. Most monists are atheists. See Roland Hall, “Monism and Pluralism,” in Paul Edwards, ed., *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 8 vols. (New York: Macmillan and Free Press, 1967), 5:363.

<sup>1</sup>*Webster’s New International Dictionary*, s.v. “monism.”

<sup>b</sup>Dualism postulates two different but simultaneous realms of being in the universe. Mind and matter are not the same. This view allows for a physical realm and a differing spiritual realm. Hall, “Monism and Pluralism,” *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 5:364.

With the details of these systems of thought and the hair-splitting refinements as to whether matter shades off into spirit, or spirit rises by imperceptible manifestations into matter-phenomena, and merges into tangibility—we need not concern ~~us~~ **ourselves** overmuch. I realize that our new knowledge is constantly producing what is almost new revelation on the constitution of matter, and that the very dust is shown to have “a complexity and activity heretofore unimagined,” and that such phrases as “dead matter” and “inert matter” are passing out of use so far as possessing any significance is concerned. The new theory of the atom is said to amount almost to a new conception of the universe itself. The atom is no longer the indivisible particle it was once thought to be; it is now said to be known that there is an “atom” within an “atom.” That which scientists thought was elementary and final a generation ago can now be divided and broken up; that instead of the atom being the unit of substance, it is found to be almost a world in itself, with action and reaction within its small compass that is quite amazing.<sup>2</sup>

All the new knowledge, however, respecting the atom and all that comes of it, including resolving it into electrons, leaves us with the fact that it has within it something which “acts,” and something which is “acted upon”; a seemingly necessary positive and negative substance in action and reaction out of which things proceed an atom; an aggregation of atoms, a world; or a universe of worlds.

We may leave these systems of philosophy that try to account for the starting point of things, with the conviction that we may be assured that the positive which acts, and the negative which is acted upon, are both eternal things; and may they not be the ultimate factors, spirit and matter, acting and re-acting upon each other by which the universe is up-built and sustained?

(c) *Pluralism.*<sup>c</sup> Turning from these considerations of monism and dualism, we may conduct our inquiries as to the nature of the universe along other and broader lines. Is this universe monistic or pluralistic? It seems almost useless to ask the question in view of what has already been set forth. We have already before us a number of things, eternal

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<sup>2</sup>See Thomson, *Outline of Science*, 4-5. **Add on [illegible] from man and his universe.**

<sup>c</sup>Pluralism assumes that, if two irreconcilable realms exist in the universe, then there may be more than two. Bertrand Russell, a pluralist, believed that the universe has no unity, continuity, or orderliness, but is composed of any number of radically different and irreducible systems. Hall, “Monism and Pluralism,” *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 5:364. B. H. Roberts viewed the universe as pluralistic; he pointed to time, space, matter, force, energy, intelligence, and mind in establishing the pluralistic character of the universe. However, he would oppose any pluralistic view that did not also see the universe as unified, orderly, and continuous.

things, that go to the making of the universe; and these many things proclaim the pluralistic character of it—time, space, matter, force, or energy; and causation, and mind, or intelligence. All these eternal by the nature of them, self-existent, without beginning and without end, and so many of them, that if number in things constituted plurality, then here we have plurality—a pluralistic universe.

*The theological view.* The phase of this matter, however, which concerns us chiefly is with reference to mind and intelligence outside of our own world. The old and generally accepted idea about our world, ~~and~~ supposed to rest upon the authority of revelation, was that the world was created out of nothing by a supreme Intelligence, and within recent times. That the chief characteristic of this Intelligence was one-ness, that he transcended the universe, and acted from the outside of it in its creation; that sun, moon, and stars were created for the earth, the sun to be its light by day, and the moon and stars especially created to break up somewhat the otherwise utter darkness of the night; that the earth alone was the one world in which this Intelligence (God) was concerned; and whatever other beings existed were angels and spirits ministering for God, and to the benefit of the human race.

It is scarcely necessary to say that this view does not fit the universe as we have reviewed it here in the light of the knowledge we now have in respect of the extent and the vastness of the universe, and including as it does, thought of the great likelihood of the thousands of millions of suns being circled by groups of inhabited planets, numberless as the sands upon the seashore.

*Intelligence pluralistic.* The structure of the universe as we have learned it, and now know it to be, leads inevitably to the conclusion that the universe, as to the intelligence which apparently stands as dominant therein, is pluralistic. That is to say, many intelligences are bound together in at least a workable and perhaps a perfect unity; and this unity of many intelligences bound together in agreement may be and is sufficient to give the sense of one-ness to all that is. John Stuart Mill,<sup>d</sup> in his “Essay on Theism,” in speaking of the evident unity in nature which suggests that nature is governed by mind which is one, goes on to say that “no one kind of event can be absolutely pre-ordained or governed by any being but one who holds in his hands the

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<sup>d</sup>John Stuart Mill (1806–73) was an English scholar who wrote a variety of works on religion, philosophy, and economics. His *Essay on Liberty* argues that society should protect its members from governmental and moral pressures.

reigns of all Nature and not of some department only." Then he gives a splendid alternative to this by saying: "At least if a plurality be supposed, it is necessary to assume so complete a concert of action and unity of will among them that the difference is for more purposes immaterial between such a theory and that of the absolute unity of the Godhead."<sup>3</sup> This alternative presents the ground of the reconciliation between the unity of the universe and the existence of many intelligences which undoubtedly enter into and compose that unity.

*Highest spiritual manifestation in union with matter.* Again we may resort to our method of finding truth by reasoning from what we know, confining our thought for the moment to our own earth. We know that the ~~best~~ **highest** manifestation of the thing we call Intelligence is found in man; is found therefore in union with material elements; for man, the intelligence, the spirit of him, is in union with matter; the spirit *and* the body, the latter a definite amount of matter united with a spirit, constitute the being we know as man. And in this union both spirit and matter attain the highest and most desirable manifestation in this our mortal life. Man is an intelligence; but he is an intelligent entity, an individual, separate and distinct from every other individual man; and as there are many such separate intelligences, we may say for our world that, as to intelligence (mind), ~~as~~ also as to many other things, it is a pluralistic world. That being true as to our world, may it not be equally true of all the inhabited planets of our own solar system? And of all the solar systems of the universe?

*The Many as One.* Let us start from another viewpoint. The attainment of the highest wisdom, the mightiest achievements of intelligences on our earth, is not attained by the individual **man acting alone, but rather by action of the individual** in union with his fellows. By choosing the most highly developed intelligences of the community as representatives, and bringing them together in councils of various kinds, parliaments, congresses, cabinets, courts, and other national assemblies—from these, nations and the world finally get expressed the wisest and therefore the best judgments as to what ought to obtain as public policies and provide for the best securities for the freedom of men and the welfare of nations. From the deliberations of such bodies rise the wisest and best systems of governments and laws. Though the personal studies and investigations of individual scientists and philosophers may carry them far in unearthing knowledge of

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<sup>3</sup>Mill, *Three Essays*, 133.

things, and understanding the relation of forces; they may establish science, and as flaming torch-bearers these individuals may lead the way, and blaze the trails over which the crowd may follow. Yet that wisdom expressed in laws for individual, community, national, and even international relationships—all that comes from men taking counsel with his fellow men, and unitedly devising and working out the things that *ordain* and establish the order of society which concerns individual and community welfare, and *provides* the best securities for liberty; and through these *establish* man's greatest happiness, and the highest development of that thing which we think of as world civilization—it is the wisdom massed from united intelligences.

This is what we know from human experiences in the development of human wisdom, as applied to the practical things of life, the welfare of humanity; and it is vouched for by history. And now, reasoning from what we know of conditions respecting all these things as to our own world, we ask the question: May not this be the status of things in other worlds? Only, of course, in the older planets and planetary systems—the greater and the more highly developed worlds, inhabited by superior intelligences—the means employed would be more perfect, and the results correspondingly more satisfactory, in that there would be established in those older worlds higher states of civilization, and there would be undoubtedly individuals of higher intelligence with corresponding increase of power and influence. To attempt to say to what heights of development and glory intelligences may have attained to in these older, and more advanced worlds, of course, would be merely speculation; but it is not inconceivable, that as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are these developments *in more advanced worlds* higher than our developments, so are their ways above our ways and their thoughts above our thoughts.<sup>c</sup>

What infinite opportunity for development in such a universe as we are here contemplating! When viewed from the standpoint of the existence of these thousands of millions of suns, surrounded by much greater and more glorious planetary systems than our own solar system, and inhabited by intelligences superior to those that we know as the human race—what may not come of such a universe and of our

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<sup>c</sup>Roberts paraphrases Isaiah 55:8-9: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Roberts does not allude to this passage from Isaiah merely for stylistic reasons. This passage prepares the reader for Roberts's argument in the next chapter that God rules over advanced societies and higher intelligences on another planet in the universe.

world as part of it? For to intelligences there is no end of progress; however great *its* present attainment there is still a beyond to higher glory, greater majesty, increase of excellence. There are no ultimates to progress for intelligences, there is always becoming, but no end. This constitutes the joy of existence—this possibility of eternal progress!

*An optimistic universe. All this* makes the universe an optimistic universe, where hope eternally reigns, where achievements but furnish wings for still higher achievements. It makes possible the contemplation of a universe filled with the brotherhood of divine intelligences, presided over by graded councils of power and authority, rising one above another in designated spheres and authority, and yet all operating in harmonious relations, knowing that no power or authority can in reality, or ought to be exercised over intelligences by their fellow intelligences but “by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile.” Reproving with sharpness at times, as may be necessary for correction and understanding of things as they are, but followed by such manifestations of love and good will that even the “reproof” shall be seen to be but love in stern guise; for the government of our contemplated universe is to be and cannot, be other than a moral government, a government that rests upon knowledge, persuasion, and love (see D&C 121:41–43).<sup>f</sup>

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<sup>f</sup>Roberts creatively derives from this scripture principles of universal governance. Quote marks have been added to differentiate between the text of the Doctrine and Covenants and Roberts’s paraphrase.

Further references recommended by Roberts for this lesson: James, *Pluralistic Universe*; Smith, “King Follett Discourse”; D&C 29; 76; 84; 88; 93; 121. On monism and pluralism, see pages 639–41 below.