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THE LAWS *OF* THOUGHT

Introduction by John Corcoran

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CHAPTER II.

OF SIGNS IN GENERAL, AND OF THE SIGNS APPROPRIATE TO THE SCIENCE OF LOGIC IN PARTICULAR; ALSO OF THE LAWS TO WHICH THAT CLASS OF SIGNS ARE SUBJECT.

1. THAT Language is an instrument of human reason, and not merely a medium for the expression of thought, is a truth generally admitted. It is proposed in this chapter to inquire what it is that renders Language thus subservient to the most important of our intellectual faculties. In the various steps of this inquiry we shall be led to consider the constitution of Language, considered as a system adapted to an end or purpose; to investigate its elements; to seek to determine their mutual relation and dependence; and to inquire in what manner they contribute to the attainment of the end to which, as co-ordinate parts of a system, they have respect.

In proceeding to these inquiries, it will not be necessary to enter into the discussion of that famous question of the schools, whether Language is to be regarded as an *essential* instrument of reasoning, or whether, on the other hand, it is possible for us to reason without its aid. I suppose this question to be beside the design of the present treatise, for the following reason, viz., that it is the business of Science to investigate laws; and that, whether we regard signs as the representatives of things and of their relations, or as the representatives of the conceptions and operations of the human intellect, in studying the laws of signs, we are in effect studying the manifested laws of reasoning. If there exists a difference between the two inquiries, it is one which does not affect the scientific expressions of formal law, which are the object of investigation in the present stage of this work, but relates only to the mode in which those results are presented to the mental regard. For though in investigating the laws of signs, *à posteriori*, the immediate subject of examination is Language, with the rules which govern its use; while in making the internal

processes of thought the direct object of inquiry, we appeal in a more immediate way to our personal consciousness,—it will be found that in both cases the results obtained are formally equivalent. Nor could we easily conceive, that the unnumbered tongues and dialects of the earth should have preserved through a long succession of ages so much that is common and universal, were we not assured of the existence of some deep foundation of their agreement in the laws of the mind itself.

2. The elements of which all language consists are signs or symbols. Words are signs. Sometimes they are said to represent things; sometimes the operations by which the mind combines together the simple notions of things into complex conceptions; sometimes they express the relations of action, passion, or mere quality, which we perceive to exist among the objects of our experience; sometimes the emotions of the perceiving mind. But words, although in this and in other ways they fulfil the office of signs, or representative symbols, are not the only signs which we are capable of employing. Arbitrary marks, which speak only to the eye, and arbitrary sounds or actions, which address themselves to some other sense, are equally of the nature of signs, provided that their representative office is defined and understood. In the mathematical sciences, letters, and the symbols $+$, $-$, $=$, &c., are used as signs, although the term "sign" is applied to the latter class of symbols, which represent operations or relations, rather than to the former, which represent the elements of number and quantity. As the real import of a sign does not in any way depend upon its particular form or expression, so neither do the laws which determine its use. In the present treatise, however, it is with written signs that we have to do, and it is with reference to these exclusively that the term "sign" will be employed. The essential properties of signs are enumerated in the following definition.

Definition.—A sign is an arbitrary mark, having a fixed interpretation, and susceptible of combination with other signs in subjection to fixed laws dependent upon their mutual interpretation.

3. Let us consider the particulars involved in the above definition separately.

(1.) In the first place, a sign is an *arbitrary* mark. It is clearly indifferent what particular word or token we associate with a given idea, provided that the association once made is permanent. The Romans expressed by the word "civitas" what we designate by the word "state." But both they and we might equally well have employed any other word to represent the same conception. Nothing, indeed, in the nature of Language would prevent us from using a mere letter in the same sense. Were this done, the laws according to which that letter would require to be used would be essentially the same with the laws which govern the use of "civitas" in the Latin, and of "state" in the English language, so far at least as the use of those words is regulated by any general principles common to all languages alike.

(2.) In the second place, it is necessary that each sign should possess, within the limits of the same discourse or process of reasoning, a fixed interpretation. The necessity of this condition is obvious, and seems to be founded in the very nature of the subject. There exists, however, a dispute as to the precise nature of the representative office of words or symbols used as names in the processes of reasoning. By some it is maintained, that they represent the conceptions of the mind alone; by others, that they represent things. The question is not of great importance here, as its decision cannot affect the laws according to which signs are employed. I apprehend, however, that the general answer to this and such like questions is, that in the processes of reasoning, signs stand in the place and fulfil the office of the conceptions and operations of the mind; but that as those conceptions and operations represent things, and the connexions and relations of things, so signs represent things with their connexions and relations; and lastly, that as signs stand in the place of the conceptions and operations of the mind, they are subject to the laws of those conceptions and operations. This view will be more fully elucidated in the next chapter; but it here serves to explain the third of those particulars involved in the definition of a sign, viz., its subjection to fixed laws of combination depending upon the nature of its interpretation.

4. The analysis and classification of those signs by which the

operations of reasoning are conducted will be considered in the following Proposition:

Proposition I.

All the operations of Language, as an instrument of reasoning, may be conducted by a system of signs composed of the following elements, viz.:

1st. *Literal symbols, as x, y, &c., representing things as subjects of our conceptions.*

2nd. *Signs of operation, as* $+$, $-$, $\times$, *standing for those operations of the mind by which the conceptions of things are combined or resolved so as to form new conceptions involving the same elements.*

3rd. *The sign of identity,* $=$.

And these symbols of Logic are in their use subject to definite laws, partly agreeing with and partly differing from the laws of the corresponding symbols in the science of Algebra.

Let it be assumed as a criterion of the true elements of rational discourse, that they should be susceptible of combination in the simplest forms and by the simplest laws, and thus combining should generate all other known and conceivable forms of language; and adopting this principle, let the following classification be considered.

CLASS I.

5. *Appellative or descriptive signs, expressing either the name of a thing, or some quality or circumstance belonging to it.*

To this class we may obviously refer the substantive proper or common, and the adjective. These may indeed be regarded as differing only in this respect, that the former expresses the substantive existence of the individual thing or things to which it refers; the latter implies that existence. If we attach to the adjective the universally understood subject "being" or "thing," it becomes virtually a substantive, and may for all the essential purposes of reasoning be replaced by the substantive. Whether or not, in every particular of the mental regard, it is the same thing to say, "Water is a fluid thing," as to say, "Water is fluid;" it is at least equivalent in the expression of the processes of reasoning.

It is clear also, that to the above class we must refer any sign which may conventionally be used to express some circumstance or relation, the detailed exposition of which would involve the use of many signs. The epithets of poetic diction are very frequently of this kind. They are usually compounded adjectives, singly fulfilling the office of a many-worded description. Homer's "deep-eddying ocean" embodies a virtual description in the single word βαθυδίνης. And conventionally any other description addressed either to the imagination or to the intellect might equally be represented by a single sign, the use of which would in all essential points be subject to the same laws as the use of the adjective "good" or "great." Combined with the subject "thing," such a sign would virtually become a substantive; and by a single substantive the combined meaning both of thing and quality might be expressed.

6. Now, as it has been defined that a sign is an arbitrary mark, it is permissible to replace all signs of the species above described by letters. Let us then agree to represent the class of individuals to which a particular name or description is applicable, by a single letter, as x. If the name is "men," for instance, let x represent "all men," or the class "men." By a class is usually meant a collection of individuals, to each of which a particular name or description may be applied; but in this work the meaning of the term will be extended so as to include the case in which but a single individual exists, answering to the required name or description, as well as the cases denoted by the terms "nothing" and "universe," which as "classes" should be understood to comprise respectively "no beings," "all beings." Again, if an adjective, as "good," is employed as a term of description, let us represent by a letter, as y, all things to which the description "good" is applicable, i.e. "all good things," or the class "good things." Let it further be agreed, that by the combination xy shall be represented that class of things to which the names or descriptions represented by x and y are simultaneously applicable. Thus, if x alone stands for "white things," and y for "sheep," let xy stand for "white sheep;" and in like manner, if z stand for "horned things," and x and y retain their previous interpretations, let zxy represent

"horned white sheep," i.e. that collection of things to which the name "sheep," and the descriptions "white" and "horned" are together applicable.

Let us now consider the laws to which the symbols x, y, &c., used in the above sense, are subject.

7. First, it is evident, that according to the above combinations, the order in which two symbols are written is indifferent. The expressions xy and yx equally represent that class of things to the several members of which the names or descriptions x and y are together applicable. Hence we have,

$$xy = yx. \qquad (1)$$

In the case of x representing white things, and y sheep, either of the members of this equation will represent the class of "white sheep." There may be a difference as to the order in which the conception is formed, but there is none as to the individual things which are comprehended under it. In like manner, if x represent "estuaries," and y "rivers," the expressions xy and yx will indifferently represent "rivers that are estuaries," or "estuaries that are rivers," the combination in this case being in ordinary language that of two substantives, instead of that of a substantive and an adjective as in the previous instance. Let there be a third symbol, as z, representing that class of things to which the term "navigable" is applicable, and any one of the following expressions,

$$zxy, \quad zyx, \quad xyz, \text{ \&c.},$$

will represent the class of "navigable rivers that are estuaries."

If one of the descriptive terms should have some implied reference to another, it is only necessary to include that reference expressly in its stated meaning, in order to render the above remarks still applicable. Thus, if x represent "wise" and y "counsellor," we shall have to define whether x implies wisdom in the absolute sense, or only the wisdom of counsel. With such definition the law $xy = yx$ continues to be valid.

We are permitted, therefore, to employ the symbols x, y, z, &c., in the place of the substantives, adjectives, and descriptive phrases subject to the rule of interpretation, that any expression in which several of these symbols are written together shall represent all the objects or indi-

viduals to which their several meanings are together applicable, and to the law that the order in which the symbols succeed each other is indifferent.

As the rule of interpretation has been sufficiently exemplified, I shall deem it unnecessary always to express the subject "things" in defining the interpretation of a symbol used for an adjective. When I say, let x represent "good," it will be understood that x only represents "good" when a subject for that quality is supplied by another symbol, and that, used alone, its interpretation will be "good things."

8. Concerning the law above determined, the following observations, which will also be more or less appropriate to certain other laws to be deduced hereafter, may be added.

First, I would remark, that this law is a law of thought, and not, properly speaking, a law of things. Difference in the order of the qualities or attributes of an object, apart from all questions of causation, is a difference in conception merely. The law (1) expresses as a general truth, that the same thing may be conceived in different ways, and states the nature of that difference; and it does no more than this.

Secondly, As a law of thought, it is actually developed in a law of Language, the product and the instrument of thought. Though the tendency of prose writing is toward uniformity, yet even there the order of sequence of adjectives absolute in their meaning, and applied to the same subject, is indifferent, but poetic diction borrows much of its rich diversity from the extension of the same lawful freedom to the substantive also. The language of Milton is peculiarly distinguished by this species of variety. Not only does the substantive often precede the adjectives by which it is qualified, but it is frequently placed in their midst. In the first few lines of the invocation to Light, we meet with such examples as the following:

"*Offspring of heaven first-born.*"

"The rising world of *waters dark and deep.*"

"Bright effluence of *bright essence increate.*"

Now these inverted forms are not simply the fruits of a poetic license. They are the natural expressions of a freedom sanctioned by the intimate laws of thought, but for reasons of convenience not exercised in the ordinary use of language.

Thirdly, The law expressed by (1) may be characterized by saying that the literal symbols x, y, z, are *commutative, like the symbols of Algebra*. In saying this, it is not affirmed that the process of multiplication in Algebra, of which the fundamental law is expressed by the equation

$$xy = yx,$$

possesses in itself any analogy with that process of logical combination which xy has been made to represent above; but only that if the arithmetical and the logical process are expressed in the same manner, their symbolical expressions will be subject to the same formal law. The evidence of that subjection is in the two cases quite distinct.

9. As the combination of two literal symbols in the form xy expresses the whole of that class of objects to which the names or qualities represented by x and y are together applicable, it follows that if the two symbols have exactly the same signification, their combination expresses no more than either of the symbols taken alone would do. In such case we should therefore have

$$xy = x.$$

As y is, however, supposed to have the same meaning as x, we may replace it in the above equation by x, and we thus get

$$xx = x.$$

Now in common Algebra the combination xx is more briefly represented by x^2. Let us adopt the same principle of notation here; for the mode of expressing a particular succession of mental operations is a thing in itself quite as arbitrary as the mode of expressing a single idea or operation (II. 3). In accordance with this notation, then, the above equation assumes the form

$$x^2 = x, \qquad (2)$$

and is, in fact, the expression of a second general law of those symbols by which names, qualities, or descriptions, are symbolically represented.

The reader must bear in mind that although the symbols x and y in the examples previously formed received significations distinct from each other, nothing prevents us from attributing to them precisely the same signification. It is evident that the more nearly their actual significations approach to each other, the more nearly does the class of things denoted by the combination xy approach to identity with the class denoted by x, as well as with that denoted by y. The case supposed in the demonstration of the equation (2) is that of *absolute* identity of meaning. The law which it expresses is practically exemplified in language. To say "good, good," in relation to any subject, though a cumbrous and useless pleonasm, is the same as to say "good." Thus "good, good" men, is equivalent to "good" men. Such repetitions of words are indeed sometimes employed to heighten a quality or strengthen an affirmation. But this effect is merely secondary and conventional; it is not founded in the intrinsic relations of language and thought. Most of the operations which we observe in nature, or perform ourselves, are of such a kind that their effect is augmented by repetition, and this circumstance prepares us to expect the same thing in language, and even to use repetition when we design to speak with emphasis. But neither in strict reasoning nor in exact discourse is there any just ground for such a practice.

10. We pass now to the consideration of another class of the signs of speech, and of the laws connected with their use.

CLASS II.

11. *Signs of those mental operations whereby we collect parts into a whole, or separate a whole into its parts.*

We are not only capable of entertaining the conceptions of objects, as characterized by names, qualities, or circumstances, applicable to each individual of the group under consideration, but also of forming the aggregate conception of a group of objects consisting of partial groups, each of which is separately named or described. For this purpose we use the conjunctions "and," "or," &c. "Trees and minerals," "barren mountains, or fertile vales," are examples of this kind. In strictness, the words

"and," "or," interposed between the terms descriptive of two or more classes of objects, imply that those classes are quite distinct, so that no member of one is found in another. In this and in all other respects the words "and" "or" are analogous with the sign + in algebra, and their laws are identical. Thus the expression "men and women" is, conventional meanings set aside, equivalent with the expression "women and men." Let x represent "men," y, "women;" and let + stand for "*and*" and "*or*," then we have

$$x + y = y + x, \qquad (3)$$

an equation which would equally hold true if x and y represented *numbers*, and + were the sign of arithmetical addition.

Let the symbol z stand for the adjective "European," then since it is, in effect, the same thing to say "European men and women," as to say "European men and European women," we have

$$z(x + y) = zx + zy. \qquad (4)$$

And this equation also would be equally true were x, y, and z symbols of number, and were the juxtaposition of two literal symbols to represent their algebraic product, just as in the logical signification previously given, it represents the class of objects to which both the epithets conjoined belong.

The above are the laws which govern the use of the sign +, here used to denote the positive operation of aggregating parts into a whole. But the very idea of an operation effecting some positive change seems to suggest to us the idea of an opposite or negative operation, having the effect of undoing what the former one has done. Thus we cannot conceive it possible to collect parts into a whole, and not conceive it also possible to separate a part from a whole. This operation we express in common language by the sign *except*, as, "All men *except* Asiatics," "All states *except* those which are monarchical." Here it is implied that the things excepted form a part of the things from which they are excepted. As we have expressed the operation of aggregation by the sign +, so we may express the negative operation above described by − minus. Thus if x be taken to represent men, and y, Asiatics, i. e. Asiatic men, then the conception of "All men except Asiatics" will be expressed by $x - y$. And if we represent by x, "states," and by y the descriptive property "having a monarchical form," then the conception of "All states except those which are monarchical" will be expressed by $x - xy$.

As it is indifferent for all the *essential* purposes of reasoning whether we express excepted cases first or last in the order of speech, it is also indifferent in what order we write any series of terms, some of which are affected by the sign $-$. Thus we have, as in the common algebra,

$$x - y = -y + x. \qquad (5)$$

Still representing by x the class "men," and by y "Asiatics," let z represent the adjective "white." Now to apply the adjective "white" to the collection of men expressed by the phrase "Men except Asiatics," is the same as to say, "White men, except white Asiatics." Hence we have

$$z(x - y) = zx - zy. \qquad (6)$$

This is also in accordance with the laws of ordinary algebra.

The equations (4) and (6) may be considered as exemplification of a single general law, which may be stated by saying, *that the literal symbols, x, y, z, &c. are distributive in their operation.* The general fact which that law expresses is this, viz.:—If any quality or circumstance is ascribed to all the members of a group, formed either by aggregation or exclusion of partial groups, the resulting conception is the same as if the quality or circumstance were first ascribed to each member of the partial groups, and the aggregation or exclusion effected afterwards. That which is ascribed to the members of the whole is ascribed to the members of all its parts, howsoever those parts are connected together.

CLASS III.

12. *Signs by which relation is expressed, and by which we form propositions.*

Though all verbs may with propriety be referred to this class, it is sufficient for the purposes of Logic to consider it as including only the substantive verb *is* or *are*, since every other verb

may be resolved into this element, and one of the signs included under Class I. For as those signs are used to express quality or circumstance of every kind, they may be employed to express the active or passive relation of the subject of the verb, considered with reference either to past, to present, or to future time. Thus the Proposition, "Cæsar conquered the Gauls," may be resolved into "Cæsar is he who conquered the Gauls." The ground of this analysis I conceive to be the following:—Unless we understand what is meant by having conquered the Gauls, i. e. by the expression "One who conquered the Gauls," we cannot understand the sentence in question. It is, therefore, truly an element of that sentence; another element is "Cæsar," and there is yet another required, the copula *is*, to show the connexion of these two. I do not, however, affirm that there is no other mode than the above of contemplating the relation expressed by the proposition, "Cæsar conquered the Gauls;" but only that the analysis here given is a correct one for the particular point of view which has been taken, and that it suffices for the purposes of logical deduction. It may be remarked that the passive and future participles of the Greek language imply the existence of the principle which has been asserted, viz.: that the sign *is* or *are* may be regarded as an element of every personal verb.

13. The above sign, *is* or *are*, may be expressed by the symbol $=$. The laws, or as would usually be said, the axioms which the symbol introduces, are next to be considered.

Let us take the Proposition, "The stars are the suns and the planets," and let us represent stars by x, suns by y, and planets by z; we have then

$$x = y + z. \qquad (7)$$

Now if it be true that the stars are the suns and the planets, it will follow that the stars, except the planets, are suns. This would give the equation

$$x - z = y, \qquad (8)$$

which must therefore be a deduction from (7). Thus a term z has been removed from one side of an equation to the other by changing its sign. This is in accordance with the algebraic rule of transposition.

But instead of dwelling upon particular cases, we may at once affirm the general axioms :—

1st. If equal things are added to equal things, the wholes are equal.

2nd. If equal things are taken from equal things, the remainders are equal.

And it hence appears that we may add or subtract equations, and employ the rule of transposition above given just as in common algebra.

Again: If two classes of things, x and y, be identical, that is, if all the members of the one are members of the other, then those members of the one class which possess a given property z will be identical with those members of the other which possess the same property z. Hence if we have the equation

$$x = y;$$

then whatever class or property z may represent, we have also

$$zx = zy.$$

This is formally the same as the algebraic law :—If both members of an equation are multiplied by the same quantity, the products are equal.

In like manner it may be shown that if the corresponding members of two equations are multiplied together, the resulting equation is true.

14. Here, however, the analogy of the present system with that of algebra, as commonly stated, appears to stop. Suppose it true that those members of a class x which possess a certain property z are identical with those members of a class y which possess the same property z, it does not follow that the members of the class x universally are identical with the members of the class y. Hence it cannot be inferred from the equation

$$zx = zy,$$

that the equation

$$x = y$$

is also true. In other words, the axiom of algebraists, that both

sides of an equation may be divided by the same quantity, has no formal equivalent here. I say no *formal equivalent*, because, in accordance with the general spirit of these inquiries, it is not even sought to determine whether the mental operation which is represented by removing a logical symbol, z, from a combination zx, is in itself analogous with the operation of division in Arithmetic. That mental operation is indeed identical with what is commonly termed Abstraction, and it will hereafter appear that its laws are dependent upon the laws already deduced in this chapter. What has now been shown is, that there does not exist among those laws anything analogous in *form* with a commonly received axiom of Algebra.

But a little consideration will show that even in common algebra that axiom does not possess the generality of those other axioms which have been considered. The deduction of the equation $x = y$ from the equation $zx = zy$ is only valid when it is known that z is not equal to 0. If then the value $z = 0$ is supposed to be admissible in the algebraic system, the axiom above stated ceases to be applicable, and the analogy before exemplified remains at least unbroken.

15. However, it is not with the symbols of quantity generally that it is of any importance, except as a matter of speculation, to trace such affinities. We have seen (II. 9) that the symbols of Logic are subject to the special law,

$$x^2 = x.$$

Now of the symbols of Number there are but two, viz. 0 and 1, which are subject to the same formal law. We know that $0^2 = 0$, and that $1^2 = 1$; and the equation $x^2 = x$, considered as algebraic, has no other roots than 0 and 1. Hence, instead of determining the measure of formal agreement of the symbols of Logic with those of Number generally, it is more immediately suggested to us to compare them with symbols of quantity *admitting only of the values* 0 *and* 1. Let us conceive, then, of an Algebra in which the symbols x, y, z, &c. admit indifferently of the values 0 and 1, and of these values alone. The laws, the axioms, and the processes, of such an Algebra will be identical in their whole extent with the laws, the axioms, and the processes of an Algebra of Logic. Difference of interpretation will alone divide them. Upon this principle the method of the following work is established.

16. It now remains to show that those constituent parts of ordinary language which have not been considered in the previous sections of this chapter are either resolvable into the same elements as those which have been considered, or are subsidiary to those elements by contributing to their more precise definition.

The substantive, the adjective, and the verb, together with the particles *and*, *except*, we have already considered. The pronoun may be regarded as a particular form of the substantive or the adjective. The adverb modifies the meaning of the verb, but does not affect its nature. Prepositions contribute to the expression of circumstance or relation, and thus tend to give precision and detail to the meaning of the literal symbols. The conjunctions *if*, *either*, *or*, are used chiefly in the expression of relation among propositions, and it will hereafter be shown that the same relations can be completely expressed by elementary symbols analogous in interpretation, and identical in form and law with the symbols whose use and meaning have been explained in this Chapter. As to any remaining elements of speech, it will, upon examination, be found that they are used either to give a more definite significance to the terms of discourse, and thus enter into the interpretation of the literal symbols already considered, or to express some emotion or state of feeling accompanying the utterance of a proposition, and thus do not belong to the province of the understanding, with which alone our present concern lies. Experience of its use will testify to the sufficiency of the classification which has been adopted.

CHAPTER III.

DERIVATION OF THE LAWS OF THE SYMBOLS OF LOGIC FROM THE LAWS OF THE OPERATIONS OF THE HUMAN MIND.

1. THE object of science, properly so called, is the knowledge of laws and relations. To be able to distinguish what is essential to this end, from what is only accidentally associated with it, is one of the most important conditions of scientific progress. I say, to *distinguish* between these elements, because a consistent devotion to science does not require that the attention should be altogether withdrawn from other speculations, often of a metaphysical nature, with which it is not unfrequently connected. Such questions, for instance, as the existence of a sustaining ground of phænomena, the reality of cause, the propriety of forms of speech implying that the successive states of things are connected by *operations*, and others of a like nature, may possess a deep interest and significance in relation to science, without being essentially scientific. It is indeed scarcely possible to express the conclusions of natural science without borrowing the language of these conceptions. Nor is there necessarily any practical inconvenience arising from this source. They who believe, and they who refuse to believe, that there is more in the relation of cause and effect than an invariable order of succession, agree in their interpretation of the conclusions of physical astronomy. But they only agree because they recognise a common element of scientific truth, which is independent of their particular views of the nature of causation.

2. If this distinction is important in physical science, much more does it deserve attention in connexion with the science of the intellectual powers. For the questions which this science presents become, in expression at least, almost necessarily mixed up with modes of thought and language, which betray a metaphysical origin. The idealist would give to the laws of reasoning

one form of expression; the sceptic, if true to his principles, another. They who regard the phænomena with which we are concerned in this inquiry as the mere successive *states* of the thinking subject devoid of any causal connexion, and they who refer them to the *operations* of an active intelligence, would, if consistent, equally differ in their modes of statement. Like difference would also result from a difference of classification of the mental faculties. Now the principle which I would here assert, as affording us the only ground of confidence and stability amid so much of seeming and of real diversity, is the following, viz., that if the laws in question are really deduced from observation, they have a real existence as laws of the human mind, independently of any metaphysical theory which may seem to be involved in the mode of their statement. They contain an element of truth which no ulterior criticism upon the nature, or even upon the reality, of the mind's operations, can essentially affect. Let it even be granted that the mind is but a succession of states of consciousness, a series of fleeting impressions uncaused from without or from within, emerging out of nothing, and returning into nothing again,—the last refinement of the sceptic intellect,—still, as laws of succession, or at least of a past succession, the results to which observation had led would remain true. They would require to be interpreted into a language from whose vocabulary all such terms as cause and effect, operation and subject, substance and attribute, had been banished; but they would still be valid as scientific truths.

Moreover, as any statement of the laws of thought, founded upon actual observation, must thus contain scientific elements which are independent of metaphysical theories of the nature of the mind, the practical application of such elements to the construction of a system or method of reasoning must also be independent of metaphysical distinctions. For it is upon the scientific elements involved in the statement of the laws, that any practical application will rest, just as the practical conclusions of physical astronomy are independent of any theory of the cause of gravitation, but rest only on the knowledge of its phænomenal effects. And, therefore, as respects both the determination of the laws of thought, and the practical use of them when discovered, we are, for all really scientific ends, unconcerned with the truth or falsehood of any metaphysical speculations whatever.

3. The course which it appears to me to be expedient, under these circumstances, to adopt, is to avail myself as far as possible of the language of common discourse, without regard to any theory of the nature and powers of the mind which it may be thought to embody. For instance, it is agreeable to common usage to say that we converse with each other by the communication of ideas, or conceptions, such communication being the office of words; and that with reference to any particular ideas or conceptions presented to it, the mind possesses certain powers or faculties by which the mental regard may be fixed upon some ideas, to the exclusion of others, or by which the given conceptions or ideas may, in various ways, be combined together. To those faculties or powers different names, as Attention, Simple Apprehension, Conception or Imagination, Abstraction, &c., have been given,—names which have not only furnished the titles of distinct divisions of the philosophy of the human mind, but passed into the common language of men. Whenever, then, occasion shall occur to use these terms, I shall do so without implying thereby that I accept the theory that the mind possesses such and such powers and faculties as distinct elements of its activity. Nor is it indeed necessary to inquire whether such powers of the understanding have a distinct existence or not. We may merge these different titles under the one generic name of *Operations* of the human mind, define these operations so far as is necessary for the purposes of this work, and then seek to express their ultimate laws. Such will be the general order of the course which I shall pursue, though reference will occasionally be made to the names which common agreement has assigned to the particular states or operations of the mind which may fall under our notice.

It will be most convenient to distribute the more definite results of the following investigation into distinct Propositions.

PROPOSITION I.

4. *To deduce the laws of the symbols of Logic from a consideration of those operations of the mind which are implied in the strict use of language as an instrument of reasoning.*

In every discourse, whether of the mind conversing with its own thoughts, or of the individual in his intercourse with others, there is an assumed or expressed limit within which the subjects of its operation are confined. The most unfettered discourse is that in which the words we use are understood in the widest possible application, and for them the limits of discourse are co-extensive with those of the universe itself. But more usually we confine ourselves to a less spacious field. Sometimes, in discoursing of men we imply (without expressing the limitation) that it is of men only under certain circumstances and conditions that we speak, as of civilized men, or of men in the vigour of life, or of men under some other condition or relation. Now, whatever may be the extent of the field within which all the objects of our discourse are found, that field may properly be termed the universe of discourse.

5. Furthermore, this universe of discourse is in the strictest sense the ultimate *subject* of the discourse. The office of any name or descriptive term employed under the limitations supposed is not to raise in the mind the conception of all the beings or objects to which that name or description is applicable, but only of those which exist within the supposed universe of discourse. If that universe of discourse is the actual universe of things, which it always is when our words are taken in their real and literal sense, then by men we mean *all men that exist;* but if the universe of discourse is limited by any antecedent implied understanding, then it is of men under the limitation thus introduced that we speak. It is in both cases the business of the word *men* to direct a certain operation of the mind, by which, from the proper universe of discourse, we select or fix upon the individuals signified.

6. Exactly of the same kind is the mental operation implied by the use of an adjective. Let, for instance, the universe of discourse be the actual Universe. Then, as the word *men* directs

us to select mentally from that Universe all the beings to which the term "men" is applicable; so the adjective "good," in the combination "good men," directs us still further to select mentally from the class of *men* all those who possess the further quality "good;" and if another adjective were prefixed to the combination "good men," it would direct a further operation of the same nature, having reference to that further quality which it might be chosen to express.

It is important to notice carefully the real nature of the operation here described, for it is conceivable, that it might have been different from what it is. Were the adjective simply *attributive* in its character, it would seem, that when a particular set of beings is designated by *men*, the prefixing of the adjective *good* would direct us to attach mentally to all those beings the quality of goodness. But this is not the real office of the adjective. The operation which we really perform is one of *selection according to a prescribed principle or idea.* To what faculties of the mind such an operation would be referred, according to the received classification of its powers, it is not important to inquire, but I suppose that it would be considered as dependent upon the two faculties of Conception or Imagination, and Attention. To the one of these faculties might be referred the formation of the general conception; to the other the fixing of the mental regard upon those individuals within the prescribed universe of discourse which answer to the conception. If, however, as seems not improbable, the power of Attention is nothing more than the power of continuing the exercise of any other faculty of the mind, we might properly regard the whole of the mental process above described as referrible to the mental faculty of Imagination or Conception, the first step of the process being the conception of the Universe itself, and each succeeding step limiting in a definite manner the conception thus formed. Adopting this view, I shall describe each such step, or any definite combination of such steps, as a *definite act of conception.* And the use of this term I shall extend so as to include in its meaning not only the conception of classes of objects represented by particular names or simple attributes of quality, but also the combination of such conceptions in any manner consistent with the powers and limitations of the human mind; indeed, any intellectual operation short of that which is involved in the structure of a sentence or proposition. The general laws to which such operations of the mind are subject are now to be considered.

7. Now it will be shown that the laws which in the preceding chapter have been determined *à posteriori* from the constitution of language, for the use of the literal symbols of Logic, are in reality the laws of that definite mental operation which has just been described. We commence our discourse with a certain understanding as to the limits of its subject, i. e. as to the limits of its Universe. Every name, every term of description that we employ, directs him whom we address to the performance of a certain mental operation upon that subject. And thus is thought communicated. But as each name or descriptive term is in this view but the representative of an intellectual operation, that operation being also prior in the order of nature, it is clear that the laws of the name or symbol must be of a derivative character,—must, in fact, originate in those of the operation which they represent. That the laws of the symbol and of the mental process are identical in expression will now be shown.

8. Let us then suppose that the universe of our discourse is the actual universe, so that words are to be used in the full extent of their meaning, and let us consider the two mental operations implied by the words "white" and "men." The word "men" implies the operation of selecting in thought from its subject, the universe, all men; and the resulting conception, *men*, becomes the subject of the next operation. The operation implied by the word "white" is that of selecting from its subject, "men," all of that class which are white. The final resulting conception is that of "white men." Now it is perfectly apparent that if the operations above described had been performed in a converse order, the result would have been the same. Whether we begin by forming the conception of "*men*," and then by a second intellectual act limit that conception to "white men," or whether we begin by forming the conception of "white objects," and then limit it to such of that class as are "men," is perfectly indifferent so far as the result is concerned. It is obvious that the order of the mental processes would be equally

indifferent if for the words "white" and "men" we substituted any other descriptive or appellative terms whatever, provided only that their meaning was fixed and absolute. And thus the indifference of the order of two successive acts of the faculty of Conception, the one of which furnishes the subject upon which the other is supposed to operate, is a general condition of the exercise of that faculty. It is a law of the mind, and it is the real origin of that law of the literal symbols of Logic which constitutes its formal expression (1) Chap. II.

9. It is equally clear that the mental operation above described is of such a nature that its effect is not altered by repetition. Suppose that by a definite act of conception the attention has been fixed upon men, and that by another exercise of the same faculty we limit it to those of the race who are white. Then any further repetition of the latter mental act, by which the attention is limited to white objects, does not in any way modify the conception arrived at, viz., that of white men. This is also an example of a general law of the mind, and it has its formal expression in the law ((2) Chap. II.) of the literal symbols.

10. Again, it is manifest that from the conceptions of two distinct classes of things we can form the conception of that collection of things which the two classes taken together compose; and it is obviously indifferent in what order of position or of priority those classes are presented to the mental view. This is another general law of the mind, and its expression is found in (3) Chap. II.

11. It is not necessary to pursue this course of inquiry and comparison. Sufficient illustration has been given to render manifest the two following positions, viz.:

First, That the operations of the mind, by which, in the exercise of its power of imagination or conception, it combines and modifies the simple ideas of things or qualities, not less than those operations of the reason which are exercised upon truths and propositions, are subject to general laws.

Secondly, That those laws are mathematical in their form, and that they are actually developed in the essential laws of human language. Wherefore the laws of the symbols of Logic are deducible from a consideration of the operations of the mind in reasoning.

12. The remainder of this chapter will be occupied with questions relating to that law of thought whose expression is $x^2 = x$ (II. 9), a law which, as has been implied (II. 15), forms the characteristic distinction of the operations of the mind in its ordinary discourse and reasoning, as compared with its operations when occupied with the general algebra of quantity. An important part of the following inquiry will consist in proving that the symbols 0 and 1 occupy a place, and are susceptible of an interpretation, among the symbols of Logic; and it may first be necessary to show how particular symbols, such as the above, may with propriety and advantage be employed in the representation of distinct systems of thought.

The ground of this propriety cannot consist in any community of interpretation. For in systems of thought so truly distinct as those of Logic and Arithmetic (I use the latter term in its widest sense as the science of Number), there is, properly speaking, no community of subject. The one of them is conversant with the very conceptions of things, the other takes account solely of their numerical relations. But inasmuch as the forms and methods of any system of reasoning depend immediately upon the laws to which the symbols are subject, and only mediately, through the above link of connexion, upon their interpretation, there may be both propriety and advantage in employing the same symbols in different systems of thought, provided that such interpretations can be assigned to them as shall render their formal laws identical, and their use consistent. The ground of that employment will not then be community of interpretation, but the community of the formal laws, to which in their respective systems they are subject. Nor must that community of formal laws be established upon any other ground than that of a careful observation and comparison of those results which are seen to flow independently from the interpretations of the systems under consideration.

These observations will explain the process of inquiry adopted in the following Proposition. The literal symbols of Logic are

universally subject to the law whose expression is $x^2 = x$. Of the symbols of Number there are two only, 0 and 1, which satisfy this law. But each of these symbols is also subject to a law peculiar to itself in the system of numerical magnitude, and this suggests the inquiry, what interpretations must be given to the literal symbols of Logic, in order that the same peculiar and formal laws may be realized in the logical system also.

Proposition II.

13. *To determine the logical value and significance of the symbols 0 and 1.*

The symbol 0, as used in Algebra, satisfies the following formal law,

$$0 \times y = 0, \text{ or } 0y = 0, \qquad (1)$$

whatever *number* y may represent. That this formal law may be obeyed in the system of Logic, we must assign to the symbol 0 such an interpretation that the *class* represented by $0y$ may be identical with the class represented by 0, whatever the class y may be. A little consideration will show that this condition is satisfied if the symbol 0 represent Nothing. In accordance with a previous definition, we may term Nothing a class. In fact, Nothing and Universe are the two limits of class extension, for they are the limits of the possible interpretations of general names, none of which can relate to fewer individuals than are comprised in Nothing, or to more than are comprised in the Universe. Now whatever the class y may be, the individuals which are common to it and to the class "Nothing" are identical with those comprised in the class "Nothing," for they are none. And thus by assigning to 0 the interpretation Nothing, the law (1) is satisfied; and it is not otherwise satisfied consistently with the perfectly general character of the class y.

Secondly, The symbol 1 satisfies in the system of Number the following law, viz.,

$$1 \times y = y, \text{ or } 1y = y,$$

whatever number y may represent. And this formal equation being assumed as equally valid in the system of this work, in which 1 and y represent classes, it appears that the symbol 1 must represent such a class that all the individuals which are found in *any* proposed class y are also all the individuals $1y$ that are common to that class y and the class represented by 1. A little consideration will here show that the class represented by 1 must be "the Universe," since this is the only class in which are found *all* the individuals that exist in *any* class. Hence the respective interpretations of the symbols 0 and 1 in the system of Logic are *Nothing* and *Universe*.

14. As with the idea of any class of objects as "men," there is suggested to the mind the idea of the contrary class of beings which are not men; and as the whole Universe is made up of these two classes together, since of every individual which it comprehends we may affirm either that it is a man, or that it is not a man, it becomes important to inquire how such contrary names are to be expressed. Such is the object of the following Proposition.

Proposition III.

If x represent any class of objects, then will $1 - x$ represent the contrary or supplementary class of objects, i. e. *the class including all objects which are not comprehended in the class x.*

For greater distinctness of conception let x represent the class *men*, and let us express, according to the last Proposition, the Universe by 1; now if from the conception of the Universe, as consisting of "men" and "not-men," we exclude the conception of "men," the resulting conception is that of the contrary class, "not-men." Hence the class "not-men" will be represented by $1 - x$. And, in general, whatever class of objects is represented by the symbol x, the contrary class will be expressed by $1 - x$.

15. Although the following Proposition belongs in strictness to a future chapter of this work, devoted to the subject of *maxims* or *necessary truths*, yet, on account of the great importance of that law of thought to which it relates, it has been thought proper to introduce it here.

Proposition IV.

That axiom of metaphysicians which is termed the principle of contradiction, and which affirms that it is impossible for any being to possess a quality, and at the same time not to possess it, is a consequence of the fundamental law of thought, whose expression is $x^2 = x$.

Let us write this equation in the form

$$x - x^2 = 0,$$

whence we have

$$x(1 - x) = 0; \qquad (1)$$

both these transformations being justified by the axiomatic laws of combination and transposition (II. 13). Let us, for simplicity of conception, give to the symbol x the particular interpretation of *men*, then $1 - x$ will represent the class of "not-men" (Prop. III.) Now the formal product of the expressions of two classes represents that class of individuals which is common to them both (II. 6). Hence $x(1 - x)$ will represent the class whose members are at once "men," and "not men," and the equation (1) thus express the principle, *that a class whose members are at the same time men and not men does not exist.* In other words, that *it is impossible for the same individual to be at the same time a man and not a man.* Now let the meaning of the symbol x be extended from the representing of "men," to that of any class of beings characterized by the possession of any quality whatever; and the equation (1) will then express that it is impossible for a being to possess a quality and not to possess that quality at the same time. But this is identically that "principle of contradiction" which Aristotle has described as the fundamental axiom of all philosophy. "It is impossible that the same quality should both belong and not belong to the same thing... This is the most certain of all principles... Wherefore they who demonstrate refer to this as an ultimate opinion. For it is by nature the source of all the other axioms."*

* Τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ ἅμα ὑπάρχειν τε καὶ μὴ ὑπάρχειν ἀδύνατον τῷ αὐτῷ καὶ κατὰ τὸ αὐτό... Αὕτη δὴ πασῶν ἐστὶ βεβαιοτάτη τῶν ἀρχῶν... Διὸ πάντες οἱ ἀποδεικνύντες εἰς ταύτην ἀνάγουσιν ἐσχάτην δόξαν· φύσει γὰρ ἀρχὴ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀξιωμάτων αὕτη πάντων.—*Metaphysica*, III. 3.

The above interpretation has been introduced not on account of its immediate value in the present system, but as an illustration of a significant fact in the philosophy of the intellectual powers, viz., that what has been commonly regarded as the fundamental axiom of metaphysics is but the consequence of a law of thought, mathematical in its form. I desire to direct attention also to the circumstance that the equation (1) in which that fundamental law of thought is expressed is an equation of the second degree.* Without speculating at all in this chapter upon the question, whether that circumstance is necessary in its own nature, we may venture to assert that if it had not existed, the whole procedure of the understanding would have been different from what it is. Thus it is a consequence of the fact that the fundamental equation of thought is of the second degree, that we perform the operation of analysis and classification, by division into pairs of

* Should it here be said that the existence of the equation $x^2 = x$ necessitates also the existence of the equation $x^3 = x$, which is of the third degree, and then inquired whether that equation does not indicate a process of *trichotomy*; the answer is, that the equation $x^3 = x$ is not interpretable in the system of logic. For writing it in either of the forms

$$x(1-x)(1+x) = 0, \quad (2)$$
$$x(1-x)(-1-x) = 0, \quad (3)$$

we see that its interpretation, if possible at all, must involve that of the factor $1 + x$, or of the factor $-1 - x$. The former is not interpretable, because we cannot conceive of the addition of any class x to the universe 1; the latter is not interpretable, because the symbol -1 is not subject to the law $x(1-x) = 0$, to which all class symbols are subject. Hence the equation $x^3 = x$ admits of no interpretation analogous to that of the equation $x^2 = x$. Were the former equation, however, true independently of the latter, i. e. were that act of the mind which is denoted by the symbol x, such that its second repetition should reproduce the result of a single operation, but not its first or mere repetition, it is presumable that we should be able to interpret one of the forms (2), (3), which under the actual conditions of thought we cannot do. There exist operations, known to the mathematician, the law of which may be adequately expressed by the equation $x^3 = x$. But they are of a nature altogether foreign to the province of general reasoning.

In saying that it is conceivable that the law of thought might have been different from what it is, I mean only that we can frame such an hypothesis, and study its consequences. The possibility of doing this involves no such doctrine as that the actual law of human reason is the product either of chance or of arbitrary will.

opposites, or, as it is technically said, by *dichotomy*. Now if the equation in question had been of the third degree, still admitting of interpretation as such, the mental division must have been threefold in character, and we must have proceeded by a species of *trichotomy*, the real nature of which it is impossible for us, with our existing faculties, adequately to conceive, but the laws of which we might still investigate as an object of intellectual speculation.

16. The law of thought expressed by the equation (1) will, for reasons which are made apparent by the above discussion, be occasionally referred to as the "law of duality."