

Chapter 7

Christian Science Reframed

To recap, the main argument consists of the core axioms and the deductions Eddy made from them. In her original text, these are not always made explicitly, instead sometimes being the implications of answers to questions she received from her many readers and published as part of one of her shorter works. Even during her lifetime, sales of her books were in the region of one million copies, and because of their content and style, this naturally encouraged curious readers to write to her for clarifications, either due to the highly counterintuitive conceptual material, or as a result of the variable clarity of its presentation.

Apparent inconsistencies in Eddy's work will be treated as precisely that – apparent rather than real. Given the near half-century of thought she devoted to Christian Science, and the extraordinary 432 editions of *Science and Health*, quite apart from her multitude of other works, it would be reasonable to make the assumption of consistency on this basis alone. However, for the purpose of this analysis, the 'meta-axiom' initially adopted is that Eddy's axioms, corollaries and other statements do not contradict one another. In the same manner that Eddy's own axioms are ultimately demonstrated empirically (or, at least, deductions following from empirical results do so to Eddy's satisfaction), I aim to demonstrate that apparently contradictory aspects to Christian Science can be resolved at a later stage.

Eddy's idiosyncratic use of words in everyday usage and of terms from conventional theology could lead to a degree of misapprehension completely undermining the intelligibility of her main argument,

and, by extension, her philosophical system. Consequently, although a full glossary is included as an appendix after the main body of this book, a discussion of a brief but targeted lexicon is necessary as the analysis progresses.

Having expressed the core of Eddy's Christian Science as a small set of (temporarily) axiomatic principles, the presentation of her argument moves on to a far more elaborate structure. Although built upon the foundation already provided, the first part of this new stage relies on a qualitatively different mode of presentation consisting of an edited, but nevertheless quite substantial, set of questions and answers regarding Christian Science drawn from Eddy's own work. I have used the very short texts *Rudimental Divine Science*, *No and Yes*, *Christian Science versus Pantheism* and *The Unity of Good*, in combination with passages from Chapter 3 of *Miscellaneous Writings 1883-1896*. Although Chapters 10 and 14 of Eddy's longest work, *Science and Health*, are of relevance, they will, however, be more helpful in the later, analytical chapters of the book. The second part of expressing the main argument involves rewording the questions and answers as an exposition of the principles of Christian Science.

The next series of quotes is exceptionally important:

According to Christian Science, the first idolatrous claim of sin is, that matter exists; the second, that matter is substance; the third, that matter has intelligence; and the fourth, that matter, being so endowed, produces life and death. Hence my conscientious position, in the denial of matter.¹

Spirit is the only creator, and man, including the universe, is His spiritual concept. By matter is commonly meant mind, – not the highest Mind, but a false form of mind. This so-called mind and matter cannot be separated in origin and action. What is this mind?²

Sight: Mortal mind declares that matter sees through the organizations of matter, or that mind sees by means of

1. Eddy 1888, p. 31.

2. Ibid., p. 32.

matter... that God is All, and God is Spirit; therefore there is nothing but Spirit; and consequently there is no matter. Touch. Take another train of reasoning. Mortal mind says that matter cannot feel matter... What evidence does mortal mind afford that matter is substantial, is hot or cold? Take away mortal mind, and matter could not feel what it calls 'substance'. Take away matter, and mortal mind could not cognize its own so-called substance, and this so-called mind would have no identity. ... What is substance? What is the reality of God and the universe? Immortal Mind is the real substance, – Spirit, Life, Truth, and Love. Taste: Mortal mind says, 'I taste; and this is sweet, this is sour.' Let mortal mind change, and say that sour is sweet, and so it would be. If every mortal mind believed sweet to be sour, it would be so; for the qualities of matter are but qualities of mortal mind. Change the mind, and the quality changes. Destroy the belief, and the quality disappears.³

Here, Eddy is providing her argument for the radically idealist world model which underpins Christian Science. She is seeking to demonstrate that every aspect of what is considered by others to be caused by interactions with an external world is merely a belief, and that in many cases – perhaps even most of them – it is simply wrong; a false belief. For Eddy, the only reality is God. Eddy then addresses some highly important specific questions as described in the next section.

Selected passages from *No and Yes* (Eddy 1887)

Eddy addressed further questions in this fairly short yet very helpful work *No and Yes*.

Is Christian Science blasphemous? Blasphemy has never diminished sin or sickness, nor acknowledged God in all His ways. Blasphemy rebukes not the godless lie that denies Him as All-in-all, nor does it ascribe to Him all presence, power, and glory. Christian Science does this.⁴

3. Ibid., p. 33-35.

4. Eddy 1887a, p. 18.

Eddy then continues with an important deduction:

Is there a personal devil? No man hath seen the person of good or of evil. Each is greater than the corporeality we behold. 'He cast out *devils*.' This record shows that the term devil is generic, being used in the plural number. From this it follows that there is more than one devil. That Jesus cast several persons out of another person, is not stated, and is impossible. Hence the passage must refer to the *evils* [by which Eddy means 'errors' or 'lies'] which were cast out.⁵

At this point Eddy first mentions Spinoza, which is important to the analysis later.

According to Spinoza's philosophy God is amplification. He is in all things, and therefore He is in evil in human thought. He is extension, of whatever character. Also, according to Spinoza, man is an animal vegetable, developed through the lower orders of matter and mortal mind. All these vagaries are at variance with my system of metaphysics, which rests on God as One and All, and denies the actual existence of both matter and evil.⁶

Shortly afterwards, Eddy offers this summary:

Mortal man has but a false sense of Soul and body. He believes that Spirit, or Soul, exists in matter. This is pantheism, and is not the Science of Soul.⁷

Selected text from *Miscellaneous Writing 1883-1896* (Eddy 1897)

Amongst much else in this longer text, Eddy focusses on a commonly asked question, especially so in the nineteenth century:

5. Eddy 1887a, p. 22.

6. Eddy 1887a, p. 24.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

If I have the toothache, and nothing stops it until I have the tooth extracted, and then the pain ceases, has the mind, or extracting, or both, caused the pain to cease? What you thought was pain in the bone or nerve, could only have been a belief in pain in matter, for matter has no sensation. It was a state of mortal thought made manifest in the flesh. You call this body matter, when awake, or when asleep in a dream. That matter can report pain, or that mind is *in* matter, reporting sensations, is but a dream at all times. You believed that if the tooth were extracted, the pain would cease: this demand of mortal thought once met, your belief assumed a new form, and said, There is no more pain. When your belief in pain ceases, the pain stops.⁸

This analysis was particularly in evidence during the 1918-19 Spanish Influenza pandemic, when it was central to the Christian Science Church's understanding of what was taking place. Self-evidently, this is of great relevance to the COVID-19 pandemic. The next question answered below is a surprising but nevertheless genuine reader's enquiry: 'Was ever a person made insane by studying metaphysics? Such an occurrence would be impossible, for the proper study of Mind-healing would cure the insane'⁹. So even if one was apparently driven insane by such radical idealism – 'apparently', because as all illness does not exist, psychiatric illness, as a subset, also cannot exist – it would also provide the healing, as the insanity would be a delusion: a delusion that one was insane. But the presence of a delusion is one of a range of possible symptoms of a psychotic illness, so this appears to create a paradox; it is analogous to a hypochondriac worrying that they have hypochondria!

The following question concerns one of the potentially serious flaws in Eddy's system (which will be considered in greater detail later). 'How does Mrs. Eddy know that she has read and studied correctly, if one must deny the evidences [*sic*] of the senses? She had to use her eyes to read'¹⁰. Eddy provided this answer:

Jesus said, 'Having eyes, see ye not?' I read the inspired page through a higher than mortal sense. As matter, the eye

8. Eddy 1897, p. 44.

9. Eddy 1897, p. 48.

10. Eddy 1897, p. 58.

cannot see; and as mortal mind, it is a belief that sees. I may read the Scriptures through a belief of eyesight; but I must spiritually understand them to interpret their Science.¹¹

In Christian Science, the partial isomorphism between illusory physical reality and true spiritual reality is a highly variable one, but could be explained, within Eddy's system, as being due to a limitation of our very early stage in developing spiritual sense. The next question posits an interesting concept: if we cannot believe the evidence of our eyes, would it not permit the possibility of their being far more (or far fewer) real minds than there are false bodies?

If mortal mind and body are myths, what is the connection between them and real identity, and why are there as many identities as mortal bodies? Every material belief hints the existence of spiritual reality. ... The education of the future will be instruction, in spiritual Science, against the material... counterfeit sciences. All... will be swallowed up by the reality and omnipotence of Truth over error, and of Life over death.¹²

Eddy also considers the 'nature versus nurture' debate: 'Does Christian Science set aside the law of transmission, prenatal desires, and good or bad influences on the unborn child?'¹³ Here, Eddy is being asked about heritability, which at the time of her writing was almost universally believed to be not merely important, but, by many academics in biology and psychology, of sole importance. Her answer is that it does not occur at all:

Whatever is humanly conceived is a departure from divine law; hence its mythical origin and certain end. According to the Scriptures, – St. Paul declares astutely, 'For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things,' – man is incapable of originating; nothing can be formed apart from God, good, the all-knowing Mind. What seems to be of human origin is the counterfeit of the divine.¹⁴

11. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

13. Eddy 1897, p. 71.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

This (the denial of inherited characteristics) is something claimed decades later in 1913 by John Broadus Watson in his so-called 'Behaviorist Manifesto'. Watson's paper, 'Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It'¹⁵, triggered a revolution in psychology, eschewing introspection, mental states and the inheritance of characteristics, while promoting the influence of environment and the necessity of quantifiable, objective data. This last point is another curious point of similarity between Watson and Eddy, despite Watson's rigorous materialism and Eddy's radical idealism, in that it was the objective, measurable recovery of her patients that Eddy cited as both evidence for the truth of her ideas and, crucially, the validity of her methodology.

Selected text from *Christian Science versus Pantheism* (Eddy 1898)

Eddy regarded mainstream Christianity as having pantheistic tendencies, which she vehemently abjured, and was consequently angered by what she saw as the wholly unjust criticism that Christian Science was pantheistic. Her published response on this topic formed this short book, in which she explained her position in some detail. As this is such an important aspect of her system, revisiting this topic with a fairly lengthy set of quotes is needed in order to do Eddy justice:

The Standard Dictionary has it that pantheism is the doctrine of the deification of natural causes, conceived as one personified nature, to which the religious sentiment is directed.¹⁶

Theism is the belief in the personality and infinite mind of one supreme, holy, self-existent God, who reveals Himself supernaturally to His creation.¹⁷

It is the doctrine that the universe owes its origin and continuity to the reason, intellect, and will of a self-existent

15. Watson 1913.

16. Eddy 1898, p. 2.

17. Ibid., p. 3.

divine Being, who possesses all wisdom, goodness, and power, and is the creator and preserver of man.¹⁸

Christianity, as taught and demonstrated in the first century by our great Master, virtually annulled the so-called laws of matter, idolatry, pantheism, and polytheism.¹⁹

The doctrines that embrace pantheism, polytheism, and paganism are admixtures of matter and Spirit, truth and error, sickness and sin, life and death.²⁰

They constantly reiterate the belief of pantheism, that mind ‘sleeps in the mineral, dreams in the animal, and wakes in man’²¹.

From a material standpoint, the best of people sometimes object to the philosophy of Christian Science, on the ground that it takes away man’s personality and makes man less than man. But what saith the apostle? – even this: ‘If a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.’ The great Nazarene Prophet said, ‘By their fruits ye shall know them:’ then, if the effects of Christian Science on the lives of men be thus judged, we are sure the honest verdict of humanity will attest its uplifting power, and prevail over the opposite notion that Christian Science lessens man’s individuality.²²

Again, it is Eddy’s empiricism which is such an original aspect of her ideas.

Limitations

As stated earlier, certain essential aspects of Christian Science are highly problematic; this is now the point at which a resolution of these difficulties must be found if a coherent second philosophical system is

18. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

21. Eddy 1898, pp. 9, 10.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 9,10.