

De Verflauwing der Grenzen
Dr. A. Kuyper
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“Obliteration of the boundary lines” is a striking phrase (we presume of Dr. Kuyper’s own coining) to describe the most characteristic feature of Pantheism. “God bears in Scripture the predicate of *Hammabdil*, because it is He who has drawn, first, between Himself and the creature, afterwards within the sphere of creation, certain lines of demarcation.” The author undertakes to show, first, how the spirit of our age tends to obliterate these lines; next, to point out the dangers which this tendency involves, and finally to give advice as to the method of resistance it should be met with.

Dr. Kuyper does not belong to those who indiscriminately condemn every feature of Pantheism. If given the choice between a “frozen Deism” and “melting Pantheism,” he would prefer the latter. In India he would have been a Buddhist. The deepest spirit of Pantheism is false love. “We may call it spiritual adultery, but still it is adultery from inclination—born out of the pathos of sympathy.” Hence all Pantheism originally is of a religious nature, and only in the second instance assumes a fixed form in the philosophical schools. Its prevalence in the present age must be ascribed to three causes: the strong consciousness which our age has of its own power; the overstrained estimate it places upon the worth of man; and the extent to which it has penetrated into the riches of nature. On the other hand, the possibility of dissolving the manifoldness of the real world into one indefinite identity, Pantheism has created for itself by its union with Idealism. As long as our thinking regulates itself by the real and objective world It cannot ignore the distinctions by which it is confronted on every side. But once the notion having gained prevalence that the “Ding an Sich” is shut off from our knowledge, and that at least the forms of representation and thought are products of our own mind, this great objection is easily disposed of. Through Kant’s subjective idealism this view became predominant in modern philosophy. Human thought naturally tends towards unity, and this tendency did the rest. The result was, that in the great Pantheistic systems following upon Kant, all difference between the Creator and creation, between time and eternity, between good and evil, between the holy and the profane, is done away with. This, to be sure, is not a complete statement of the connection between the Kantian criticism and the great speculative systems; still it is one important side of the truth.

The author does not attempt to give a definition of Pantheism, which indeed is not a very easy matter. He contents himself with finding its *nota characteristic* in this very obliteration of the boundary lines. To a certain extent Pantheism has this feature in common with Materialism, but Dr. Kuyper intimates with sufficient clearness that Pantheism disposes not merely of the qualitative, but also of the ontological differences between things, resolving them into the one identical being. And as for the more modern and refined form of Materialism, Evolutionism, this, as we shall see, is considered as a mere application on a huge scale of the Pantheistic principle to the phenomenal world.

We are warned against the inference that Pantheism still holds a position of supremacy in the philosophical schools. The days of speculation lie far behind us, and from the height of Agnosticism we look down with a sort of contempt on men like Schelling and Hegel. Nevertheless, what has long since been banished from the schools still continues to exert a powerful influence in the applied sciences and in practical life. In the theory of evolution Dr. Kuyper discovers this influence,

obliterating all lines of demarcation in the sphere of phenomena. The conquests made by this theory in the world of science are not the result of verification by strict empirical proof, but largely due to its success in appealing to the deeper Pantheistic sympathies of the age. However much scientists may deny this dependence, the fact remains that Pantheism could not frame a view of the phenomenal world more consistent with its own principles, than that framed for it by Evolutionism.

The dangers which the prevailing tendency involves relate to personal life, the life of the Church, and the life of the State. Pantheism is fatal to the development of individual character. In the sphere of religion it is inconsistent with the supernatural claims of Christianity. Christianity is in itself a protest against all naturalism and evolution. Christ is *the* miracle. "Bethlehem makes a break in the genealogy of humanity." Hence, the attempt of Pantheism to silence this protest by divesting Christianity of its supernatural elements. The danger is all the greater since the Church itself is carried away with the current, and many of its leaders unconsciously promote the process of dissolution by reducing the supernatural to a minimum and effacing all lines of confessional distinction. In political life, finally, instead of the conception of the State being derived from the idea of absolute right, the latter is made to depend on the former, and is represented as something relative, subject to a constant process of becoming. And after having thus thrown away of its own free will all weapons of defense, our age will end with standing powerless against nihilism and anarchism, when the people take up the cry: "There are no lines of distinction any longer."

In the third part of his speech, Dr. Kuyper gives advice as to the method of resistance that this fatal influence should be met with. First, he rejects three methods which have proved unavailing. They are the apologetic method, the method of compromise and the amphibian method. The second refers to the mediation theology; the third characterizes the dualism of the Neo-Kantian or Ritschlian School, in which head and heart have parted ways. The apologetic method is rejected because not even the most eloquent pleading can save us in a court where reason is party and judge at the same time. The compromise method amounts to a monstrous marriage, and "hybrids do not propagate." The amphibian scheme is impracticable, because Logos and Ethos dispose of one consciousness only, and the proposed division of goods is sure to produce hypertrophy of the head and atrophy of the heart.

The true method of resistance was prescribed to us by God Himself when He called Abraham out of Ur, separated Israel from the nations, and drew a line of distinction between His Church and the world. We should not spend our force in fruitless skirmishing; but retreat behind our defenses, and create for ourselves a new sphere of life, in which all lines drawn by God are respected. This is sure to meet with success. It will yield a basis of operation, enable us to throw up in front a fortified line of defense and to delay the battle until we shall have sufficiently developed our power and disciplined our ranks. This does not mean, however, that there is a single sphere of life from which we should withdraw. On the contrary, Dr. Kuyper wishes a consistent application of his principle to every single department. "We should not rest until we have imparted our conviction to our children and grandchildren, supporting a Christian education in the home, by Christian schools." Even this is not sufficient. "The Christian school calls for a Christian gymnasium, and believers cannot escape from the duty of founding their own university."

There is a wealth of pithy sayings in this speech which we would like to quote if space did not forbid.

The treatment of the subject is strong, broad and masterly in every respect.