

ARTICLE VI.

AN EXAMINATION OF ROYCE'S "RELIGIOUS ASPECT OF PHILOSOPHY."¹

BY THE REV. EDWIN STUTELY CARR, A.M., D.D.

THIS work was published several years since, and was somewhat extensively discussed at the time. The importance and abiding interest of the subject, and the unusually clear and thorough exposition of certain philosophical doctrines which are now considered new and fruitful, are my justification for the present article. Professor Royce's graceful and popular style, clear without superficiality, enriched by the results of wide and varied reading, has placed him in the front rank of American writers in his department. His "Spirit of Modern Philosophy," embodying the same general principles as the work we are to discuss, is used as a text-book in several courses in Harvard University. It is gratifying to the student of philosophy, wearied by the endless recounting of what other men have thought,—the stock in trade of the average philosophy-professor of to-day,—to find a man who has the courage to construct a system. An examination of the book will inform us whether the courage of the author or the prudence of his colleagues is the more commendable.

Part I. is concerned with "The Search for a Moral Ideal." The mutually destructive warfare of all existing ethical standards leads to the adoption of a moral maxim which bears the ordinary marks of a compromise,—so far as it is

¹ Public attention has been recently drawn to Professor Royce's view of theism by his appointment as Gifford lecturer in the University of Aberdeen.

clear, unsatisfactory to all parties; and so far as it is vague and ambiguous, the source of future strife. It is, "Act always in the light of the completest insight into all the aims that thy act is to affect." "The ideal means the will to direct my acts toward the attainment of universal harmony" (p. 141). The wished-for state of harmony suggests an Universal Will, obedience to which brings in the harmonious condition. When the man fell among thieves on the Jericho road, if the Samaritan, before relieving his necessities, had seated himself comfortably and begun to consider what influence his act would have in harmonizing the moral ideals of the Jew and the Samaritan, Greek, Roman, Persian, etc., history would probably never have recorded the case of this man as an example of successful charity. It is encouraging, however, to learn that there is an Universal Will, for a will may be expected to have some purpose and to do something, and there is sad need that something be done in the dreadful world unveiled to us in the second part.

Part II. is on "The Search for a Religious Truth." All historical and existing systems of thought fall before the author's critical onslaught, and a space as wide as the universe is speedily cleared for the erection of the treasure-house of humanity's future truth and hope. Materialistic and monistic theories are untenable, and all theistic systems, which make the Deity a first cause, are involved in an infinity of contradictions, and finally impaled on one or the other of the horns of the old dilemma, "In this bad world the Creator is either not omnipotent or not good."

We are to be delivered from the world of universal doubt by a monistic idealism. From the postulates underlying Berkeley's hypothesis a world is constructed in which there is no reality, external to the mind and causally related to it, but only finite spirits whose consciousness corresponds to the mental states of a World-Consciousness. Causation

in general is denied or made very secondary. This idealistic conception of the world is first presented merely as an hypothesis, in order to overcome the prejudice of common-sense realism, and secure for the theory a fair hearing by showing that it satisfies the conditions of the problem better than any of the common conceptions,—realistic, monistic, etc. The author is not satisfied, however, to present his system as a simple hypothesis. It is to be infallibly and irresistibly demonstrated. This is accomplished by means of the argument from the possibility of error,—which the author presents as the original element in his system. A thorough discussion of this argument is not in place here, but it is not difficult to show that the argument is unsound,—the fallacy consisting in identifying total relativity, which is equivalent to solipsism, with skepticism. Reserving this argument for discussion elsewhere, for the purposes of this article I assume the author's monistic idealism as an unproven hypothesis which any man is at liberty to accept or reject according as it seems to him to furnish a satisfactory theory of things.

Assuming this system, then, as an hypothesis of the nature of things, how does it satisfy as a theory of knowledge? The assumption of ordinary common-sense is that the object affects causally the senses of the knowing subject. But the author denies causality, and the missing link between subject and object is to be supplied by a World-Consciousness including both. Subject and object are both embraced in an all-inclusive Consciousness, which knows the idea in the finite mind and its correspondence or lack of correspondence with the object; and the finite mind knows, more or less clearly, the ideas of the World-Consciousness, for the finite mind is a "part" of this Consciousness.

As to this theory in its general outlines. This type of idealistic theory is credited with having destroyed the

common-sense, "carpenter," theory of the universe,—which assumed God, a material world, and finite minds. It is objected to the carpenter theory that it is crudely anthropomorphic. This difficulty is greatly exaggerated, because proper weight is not given to the fact, that, when correctly stated, the theory insists on the immanence as well as the transcendence of God. The former doctrine allows God to work his will in the world largely by an immanent causality, while the latter doctrine preserves his personality,—always imperiled by an idealistic theory. It must of course be admitted however, that the carpenter theory is anthropomorphic; but the idealistic theory is equally so. How do I know that the universe is constructed on the plan of my mind, any more than that God made the world as I make a house? It is true that we regard thought as nobler than a physical activity, and it is doubtless proper to use the highest analogy we know in accounting for the universe; but we must not forget that it remains a mere analogy, exposed to the objection of subjective anthropomorphism. And further the activities of the mind are utter mysteries. Idealists of the school of Professor Royce explain even the most ordinary and fundamental operations of the mind by an appeal to the Deity; as, memory is possible because the past and present mental states are brought together in the timeless life of God. Here is the manifest circle of using God to explain the mind, and then using the mind to explain God in his relation to the finite.

The problems of psychology are recognized, and always have been, as the most difficult and complicated in the whole realm of science; and the idealistic position, in itself, is an admission of this fact, for the idealist has tried to simplify the problem somewhat, by eliminating the troublesome factor of external reality. And now we find this center of all mystery, the human mind, taken as the analogy for the structure of the universe, and all is explained! The

unknown is said to be like the mysterious, and lo! the light of all truth bursts upon us!

If this monistic idealism be accepted as the theory of the universe, it is not the end but the beginning, not the goal but the starting-point, of philosophy. All the puzzling problems remain. The sphere of the unknown, on the common-sense view, becomes the sphere of the unconscious, and the problem of knowledge (not to raise the question how knowledge originally got into the mind) takes the form of the rising of truth in consciousness,—as mysterious a process as knowing external reality. And in fact when it is assumed that the finite mind and known object are both included as thoughts in the Absolute Consciousness, the problem of knowledge seems to remain practically unaltered; except by the introduction of an additional complication in the relation of mind and object to the Absolute Consciousness. For the finite mind and the object must somehow preserve their identity, otherwise they disappear in the blank unit of the Absolute, and all knowledge is at an end. If, however, they preserve their identity, they are as far separated within as without the Absolute Thought.

This theory of monistic idealism, therefore, if generally accepted, would be merely the statement, not the solution, of the philosophic problem. The psychology of the divine mind or of the Absolute Thought would be the problem. Philosophy surely could not content itself merely by suggesting the analogy of the human mind. For in addition to the fact that the unknown activities of the mind deepen the shadows rather than clear up the obscurity which envelops the ultimate philosophical questions, the analogy is very imperfect. Our thoughts do not assume *quasi*-independence in our minds, capable of knowing each other and of mutual interaction. It may be questioned whether the problem might not be more satisfactorily stated by

dropping the analogy of the human mind entirely, as confusing and misleading.

This World-Consciousness is now made out by our author to be the Infinite Universal, Absolute and All-embracing Thought, the essence of all finite persons and things which are simply thoughts of the World-Spirit. In ourselves and apart from God, we are unable, not only to know any object, but to remember any past event. The theory, held in strictness, would of course deny to the finite subject, who is a "part" of God, power to imitate or complete the most insignificant mental act; though the author represents the wicked man as possessing and exercising the will to do evil. But the author particularizes about memory, asserting, as I have suggested above, that one can have a mental experience, and remember that he had a similar experience previously, only because his two mental states are brought together in the timeless life of God. What is this but the breakdown and suicide of philosophy, or its metamorphosis into mythology? It is the psychology of Homer come again, with a goddess of memory, of love, fear, anger, etc. It would require the combined activities of all the gods of Olympus to keep such a mind in efficient operation. One would naturally assume that the author's monotheistic Absolute is an improvement on polytheism; but whether this pantheistic extreme is preferable to the ancient conception may fairly be questioned.

But though the World-Consciousness does not seem to help us much philosophically, it may have something good for our souls. We are in doubt and discouragement because of the dark world pictured in the first chapter of Part II., which forbade us to believe or even to hope there could be a good God. The author hails the advent of the Absolute Thought with a sense of joy and freedom which promises much. What sort of a religion does the Absolute Thought bring us?

“The Infinite Thought must, knowing all truth, include also a knowledge of all wills and of their conflict. In him then we have the Judge of our ideals and of our conduct. He must know the exact value of the Good Will which for him, like all possible truths, must be an actually realized fact. And so we cannot pause with a simply theoretical idealism. Our doctrine is practical, too. We have found not only an infinite Seer of physical facts, but an infinite Seer of the Good as well as of the Evil. In looking for goodness we are in no wise looking for what the world does not contain” (p. 434). Our author makes a loyal effort, by the use of capitals and complimentary adjectives, to show that the Infinite Thought is a satisfactory God; and he even goes so far as to capitalize Evil and Good, probably because both enter into the thought-substance of the Deity. There is an important new element introduced, unostentatiously, in the passage just quoted. The whole argument thus far, if admitted, establishes only the Infinite as Thought. Is the Infinite also good, or has he any moral character? One might expect to find him so, as he is the Judge; but as Thought he merely knows the good as realized fact. He is not said to *be* good, and to exert himself for the realization of the good, for he is to possess no causal power lest he become responsible for this bad world. Can we make clear to ourselves the mental life of this deity? It is an infinite succession of mental states, and these thoughts are the realized persons and things of our world. Has the deity any power over this train of ideas, as to its composition or order? One would expect so, for he “realizes the Moral Insight and the Universal Will of our ethical discussion” (p. 442). “God’s life is the infinite rest, not apart from but in the endless strife, as Heraclitus taught” (p. 459). But no; the deity has no power over the train of ideas, for by controlling the ideas he would create the world and be responsible for the evil.

What then is the function of this deity? He is the Seer and Judge; he sits a helpless spectator of the infinite train of ideas, and "never ceases to think of us and of all things, never changes, never mistakes" (p. 440). As a Seer he has no conceivable use or significance; as a moral ideal he is an Universal Will which cannot will, and which is utterly indifferent to evil and good; and he cannot be made serviceable as a Judge, for no sensible man would regard in the least the good or ill opinion of such a nonentity. We may then simply drop all names and all ideas about the Infinite Thought which tend to give it a deceptive appearance of personality, and consider it simply as a train of ideas,—causeless, passionless, purposeless,—hanging in the air or moving in shadowy procession through the clouds—if it cares to think for itself an atmosphere or a cloud to hang in. An orthodox Hegelian can readily understand the existence of a thought without a mind to think it, or of a group of qualities apart from any substance, for he lives in a Wonderland where nothing is more common than Alice's experience of seeing a grin without a cat. Would it not be better for the Seer and Judge, rather than to turn into a pale abstraction and vanish, to become in fact the Universal Will, even if he is obliged to assume responsibility for the world? Especially, as the surprising discovery is now made that the world is absolutely good. Of this I will speak later.

In short, the Absolute cannot be said to be Thought, unless feeling and volition are also ascribed to him. We know thought only in our own consciousness, and there we always find it intensified by feeling and to some extent controlled by will. These three phases or aspects of our mental life are inseparably connected in our inner experience, and to speak of an Infinite Thought, as a separate objective existence apart from a person who also feels and wills, is meaningless to the human intellect and can lead only to

endless confusion. If it is intended that the Infinite is *like* thought, the reader has a right to know in what respects it is like thought, and probably some other word could be more safely used. Such an ambiguous expression as Infinite Thought is confusing to the student, and tempts the writer to increase or diminish the content of the term according to the exigencies of his system. This appears when we are told that the moral aim is the "realization of the eternal life of an infinite spirit." "Life" and "spirit" mean more than Thought.

The reply to this criticism will doubtless be made, that the Infinite is in the "intelligible" world, where causality, substance, and other categories of the understanding do not hold good. Kant may be pardoned for employing the notion of an intelligible world, for he did it in ignorance of the fantastic extremes to which it would be carried by his successors. And in fact, what human insight could have enabled Kant to forecast the future course of philosophy? The "Critique of Pure Reason" draws the sharpest line of distinction between the world of experience, which only is knowable by us, and a transcendental world, unknowable because in no conformity to the laws of our thought. The main use of this latter world is to furnish the theologian a wide field where he may amuse himself by the erection of speculative air-castles, which can do no harm in future, for all sensible men know they are baseless fancies. No one was more astonished than Kant to find his successors annihilating the *Ding an Sich*, abandoning the *terra firma* of the *Verstand*, and soaring on the wings of the *Vernunft* into the uttermost regions of the infinite. The subtle irony of Kant has been often noted, where he says he preserves the treasures of faith by elevating its objects above either attack or defense, and the philosophers have amused themselves at the simplicity of the theologians who have taken the words seriously. But is the philosopher now gravely

to inform us that his Infinite Thought, his World-Consciousness, etc., cannot be disproven, because they are in a transcendental world, where the laws of our experience are not valid? It may be said in this connection, that my criticism above on the author's theory of knowledge is faulty, because I assume that the subject and the object must either retain or lose their identity,—identity being a notion applicable to the mind and the object only when conceived materially as abiding substances. Such lines of defense are the ones commonly adopted by the idealist, and always of course with triumphant success, if his premises are once admitted. He prefers to fight in the air, remote from fact and common-sense; in a land of enchantment, where nothing can be done except by spells known only to the initiated. The transcendental objects of the Hegelian faith must be spiritually discerned.

The Infinite Thought not only maintains a strange and inscrutable character in his natural habitat in the regions of the transcendental, but his advent on earth is attended by various miraculous manifestations. The most remarkable of these is the transformation of the dreadfully bad world of the beginning of Part II. into an absolutely good world at the close of this section. It is the same world, the world of our daily experience, in both cases; and how the supposition of the Infinite Thought can work such a revolution of opinion in the author's mind is a mystery, which the page of dialectic about the Infinite as the perfect being does not solve. Natural evils,—imperfection, death, etc.,—may be blessings in disguise; and moral evil is constantly overcome by the virtuous wills of men, and therefore the good is constantly being exalted as victorious. Here the disciplinary power of temptation, the conflict with sin as necessary to virtue, which were powerless to save the gods of Chapter VIII. from annihilation, are sufficient to stop the mouths of all who would scoff at the absolutely

good world of the Infinite Thought; while we are left to draw our own inferences from the case of the wicked man, whose life is a victory not of good but of evil.

As to the moral ideal in the system, it is to aid in the "progressive realization of the eternal life of an Infinite Spirit" (p. 441). This religion "cannot be expected to furnish us an *a priori* knowledge of any fact of experience, of any particular law of Nature, of the destiny of any one finite being. All that remains just as dark as it was before" (p. 437). Immortality for a finite being is inconceivable, and the expectation of it is immoral, because selfish. "You love the ideal for its own sake. It is not your triumph you seek, but the triumph of the Highest" (p. 447). We find here what Lotze has somewhere characterized as the Quixotry of virtue which feels disgraced if rewarded. And yet the system allows a certain reward to virtue in the approval of the Judge. Possibly the criticism above on the Judge-notion may serve to remove from the system this last trace of what Kant calls "*Götzendienst*," and introduce a thoroughly disinterested benevolence such as flourished in New England a century ago, when good souls professed themselves willing to be damned for the glory of God.

I cannot regard this system as the final utterance of speculative thought. It is to me the breakdown and suicide of philosophy, and the vanishing-point of religion. Yet this book may be useful in showing us where we are philosophically, as the author says Schopenhauer has benefited philosophy,¹ and for much the same reason. The book makes impossible an unreflecting optimism as to the future philosophical development, unless a radical reform is instituted.

The world of philosophical and ethical thought to-day is chaos and night come again. We have Spencer with his absurd Unknowable, offset in part by his sane attempt to

¹ Modern Philosophy, p. 230.

live and think in a real world. We have the monist, who begs the question of the ages by assuming a principle both physical and spiritual. We have the scattered remnant of the Hegelian school, more than any other the characteristic philosophy of the time, as it is the logical outcome of the speculative development of the past century. This system has proven a success, however, neither as a philosophy nor as a religion. Religious souls were at first deceived by the pious humbug about a wondrous union with God to be brought about by the Hegelian Holy Spirit; but now all the world knows that the God is a conscienceless and passionless pantheistic principle, the union is the absorption and annihilation of the human personality, and that the system in general can no more meet the intellectual and moral needs of living men than the ideas of beefsteak and potatoes can nourish the physical body. We have Goethe raising an infinity of profound questions to which our age has no reply save the sneer of Mephistopheles. We have Carlyle, the Stoic. We have George Eliot, giving up the Christian God for the soulless and loveless Substance of Spinoza, and singing the praises of an immortality in the memory of future generations:—

“O may I join the choir invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better by their presence.”

We have, in fiction and in life, men like Robert Elsmere, where the ice-bound peaks of a dreary pantheism are lit up into a deceptive warmth and beauty by the last fading beams of a Christian faith. And we have the shallow optimist, who says the world is growing better and we must be patient and cheerful until in some wondrous way the golden age of the future is ushered in by the destruction of all that humanity has trusted and loved and worked for in the past.

What then shall be done? Is not resignation the lesson

of the hour? We cannot call back the Pope or the Puritans, Eden or the age of Saturn, and we do not care to return to the fool's paradise of the ignorant past by clinging to illusions merely because it is pleasant to believe them. If the world is really such a wretched place, and humanity is necessarily compassed about with so many limitations, it is well to know it and prepare to make the best of it. Another question, however, may be raised concerning this, as every evil predicament in which men find themselves,—What is the cause of the existing state; the Creator, or our own folly? This question is pertinent here.

Modern science and philosophy are the children of the Renaissance. They have broken away from the leading-strings of their ancient mistress, theology, and set up for themselves. We see the outcome to-day; science has arrived at a blind and purposeless evolution of the Unknown, and philosophy has adopted the scholastic dialectic and dogmatic method of the old theology, without even winning thereby any object satisfying to reason or inspiring to moral effort. The bonds of the ancient union must be restored, if we are to gain a full-orbed and permanent truth. "Religion must be reorganized as one of the essential and fundamental facts of life. It is a fact that does not ask either of philosophy or science leave to be. . . . Religion represents the fullness of the nature; each system of philosophy represents only a part of the nature. Theology should still maintain her old position as queen of philosophy as well as of science."¹

It is apparent in Germany to-day that the race of giants is extinct—the intellectual Titans who had ideas, however erroneous, and personal force and courage to apply these ideas in constructing a theory of things. The German professor of philosophy to-day is a scribe, a commentator, an antiquarian. He will lead the student out over an in-

¹ Professor C. C. Everett, *Institute Essays*, 1879, p. 47.

finity of speculative battle-fields, and exhibit entertainingly the fragments of the metaphysical wrecks of all past time; but when at last he has traversed the long road from Thales to Hegel, and you think you may at length learn what it all amounts to, he hesitates and stammers and finally stops. He is rather an Hegelian, but not exactly; and he is going to wait until natural science explains matter and mind before he builds his system. The subjective-skeptical tendency of the transcendental period pervades German speculation as an influence hostile to creative thought on new and fruitful lines. German theology has become largely metamorphosed into philosophy, and, blind leading the blind, they are likely to fall into the ditch together.

I know of no country to-day so favorably situated as America for the development of a philosophy and a theology which shall meet the needs of our time. A great opportunity presents itself to the young students of America. In the God of our fathers, immanent in the world and yet in some sense transcendent, we have the loftiest and truest principle the world has yet known, whether as a regulative guide in thought or as an ideal for conduct. Profiting by the errors and one-sided extremes of the past, we may develop a theology which shall be rational, and a philosophy which shall be reverent. And in the interval we shall be living in a world where God and man, body and mind, the duties of the present and the hopes of the future life are each allowed a place,—a much more comfortable world to wait in than that of the Hegelian, old or new. For “the wide shoreless universe” shall be to us in some sense “a firm city, a dwelling which we know.”