

to the clearest and most adequate conception of existence at which it is possible to arrive, the goal in this case being such a conception of existence, which, while explaining it in all its fulness, will yet be consistent with itself throughout. The nearer we approach to this ideal the more perfect will be our theory. It must be apparent, however, that the further on this road we travel, the fewer will be our companions, for only a very limited number have at once the time, opportunity, and inclination, which must necessarily be possessed by those who endeavour to reach the limit of knowledge in this direction. We need not be surprised, therefore, to find that by far the greater number of mankind adhere to those theories which, though quite inadequate in themselves, are yet best suited to the knowledge and comprehension of the majority. So, it must be quite evident that the mere fact of the number who adhere to any theory does not by any means proclaim that theory to be the most adequate or consistent. Still, we find Mr. Spencer very often making such appeals to the vulgar in support of the principles of his theory. His system of philosophy, however, is one whose principles have been shown time and again since the days of Locke and Hume, to be utterly incapable of accounting for the knowledge of existence; and hence of the nature of known existence itself. Yet, with a strange persistence in error which cannot be looked upon otherwise than as the result of an ignorance of the point at issue, Mr. Spencer, with others of a similar turn of mind, still clings to the conviction that physical science will yet enable us to answer those questions as to the ultimate nature of existence and our knowledge of it, as far as these are answerable. The fact remains, however, that it must be for ever impossible to explain the conditions of existence and knowledge from the operations of physical laws; since the conditions of these very physical laws are involved in the problem to

be solved. And since every physical fact that ever was known, or ever will be, can only be known in one way, it follows that from the very nature of it, we cannot empirically perceive in any completed experience the conditions which renders it possible. The consequence is, that those very difficulties which proved fatal to the system of Locke, must beset every subsequent theory which endeavours to account for experience from the starting point of the known sentient organism as acted upon by a material environment. Such a theory, when reduced to consistency, as is shown in the case of Hume, makes manifest the fact that, adopting its principles, any knowledge whatever is rendered impossible. Notwithstanding this fact, however, Mr. Spencer supposes that he has discovered the universal solvent of all difficulties as to the conditions of experience, in the doctrine of physical evolution. This is the central principle of all his philosophy and all his writings, and by means of this alone he would explain all that is explicable in the sphere of Biology, in the wide sense in which he uses that term. Apart from the doctrine of evolution, however, his theory is just that of Locke in all essential respects; and even if we admit the evolution of the organism, with all its special organs of sense and their connections, yet this does not in the slightest alter the nature of the question concerning the *conditions* of experience which both Locke and Spencer have attempted to answer. When Mr. Spencer has developed the material organism to its present state, he occupies exactly the same position, with regard to the ultimate conditions of experience, which Locke did at the beginning of his theory. Both alike start with the sentient organism, and the question is, can they, from the nature of such an organism and its environment, discover the conditions of human knowledge and the nature of known existence? Evidently not: for the organism it-