

THE
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EVOLUTION.¹

THE subject to which I ask your attention requires a preliminary statement if it is not to appear at the outset too vast and vague. My purpose is to express the opinion that evolution is history; that antecedents and causes should consequently be historically construed; that evolution is pluralistic, implying many histories, but not a single history of the world; that man writes the history only of his own world; that, however, since he discovers his world to be a history, he may have a science of history or evolution which is universal, and that this science indicates that evolution is progressive. Because I am expressing an opinion and not trying to prove a thesis I have indulged in many assertions.

I take it that the term 'evolution' in so far as it indicates any natural fact, indicates initially no more than the fact that things have a past, that they have a history. It would indeed be but another name for history if we were willing to extend our conception of history to denote all discovered and discoverable changes. As indicating a rational enterprise the term appears to express the attempt to recover the history of things by generalizing for the past the conditions, types, factors, and rates of change which are discoverable. If this is so, it would seem clear that the only point where the doctrine of evolution in general is questionable, is in its method of procedure. If we are not justified in extending to the past the discoverable principles of change, the attempt to do so might be interesting, but it would deserve no special commendation. It is, however, unprofitable

¹ Delivered as the presidential address before the Eleventh Annual Meeting of the American Philosophical Association at Harvard University, December 28, 1911.