

# Reality: Matter or Mind?

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*Our lives seem to be involved with matter and controlled by it to a greater or lesser degree. Sometimes matter can seem positive and even uplifting. Other times it can be troublesome. And occasionally it can present apparently unsolvable problems.*

Then is when we have to decide whether we're going to accept the material conditions as reality and submit to them or whether we're going to challenge their reality.

## The Perception of Spirit Solves a Humanly Unsolvable Problem

A man I know had to make such a decision because he faced a material situation which didn't seem to have a human solution. He was Director of Military Operations on Johnston Island in the Pacific where high-altitude nuclear tests were being conducted.

A Thor missile had just been launched containing nearly a thousand tons of explosive energy. The trajectory was erratic, sending it straight up into the sky instead of downrange. A decision was made to explode it before it got beyond their control.

This meant that tons of debris, including radioactive material, would fall back on the small island. Rocket launchers, fully fueled aircraft, and a liquid oxygen plant on the island made the situation even more dangerous. The debris would take 20 to 25 minutes to fall to the island.

A general fear of disaster gripped the control center. The Director said his first reaction was fear too, but then he went into his office to pray. His first thought was: "There are no accidents in divine Mind." He continued reasoning: "There's only one power in control here, that is, God,

divine Love. And God's love is caring for everyone here. So there can't be destruction and disaster because the one Mind governs all."

When he came out, he had a complete sense that "all is well." He went around the control center assuring the physicists and scientists that everything was going to be all right. He said, "They looked at me as though I was out of my mind."

I asked him, "What were they doing during this time?" He said, "Being physicists, they were figuring the probabilities — what could happen, what could not happen."

He had a closed-circuit television system, and he scanned the island as the debris began to impact. He said everything fell in open areas — on the runway, into parking ramps, between buildings, even alongside an airplane and rolled underneath. But nothing touched an airplane, a rocket launcher, a building of any type. Further evidence of all-knowing Mind was that all the contaminated material from the nuclear device fell in the lagoon, where it was harmlessly washed off.

I asked if there was any comment. He replied, "One physicist said, 'It's an absolute miracle'."

Then another man looked right at him and asked, "How did you know it would turn out like this?"

The Director said, "I just had an assurance that everything was under control."

## The Perception of Spirit Impels Us to Learn More of Spirit

How could this man, trained along the lines of physical science, feel that in spite of the material odds, there was a spiritual power that would guarantee safety? How could he be willing to challenge the material ap-

pearance as constituting reality?

Well, he'd seen members of his family solve material problems through spiritual trust. Then he himself had taken up the earnest study of Christian Science when he faced a serious eye problem. The condition was healed entirely through spiritual means.

So it was natural when he faced this danger that he'd feel he didn't have to accept the material picture of inevitable disaster. It's true his first reaction was fear. But this didn't last. He had seen that material probabilities can be reversed. This helped him take the first important step of refusing to be locked into a strait-jacket of believing that matter's conditions make up our reality.

For many people this is the first step. Often it comes when the material conditions offer no hope. Then the straitjacket of matter isn't comfortable any more. It's restricting them from finding their answers.

But just rejecting one viewpoint isn't enough. And the Director was doing more than rejecting. He was clarifying in his thought the way this spiritual power operates.

You remember his statement, "There are no accidents in divine Mind." This was the key. He was acknowledging that we live in a universe of ideas evolved by one infinite divine Mind, or God.

Each of these ideas has to be intelligent because the divine Mind is intelligent. So they have to act in an orderly relation to each other. And this is why he was saying there are no accidents in divine Mind.

Even though he seemed to be surrounded by material objects, he saw himself in an environment of perfect ideas evolved and governed by divine Mind. He identified these ideas as having no material characteristics,

such as limitation or destructibility.

In other words, they're spiritual ideas. This is the distinction between the concepts of the so-called material mind and the ideas of the divine Mind or Spirit.

At this point someone could say, "All right, that's one explanation, but this safety could still have been pure luck. After all, the probabilities did allow for it even if the odds were great."

True. But safety was experienced. And safety is an expression of intelligent Mind. So we can just as well consider that the power of the divine Mind or Spirit was in operation here.

There's something here that goes beyond just finding safety though. It's an impulsion to come closer to the reality of our being. When the Director turned to Spirit in the face of the danger, he was being faithful to his deepest insights into reality.

I'm sure we've all had insights and feelings that draw us to an identity beyond what the material senses tell us. It's a beautiful promise. But it does carry with it an obligation to be faithful to it.

And really, you have no choice. It's like when you discover something that corrects a misconception you might have had; once you perceive that corrective truth, you can't go back to believing the misconception, no matter how hard you try.

I know this is the way it was with me as I came to see the whole new light that Christian Science throws on existence. Like the Director, I had seen evidences of Spirit's substantiality, so I couldn't go back to accepting certain former concepts about matter.

I had felt the effects of this spiritual reliance all my life. I have to admit that during my time at college, my interests were diverted somewhat

into other areas. But shortly after this, the impact of what Christian Science was and what it could do was so great that it literally became the prime force in my life, so much so that it impelled me into the full-time study and practice of it as a public Christian Science practitioner.

### **Both Spirit and Matter Can't Be Real**

Now when we accept the allness of Spirit and its ideas as the only reality, the question inevitably arises: What do we do about matter?

And this was the dilemma I kept running into. On the one hand, I was denying the reality of matter, yet at the same time I couldn't dismiss matter. I had to eat, sleep, be housed and clothed materially. I used material things like cars, telephones, writing paper, snow shovels; and I enjoyed sports, books, nature, friends. My life was too dependent on matter to just block it out. For one thing, I couldn't block it out. And somehow it didn't seem right to try to block it out.

Yet I did feel a compulsion to come to terms with it. I felt that a material concept of existence imposed limitation and vulnerability on me. Also it worked against my accepting Spirit and its ideas as the only reality which I felt to be ultimate truth. There had to be some way to see the substance of Spirit and place myself under its control and at the same time deal with matter in a right way while denying its reality.

### **Evolving Physical Theories Show Matter May Not Be What We Thought**

So over the years I've been doing something that might seem almost contradictory. In addition to my spiritual study, I've been exploring what the physical scientists are saying about matter.

I knew they were taking a new approach. I didn't feel they were arriving at the same conclusion as Christian Science, but I did feel they were changing. And I figured if what was formerly believed about matter is being rejected, then very probably what is now believed will drop away too. At any rate, I needed to undercut my own belief in the substantial nature of matter.

So I did extensive reading and talked with experts in the field. And the thing that kept coming to the surface was that when we get down to the level of subatomic physics, a wholly different way of thinking about matter is demanded. A statement by Nobel prize winner Werner Heisenberg summed up for me why a different approach is demanded. He

said: "Atoms are not *things*. When we get down to the atomic level, the objective world in space and time no longer exists."<sup>1</sup> Another way of putting it: The "... ultimate constituents turned out to be not 'things' but processes. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

Arthur Koestler, who has done a lot of writing in the area of the physical sciences, brings out that in the most advanced views, the physicist has to abandon concepts like location, velocity, energy, size.<sup>3</sup>

Then he makes an interesting observation: "Relativity and quantum theory are transforming man's image of the universe around him radically, but the dogmas of nineteenth-century science still dominate the habits of thought of the average educated person who prides himself on a 'rational' outlook."<sup>4</sup> I saw that that described me perfectly. I was bound by the dogmas of nineteenth-century science.

I didn't conclude from this that the physical scientists are all now saying, "There is no matter." Generally they're not saying that at all. However, they are changing their explanations of matter.

The physical scientist considers matter in terms of a set of evolving theories. He sets up mental models of what he believes reality to be. He then tests these theories to see how valid they are. These theories are constantly being replaced by other theories.

So even from the standpoint of the physical sciences, there's far from a conclusive statement about matter, where they can say, "This is it."

Yet in the midst of this fluctuation, a certain pattern of throwing off material limitation does emerge. Just consider the impact in the last decade or so of replacing old theories or limited views of matter with less limited views: We cook with microwaves. We process data at an incredible rate. We use electromagnetic waves to see what's happening on the other side of the world, even on other planets.

As I thought about all of this, I got a different perspective on physical research — as not just the probing into matter but equally the setting aside of limited beliefs about matter. And I saw how a Christian Scientist could be engaged in physical research very effectively without conflict. I also saw that as material limitations are thrown off, thought could open to consider the totally unlimited nature of Spirit and its ideas.

But at the same time I recognized that, regardless of how far the natural scientist may go in throwing off matter's limitation, as long as he holds to the premise of his material measurements, he can't get beyond their boundaries into the unlimited spiritual realm.

### **Mary Baker Eddy Turned from Matter to Materially Mental to Spiritually Mental Cause and Effect**

All of this was very helpful to me in challenging my present concepts of matter as I considered how the physical scientist is continually challenging his concept of matter. And it made me more impressed than ever at the way the Discoverer and Founder of Christian Science, Mary Baker Eddy, continued to challenge the theories of her day until she finally arrived at the conclusion that reality could not be both Spirit and matter.

In a certain sense she went through a process much like the physical scientist, although of course the element of divine revelation was paramount in her discovery. She selected premises and tested them against experience. She was willing to discard old theories as she searched for clearer concepts of reality.

You could say she had one basic premise practically from childhood: it was a conviction of the total goodness of God. From this she concluded that there must be answers to the human need.

Because of her own ill health and her desire to help others, her researches were largely directed to the area of healing. She at once began to see the part thought played in the treatment of disease.

Her contact with homeopathy gave her important insights. She found she could attenuate a drug until there was hardly any of its chemical property left. When this weakened solution was given to a patient and cures followed, this showed the effect didn't come from the drug but from the patient's thought about it and the mental activity of all those involved in the process.

This lessened her faith in the objective nature of matter and led her to explore a largely mental approach to healing. But this too fell short because it didn't really get beyond the material premises of the human mind.

These experiments and observations took her part way. However, during this time she was also having some important purely spiritual breakthroughs. One occurred in 1864. It was a healing of Mary Ann Jarvis. Mrs. Eddy describes this healing in the Christian Science textbook, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. It was a case of consumption, and one of the unusual symptoms of the case was that the patient breathed with great difficulty when the wind was from the east. Mrs. Eddy writes, "My metaphysical treatment changed the action of her belief on the lungs, and she never suffered again from east winds, but was restored to health."<sup>5</sup>

Interestingly enough, for nearly twenty years Mrs. Eddy dated her discovery from this healing. Later she came to see that the even more significant spiritual breakthrough came with her own healing of the effects of an accident that looked as though it would prove fatal.

At that time she had turned deeply and wholly to God and had found response in healing. She wasn't able to explain just how the healing had come about, so she devoted the next three years of her life to searching the Scriptures for the answer.

The totally spiritual nature of reality became apparent to her. She understood her own healing through seeing the healings of Jesus as the operation of a continuing universal divine law. She was able to verify these conclusions in her own healing practice. This confirmed her larger discovery: that reality is spiritual, not material.

### **We Glimpse the Allness of Spirit Through Spiritual Sense**

As I thought about how the physical scientist arrives at new conclusions by going beyond what he thought the material senses were telling him, and how Mrs. Eddy was able to arrive at her radically spiritual conclusions by going beyond what the physical senses seemed to be telling her, I realized this was the answer to my dilemma. I had to go beyond what the corporeal senses were telling me in order to break down some of the rigid concepts I'd formed about matter.

But those physical senses can seem pretty persuasive. Then I considered all of the senses I had besides the five physical senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and feeling.

We all have these senses. For instance, when you came to the lecture *this evening, you had a sense of direction*. When you work in your home or at your job, you have a sense of exactness, diligence. You have senses of promptness, gratitude, loyalty, affection.

You can't detect these with any material measuring instrument. Yet they're very tangible, and through them you determine the nature of your environment.

All of these senses can be classified as being more materially oriented or less materially oriented. Take the sense of joy. Usually joy is thought of as a quality or a feeling. But it's also a sense. When you use the sense of joy, you identify everything around you with this nature.

If your sense of joy is a reaction to material conditions, then it's materially oriented. It can fluctuate. Sometimes it's there, sometimes it's not. But if your joy is independent of



material conditions, then you're beginning to elevate it to the level of a spiritual sense.

I had an experience in the Army where I caught a real glimpse of this. I was walking over to work one morning feeling low. I wasn't depressed, but you might say my sense of joy wasn't exactly energized.

Well, sometime during the morning I saw what I was doing. I got hold of myself, and I realized that joy was a faculty imparted to me by God. It was a component of my being, inherent in my being.

Nothing earthshaking happened. The material circumstances around me didn't change, but the whole hue of my environment changed. I was seeing through the lens of joy.

And on various occasions since then, when I've needed to lift my spirits, I've been able to think back on this simple experience and always I've been able to energize this God-imparted faculty of joy and see my environment through the spiritual sense.

Jesus told us we could do this. He said, "Your joy no man taketh from you."<sup>6</sup>

This may sound like a strange saying coming from a man who himself experienced so much hardship and suffering. But wasn't he indicating this ability we all have to see through the lens of joy in reverse of whatever the material senses may be telling us?

It's true he had to struggle against the attacks that culminated in the crucifixion. But he knew what he was up against. He had even predicted the specific events, and he could have avoided them. Why didn't he?

Wasn't it to teach us the larger lesson than just the Christian virtues and morals, as indispensable as these are — to teach us the larger lesson that our identity is spiritual and not physical? And as we exercise our spiritual sense, we can find safety from bodily harm and even from the mental attacks of envy and hatred.

As he himself realized this, could he be defeated? The demand was great because the physical senses would try to blot out, neutralize, this sense.

Not that joy was the only sense he exercised. He had spoken of peace: "My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you." And he had spoken of love: "Love one another."<sup>8</sup>

Think of the tremendous demand on him to exercise these senses, to see through the lens of peace, when his whole mission as well as his life seemed to be coming to an end. Or to see through the lens of love when his enemies were inflicting the cruelest and most humiliating torture on him — and he actually sought forgiveness for them.

Yet hadn't he already been exercising all these senses when he was with the people and healing them of every kind of human trouble? In place of what the physical senses told, Jesus exercised spiritual sense to see what was really true about them.

This is the power of the Christ: the ability to see with the senses of joy and peace and deep compassionate love. This power of the Christ so lifts us up that what appears to be ailing or limited matter no longer appears that way. Our spiritual sense gives a view of the eternal divine nature of man. We feel reassured, enlightened, loved.

It's not only a mental effect but a physical effect as well because when you've really changed the mental, you've changed the physical, since they can't be separated. It's the clearer spiritual view — seeing our environment through the spiritual senses that does the work.

### We Can Perceive Existence in Spiritual Terms

When we do exercise spiritual sense, what specifically do we see? Do the landscapes fade, our friends leave, our bodies disappear? No. When we exercise our spiritual sense, all that we know and cherish that is worthy remains. We're able to enjoy it more because the limiting and hampering material beliefs about it are dropping away.

At present we seem to see the spiritual ideas that make up reality as matter, but we can know these apparent physical objects have a nature beyond what we see. Mrs. Eddy classifies these objects as mistaken beliefs about real substance. But she doesn't just discount them. She says: "Every material belief hints the existence of spiritual reality; and if mortals are instructed in spiritual things, it will be seen that material belief, in all its manifestations, reversed, will be found the type and representative of verities priceless, eternal, and just at hand."<sup>9</sup>

Reality is here now. It simply requires our spiritual sense to perceive it correctly.

But when we do see substance as it really is — without any material nature — what's it like? Well, it's very tangible. You know the warmth, affection, strength, good humor, that a friend has. This is tangible.

"But," you might say, "that friend also has form and color that I can see in addition to the qualities."

We need to get away from thinking that form and outline are always material. Even some advanced physicists are reaching beyond this. Erwin Schrodinger, also a Nobel prize winner, says, "The habit of everyday

language deceives us and seems to require, whenever we hear the word 'shape' or 'form' pronounced, that it must be the shape or form of something, that a material substratum is required to take on a shape. . . . But when you come to the ultimate particles constituting matter," Schrodinger says, "there seems to be no point in thinking of them again as consisting of some material. They are, as it were, pure shape, nothing but shape; what turns up again and again in successive observations is this shape, not an individual speck of material."<sup>10</sup>

That's one step out. But Mrs. Eddy went even beyond this still limited concept of substance. She saw form and outline are not the concept of the human mind even at an advanced stage of freedom. She writes, "From the infinite elements of the one Mind emanate all form, color, quality, and quantity, and these are mental, both primarily and secondarily."<sup>11</sup>

At this point we may not fully perceive the precise form of spiritual reality — the precise forms of vitality or courage or unselfishness — because our spiritual sense isn't that far developed. But we can be assured that God is constantly bringing forth that form. And it's infinitely endowed with beauty, originality, meaning, and permanence.

You and I are that form, a conscious identity aware of all the spiritual ideas and qualities — you might say the embodiment of all the spiritual ideas and qualities the divine Mind is aware of.

Just to give a little hint of how vast this awareness is, consider knowing an endless number of friends, being with them at all times, and being aware of everything about them constantly. The human thought can scarcely begin to conceive of such an infinite awareness.

At first this might sound pretty crowded, being with all these friends at all times. And it might sound like an overwhelming mental effort, being constantly aware of everything about them. It might even sound a bit too personal constantly knowing everything about them, and it could even sound dull because there'd be nothing new, no surprises.

Isn't this because we're so accustomed to thinking in terms of matter with its time and space? But if we eliminate time and space, then the possibilities become clearer.

Let me use an illustration with numbers. If you think of a trillion numbers, you don't feel crowded — because time and space aren't involved. Yet you know that a trillion doesn't begin to describe all the numbers there are.

And as far as being an overwhelming effort, you don't mind an ex-

panded awareness if it doesn't weigh you down or confuse you. You add up your shopping list or compute your income tax return. And if you're like me, you probably do it one number at a time. (I know there are people who can look at a column of figures and instantly see the answer.)

But you wouldn't mind if you could add up a hundred shopping lists or compute a hundred income tax returns simultaneously if it wasn't a mental strain.

And as far as being too personal, you don't mind knowing all there is to know about numbers as long as it's good and uplifting and helpful. Well, this is the way it is with the people or spiritual identities in God's universe of ideas. Everything you can know about them is good and right and appropriate.

And as far as being dull because it's all known, I'm sure the mathematician knows a lot more about numbers than I do, and he finds it fascinating to explore the endless aspects. Well, in God's universe of ideas, interest and variety are infinitely greater than in mathematics.

The facets of Mind's ideas never run out. And while we know them all, that "all" has no boundary. And each facet includes in its nature the quality of interest, appeal, satisfaction — and action.

What I've described here is just a brief attempt to put in human terms the unlimited and truly glorious nature of being when the belief in matter is removed. Since it is put in material terms and since it does require the actual experiencing of spiritual sense to accurately perceive it, all we can do here is hint of it.

But to the degree our hint is accurate, it can lift thought somewhat out of its material bonds to see the divine possibilities a little clearer. It can help us understand better Jesus' healings of physical disease, his proving of the infinitude of resources in multiplying small amounts of food, his immediate presence with his disciples in the room where the door was locked, his control over gravity and weather.

We may feel far from Jesus' advanced evidences of spiritual awareness, but at least we can begin to understand what lay behind them. We can see the reality and beauty of God's universe shining through. We can say with Mary Baker Eddy, "Earth is more spiritually beautiful to my gaze now than when it was more earthly to the eyes of Eve."<sup>12</sup>

And even before we know the exact nature of spiritual reality, we can establish a base of awareness that is constantly reversing the distortions and limits of material sense and establishing the beauty of our lives on an ever more consistent spiritual foundation.

## Effect Is Increased Harmony and Progress on the Human Scene

What about the practical application of this? It might seem that since Christian Science teaches the unreality of matter and the allness of Spirit and its ideas, there would be no meeting point for solving human problems, particularly those associated with material conditions.

If the physical body and other objects were independent matter, then a meeting point would be hard to find. But Christian Science doesn't just wave off the material world. It identifies it as a mental misrepresentation of the perfect ideas of Spirit which constitute our identity.

Among these mental misconceptions are some that are farther removed from the nature of God's love than others — such as disease, lack, sorrow, violence. So we start by healing these extremes as we progress toward the point of setting aside all material distortion and limitation.

Here's an example of how this works in a physical healing. I received a call from my mother shortly after I'd moved to Minneapolis to enter the practice of Christian Science. She said she'd fallen and broken a bone in her leg. She asked for help in Christian Science.

Together we started affirming that man is spiritual, not material. Starting with this premise, we were able to draw several conclusions which applied to this case and offset specific harmful misconceptions.

For instance, it was very comforting and reassuring to realize that if man is not material, he is not subject to material breakage. In fact, there wouldn't be any matter to come into contact with to cause breakage.

It was also comforting and reassuring to realize that if man is spiritual, not material, he can't make a material misjudgment that would cause an

accident. This was helpful in lifting off the self-recrimination that would say, "How could I have been so careless or thoughtless?" or "How could someone else have been so thoughtless or careless?"

Then it was very helpful to realize that if man is spiritual and not material, he can't experience sensations of pain and inflammation. These were being very insistent at the moment.

This approach was not just a mental device to soothe thought. It was an understanding awareness of reality that eliminates misconceptions — the only substance of any problem.

My mother and I kept on praying along these lines in spite of the pain and other symptoms. Three days later she was back at the insurance company where she worked, wearing high heels, going up and down stairs. Later at a meeting involving company executives and the company doctor, the subject of this healing came up. The healing was confirmed by the doctor. As a result, the company changed its ruling so that from then on, Christian Science treatment was recognized for payment of claims in all types of cases in all their policies throughout the United States and Canada.

Someone might try to explain this healing as just a natural material healing process, although an unusually rapid one. Of course it went much deeper than this.

But even this explanation hints of an orderly beneficent control of the universe. Why not carry it farther and acknowledge that, fully understood, this beneficent controlling power of the universe, God, is uninterrupted in His care and doesn't express Himself in limited, vulnerable matter?

Something happens when we take this approach. In the healing I just described, there was a conviction of safety because matter was rejected as

the medium of identity. Thought was focused on a higher goal than merely healing a broken bone. It was focused on the goal of seeing man as not physical but spiritual, representing the intelligent Mind or Love which is God. The result was that the extreme misconceptions of accident, breakage, pain, were eliminated in a way natural and understandable to human thought.

That's a beautiful part of Christian Science healing. When it takes place, we think, "Why, of course, that's the way it should be." Everything feels normal and well.

But it's not just happenstance. It's an enlightened rejection of the mental factors that we call disease. In its fullest explanation, it's an acknowledgment that divine Mind and man as Mind's spiritual idea are the only reality.

This approach works in dealing with material technical problems, too. In reality, everything consists of ideas produced by an intelligent, purposeful Mind. Starting from this standpoint, we can expect to see the pattern of order and usefulness of everything around us, whether it's furnishing a house, cooking a meal, running a business, or solving a complex technological problem.

We can feel the connection between ultimate spiritual reality and our everyday affairs. That's what I came to see as the answer to my dilemma. As I hold to reality as spiritual, the limitations, misunderstandings, and frustrations of the apparent human life are replaced in a natural way with an awareness of the infinite supply, mental unity, and lasting satisfaction of Spirit. This applies not only individually but also to broader world needs.

Try this approach. Try to be more consistent in thinking of everything in your life as made up of God's spiritual ideas. These spiritual ideas

express the Love, the Mind, which are God.

The concepts of the human mind do seem tenacious. We don't set them aside just by human wishing. It requires careful application of the highest intellectual and moral and spiritual standards to each human need. This is love in its highest sense.

Through this conscious application, we become aware that the universe is not the realm of matter we might have thought it was. It is the realm of Spirit. And that Spirit is what uplifts us, draws us into another universe, the only universe there really is — a universe that is the present consciousness of warmth and understanding and health and joy.

Then we really know that reality is not matter because we feel the presence of God, and we experience our own true selfhood as God's idea — limitless and spiritual.

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1. Arthur Koestler, "Order from Disorder," *Harper's Magazine*, July 1974, p. 56.
2. Koestler, *The Roots of Coincidence* (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 54.
3. See *ibid.*, p. 51.
4. Koestler, "Order from Disorder," p. 58.
5. *Science and Health*, pp. 184, 185. See also Robert Peel, *Mary Baker Eddy, the Years of Trial* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), p. 342.
6. John 16:22.
7. 14:27.
8. 13:34.
9. *Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 60.
10. Schroedinger, *Science and Humanism*, p. 21.
11. *Science and Health*, p. 512.
12. *Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 86.