

ARTICLE X.

CRITICAL NOTES.

ROYCE'S "CONCEPTION OF GOD."¹

THIS work is a report of a discussion held before the Philosophical Union of the University of California in 1895. It contains the leading address of the symposium by Professor Royce; remarks, critical and constructive, by the other participants in the discussion; and finally a supplemental essay by Professor Royce in which he develops more thoroughly his central doctrine, and replies to his critics.

It is apparent, from Professor Royce's introductory remarks, that the Philosophical Union of the University has been studying his work, "The Religious Aspect of Philosophy." "Were there time, I should be glad indeed if I were able to throw any light on that little book. But my time is short. The great problems of philosophy are pressing. It is the death of your philosophizing if you come to believe anything merely because you have once maintained it. Let us lay aside, then, both text and tradition, and come face to face with our philosophical problem itself" (pp. 5, 6). This seems to breathe a spirit of admirable candor; but if, as we shall find later, the conclusions of Royce's present discussion are utterly irreconcilable with his results in "The Religious Aspect," it would seem more candid, and also a saving of time, at least for the students of the Philosophical Union, to recognize and deal thoroughly with this fact at the outset.

In seeking a philosophical conception of God, Royce begins with the idea of an Omniscient Being. This is evidently the Absolute Thought of "The Religious Aspect," but the Absolute Thought has experienced a remarkable transformation. There the Absolute Thought could not be personal or a Power, for an infinite person is an absurdity, and if a Power, the Absolute is responsible for the bad world. But now, "The attribute of Omniscience, if it were once regarded as expressing the nature of a real being, would involve the presence of other attributes,—Omnipotence, Self-consciousness, Self-possession,—yes, I would unhesi-

¹The Conception of God. A Philosophical Discussion concerning the Nature of the Divine Idea as a Demonstrable Reality. By Josiah Royce, Professor of the History of Philosophy in Harvard University, Joseph Le Conte and G. H. Howison, Professors in the University of California, and Sidney Edward Mezes, Professor of Philosophy in the University of Texas. Pp. 354. New York: The Macmillan Co. \$1.75.

tatingly add, of Goodness, Perfection, and Peace" (p. 8). This is the conception of God which Professor Royce maintains throughout this work,—evidently a reasonably satisfactory presentation of the Christian personal God. Our joy that one of our prominent philosophers is coming out into the light on this question is tempered by curiosity as to the motives for the change, and by astonishment that he can reach such conclusions from his philosophical premises.

Royce proceeds to prove the reality of the Omniscient Being by the same general argument by which the Absolute Thought was demonstrated in the earlier work. Your individual experience is fragmentary, it can be completed and made thoroughly rational, and so real, only by assuming one all-embracing Omniscient Being. The dialectic of the argument is given some new turns which are perhaps more bewildering but not more convincing. The unproven link in the argument is the assumption, a moral one, that the universe is rational. Professor Samuel Harris used to tell us at Yale Divinity School, "If you refuse to make the assumptions of the Scotch philosophy, you sink into complete agnosticism." Students idealistically inclined would inquire, "Why not, rather than assume what is unproven?" Here Hegelianism seems more thoroughgoing, but is not. If the agnostic says he is content with his fragmentary knowledge, the Hegelian can condemn him only by the assumption that the real is rational.

Professor Le Conte discusses "God and Connected Problems in the Light of Evolution." "I can only admire, not criticise, the subtle method of Professor Royce in reaching the conclusion of the personal existence of God. I have my own way of reaching the same conclusion, but in comparison it is a rough and ready way" (p. 67). These words suggest how Royce's "argument" impresses the average man of culture who is not a specialist in philosophy. He is bethumped with words and confused by plausible dialectic, but not convinced. He therefore avoids the subject by a few words of vague compliment, and so the argument is heralded as the triumphant demonstration of a false philosophy. Le Conte argues to a World-Soul from the analogy of the conscious human spirit, and closes with some fine moral reflections on free, immortal personality as the final end of the evolutionary process.

Professor Howison speaks of "The City of God, and the True God as its Head." The chief interest of the philosophical discussion centers in the battle royal between Howison and Royce. Howison is a clear thinker and trenchant writer, and though an idealist is no Hegelian. He prefers to name his system "Personal Idealism, since all other forms of idealism are in the last analysis non-personal, are unable to achieve the reality of any genuine person" (p. xv). This is the key-note of his criticism of Royce,—that his Hegelian principles result in a pantheism destructive of genuine personality, divine or human. In his Editor's Introduction, Howison gives an excellent historic review, and a remarkably fine char-

acterization of the present state of the philosophy of religion. The victory over materialism and agnosticism has been won by accepting an Immanent God, an All-pervading Intelligence, and the "burning question" now is, "Can the reality of human free agency, of moral responsibility, and unlimited spiritual hope for every soul, can this be made out, can it even be held, consistently with the theory of an Immanent God?" By far the most valuable part of this work is Howison's criticism of Royce on this point, and his answer to the question above is a decided negative. He intimates that he is preparing for publication a systematic statement of his philosophical position,—a work which will be cordially welcomed by the large and growing class who are profoundly dissatisfied with the Hegelianism prevalent in our current philosophy and literature.

Doubtless Howison's keen criticism, wholly unanswerable from the standpoint of consistent Hegelianism, is largely responsible for Royce's insistence on the thoroughgoing personality of God, which is the conspicuous point in his Supplementary Essay. A consistent Hegelian, of the F. H. Bradley type, "views the categories of self-consciousness as 'mere appearance,' and as 'lost' or 'absorbed' or 'transformed' into something unspeakably other than they are, when we pass to the absolute point of view" (p. 302). This Supplementary Essay would be a really valuable contribution to the literature of Christian theism, were the reader not disturbed by a growing amazement that an Hegelian and the author of the early sections of "The Religious Aspect" can hold such views. "A new moment which we have called Will is now introduced" (p. 210). "This generalized form of attention, which we now attribute to the Absolute Experience, is now conceived by us as that aspect of this Absolute which determines the ideas to find this concrete realization which they do find" (p. 201). In "The Religious Aspect" the Absolute Thought was not a Will, for if he controlled the train of his ideas, the things and persons of the world, he would create and govern the world. Here he is essentially the Christian Creator, and he is confronted by the old theological problem of selecting the best from an infinity of possible worlds (p. 212). The Absolute Thought now is also free personality: "This attentive aspect cannot be conceived as determined by any of the ideas, or by the thought aspect of the Absolute in its wholeness." "The Absolute Thought acts freely, unconstrainedly,—if you will, capriciously." Here our author realizes his danger from the argument used in "The Religious Aspect" to destroy the Christian God (p. 273),—if controlled by any superior law or power, He is finite. Instead of making God act capriciously, a manifest absurdity for the Absolute Intelligence, Royce needs to introduce the truism of theology, that being controlled in his choices by the supreme law of wisdom and love is not a limitation but a perfection. This is suggested on page 214.

An attempt is made (pp. 203-204) to justify this extraordinary change of base. The author contends that, as he uses the term, from the abso-

hute point of view, the Absolute Will is not the cause of the world. This amounts, of course, in plain English, to saying the Absolute Will is not a will; and the plain man would inquire, "What is it then, and why call it a will?" It is a will or not a will, according to the work Professor Royce has in hand. The Absolute Thought is not a will when Professor Royce is destroying the Christian God by the antinomies of creation, of evil, and of infinite personality; then the Absolute Thought is Aristotle's Prime Mover,—a passive, passionless, and inert spectator of the eternal ideas. But when Professor Howison says, "In that case, you have no genuine personality in God or man," then Professor Royce replies, "Yes, for the Absolute Thought *is* will, although, I do not hesitate to add, in a merely Pickwickian sense."

It is therefore evident, as I have asserted at the beginning of this review, that the conclusions reached in "The Religious Aspect" and those of the present work are utterly irreconcilable. In the former, God is not personal nor in causal relations with the world. There the Absolute Thought as will is kept prudently in the background. And wisely, for, if will, Thought becomes an infinite Power, since, as its thoughts are the things and events of the world, if it controls and wills the train of its own ideas, it as really creates the world as does God in the crudest statement of the carpenter theory. And if the Absolute Thought thus becomes a Power, all the objections so forcibly presented in Chapter VIII. of "The Religious Aspect" rise against it. It is an old maxim in beginning an argumentative discussion, "Don't raise a bigger devil than you can lay." Had Royce kept this maxim in mind, he would not have been so free to raise and enforce objections to Christian theism in the beginning of "The Religious Aspect," and he would have found much smoother sailing in the closing section of the book. In that case, however, it would not have been necessary to write the closing section, for the Christian Creator would have proven satisfactory. In Chapter VIII. the difficulties which confront any conception of a personal God are presented so forcibly, with such wealth of illustration and detail, that the old Hegelian device of viewing everything *sub specie aternitatis* is powerless to save the Absolute Thought, when it appears as will in this new work, from annihilation by the same difficulties.

We would not be understood, however, to criticise Professor Royce unkindly for passing at one bound from the abyss of inconsistency and absurdity in which we find him at the close of "The Religious Aspect" to the firm ground of Christian theism; for surely "there is joy in heaven over one philosopher that repenteth." His change of attitude may be due to the stimulating religious atmosphere of Harvard; but whatever the cause, it is proper, and in harmony with Harvard principles, to test faith by works, and to expect the young convert to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. We may therefore hope that Professor Royce will soon find time to send to the students of the University of California a

recantation of former errors and heresies, and a renunciation of the Absolute Thought and all its thoughts.

But though the past ten years have brought to Professor Royce some remarkable revelations in respect to the conception of God, he is not quite right yet on the immortality of the soul. His theory of the future life is the common Hegelian notion, that the human soul is immortal in the same sense as the extinct antediluvian animals; these animals are alive now, and always will be, as timeless divine thoughts.¹ It will be an affliction to Dr. George A. Gordon and other Congregational brethren who have been planning to win over the Unitarians to our fellowship, to be told by the literary spokesman of the Harvard philosophical faculty that modern thought has given up the immortality of the soul. It is especially trying to be informed, in the same connection, that eternal punishment is as defensible as eternal bliss (p. 325); for the Gordon party has shown a willingness to surrender the former in the interest of harmony. It happens, unfortunately, that Dr. Gordon has been especially prominent in emphasizing and demonstrating a future existence; but who would cavil if he should decide to beg pardon, and abandon the doctrinal trifle of the immortality of the soul in furtherance of the great cause of Christian unity?

Royce's course in relation to religious problems is essentially similar to that of Herbert Spencer. We have in each case a young man with some knowledge of current science and philosophy, but with no thorough or sympathetic knowledge of Christian theology,—regarding theology as a compound of imbecility and superstition. But having the pen of a ready writer and a head quick in jumping at conclusions, the young man discovers an easy opportunity to make a stir in the world by knocking out the foundation of the prevalent religious system. The result in the two cases is practically the same, though Royce sets out with the definite purpose to refute such agnosticism as that of Spencer. With Spencer we have the Unknowable,—which is yet Power, Cause, etc.; with Royce we have the Absolute Thought, which is not Cause or Power. These first principles seem diametrically different, but a moment's reflection shows that they are similar in being absolutely incomprehensible, mysterious, and absurd to human thought. For that which is a Power and Cause is not Unknowable, and Thought, if it can be called such as being like human thought, must be a Power and Cause,—for human thought is always controlled by will. Spencer and Royce are at one in attacking the central Christian principle of the personality of God; and as they are driven by criticism and more mature reflection to modify their views, in the long years of repentance for having hastily given to the world these youthful "reconciliations," both draw nearer and nearer to the standpoint of Christian theism. The preachers and the theologians clamor for a reconciliation of the earlier and later views; but the wise man wraps

¹ See my work, *The Development of Modern Religious Thought*, p. 208.

himself in the cloak of philosophic superiority, and deigns no reply to the cavilings of bigotry and superstition. But at length Frederic Harrison, undoubtedly one of the Aufgeklärte, takes up the cudgels, and, *mis-erabile dictu*, Mr. Spencer is unable to reconcile the "reconciliation" with religion, with science, or with his own later position. We hope some Frederic Harrison may soon appear, to get some such clear statement from Professor Royce; for it seems a pity that in our busy age the students of California University should waste their time on the dialectical intricacies of "The Religious Aspect" if its author has abandoned the position he there maintains. The theism of "The Religious Aspect" and that of "The Conception of God" are absolutely irreconcilable, and between the two we would recommend the latter to students who have grown too clever to attend Sunday-school; for it contains the main groundwork of the Christian doctrine of God.

We may add, as a corollary to this last paragraph, that it would be greatly to the advantage of philosophy if it were made a requirement for all philosophical degrees that the student should have taken a course of lectures in theology in some respectable divinity school.

The work we have examined suggests a question as to the sort of religion that is being taught in the philosophical departments of our universities. The extraordinary prevalence of the Hegelian type of thought in our current literature, poetry, and theology, is one of the striking phenomena of our time.¹ The professors in our leading American universities are largely Hegelian. This may not surprise us in respect to state universities, and such institutions as Harvard, where the pursuit of new truth is so eager that the adjective is often mistaken for the noun; but it does seem surprising that this type of philosophical theory should dominate our orthodox Christian schools. At a Sunday-school convention not long since, I heard an impressive story of Mr. John D. Rockefeller, who is so interested in Sunday-school work, that on one occasion he left his office during business hours, and went to a distant part of the city, to look up a young man who had grown remiss in Sunday-school attendance. Mr. Rockefeller has founded a great university, and has gathered some thousands of boys and girls to study such choice bits of Baptist doctrine as the following: "Our orthodox theology on the one side, and our common-place materialism on the other side, vanish like ghosts before the daylight of free skeptical inquiry. Neither can survive in the mind which has thought sincerely on first principles." This is from the Introduction of a work which is lauded as one of the latest and best contributions to the Hegelian theory of knowledge, and which is studied as a text-book in Chicago University.² It is commonly said, in explanation or defense, that the philosophical faculty are to teach philosophy, not

¹ See Professor Howison's Introduction, p. xxix.

² Bradley's Appearance and Reality, p. 5.]

theology; the students get the latter in the theological department. One who has never been in a university can imagine, and one who has been in such an institution knows, that the bright and ambitious students get their fundamental religious theory not from the "fossilized" professors of theology, but from the supposedly brilliant and up-to-date men of the philosophical faculty. The inconsistency of sustaining an un-Christian or anti-Christian influence in the philosophical department of a school founded in the interest of orthodox Christianity, is so colossal that it would seem ludicrous, were not the consequences so serious and so dangerous.

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF KNOWLEDGE.¹

A SPURIOUS science has never ceased to throw down the challenge to those who believe more than it is possible to prove by the senses, to make good their position. Such science proudly boasts that it will accept nothing that will not submit to the tests of the laboratory or the measuring-line of mathematics. This boast has been made so often, and with such a parade of audacious hypotheses, that those who make it have deceived themselves into a belief of its legitimacy, and imposed upon weak followers who have neither the ability nor the patience to sift the arguments by which it is sustained.

Professor Ladd in his new book "The Philosophy of Knowledge" calmly accepts the challenge, and boldly "carries the war into Africa." He meets materialists and agnostics on their own ground. With remarkable fairness, which argues supreme confidence in his own position, he admits all the data of physical science; states its fundamental laws with more force than Büchner or Lamarck, and then builds up his own theory of metaphysics from such axiomatic principles as must be assumed alike in every department of inquiry if we would build up any system of reasoned knowledge. One marked trait of Professor Ladd, which may be seen in all his books, but is especially manifest in this, is, that he is not afraid of the truth. And justly. For what is true can never contradict itself, no matter in what province of thought it may be employed. Hence if any dogma can be proved to be false, however widely disseminated, there is but one duty left to him who discovers its falsity; that is, to abandon it himself, and to expose it to public reprobation. Some persons seem always afraid for the ark of God; and well they might, if they considered only the character of the oxen who drew it. But if the truths which lie hidden there are those according to which the world was created and is governed, then, while it makes no difference to those truths how we are affected toward them, yet it is of the utmost consequence

¹ The Philosophy of Knowledge. By George Trumbull Ladd. Pp. 609. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1897. \$4.00.

whether we accept them and work them into the texture of our thought and action.

This book of Professor Ladd's is the most distinctly metaphysical of any that has seen the light in our country. It is a difficult book to read. The style is not always clear and flowing. There are many infelicities of diction marring the beauty of the thought, which is always vigorous and directed to a definite purpose. In reading this work the thought will obtrude itself: Is speculative philosophy necessarily wedded to an obscure style? Cannot the principles which underlie alike all philosophical as well as physical investigation be expressed in such a way that he who runs may read? The examples of all modern German philosophers, except Schopenhauer, and of the English Hegelians, represented by Bosanquet and Bradley, would lead us to surmise that there is some hopeless antagonism between philosophical speculation and clear expression. We do not believe this to be necessary. For the two Greek philosophers who have led all the world since their day can always be understood without effort. Plato's language was doubtless the most perfect that ever was attained by any writer; and Aristotle's, making allowance for the defective state of his manuscript when edited by Andronikos, is clearness itself compared with Kant or Hegel. But though the shell of the nut in this book is hard to break, and in some places even forbidding, yet it will in every case repay perseverance, and yield its treasures to those who have ears to hear. For they are *φωσφόρα σφαιροίσι*.

The method of this book is the *reductio ad absurdum*. This is doubtless the most effective way of dealing with agnostics. For these, under the pretense of special fairness, show that their objections against the position of those who believe something and do so because it is necessary to their rational existence, arise not so much from doubt of the truths maintained as hatred of them, and a determination not to believe, no matter what proof is offered. The author shows in almost every page of the book that those who throw doubt on religion or speculative philosophy admit every principle, while browsing in their chosen field of materialism, that the advocates of a transcendental faith and philosophy demand as a basis for their own doctrines. One example must suffice: "Modern empirical science . . . goes on heaping up its tremendous demands upon faith to the verge of a most irrational credulity; and postulating its own grounds in a speculative scheme of entities whose very nature is fast reaching the utmost stretch of imagination this side the grotesque and absurd. Who would not undertake to remain within the limits of *experience*, and believe in angels rather than in ether; in God rather than in atoms; and in the history of his kingdom as a divine self-revelation rather than the physicist's or biologist's purely mechanical evolution?" (P. 332.) This power of sarcasm is of that kind which is most effective. He gives the bare facts in which the inconsistencies of materialism are disclosed; sometimes in such a serious way that we might be deceived into believing that he had been converted by their arguments. But a touch of sly humor awakens us to a realization that the

author thinks the most effective satire is to let a fool speak out all his heart.

There is a constant appeal to the principles which underlie all reasoning; and the whole purpose of the book seems to be to show that all the sciences are mutually helpful; that they are parts of spiritual culture, and no one of them has the prerogative of prior occupation in the domain of reason. Such a treatise is much needed as a corrective against the materialistic tendency of the day. This takes for granted that what we call the exact sciences have a unique basis of proof: one which gives them a certitude which can be hoped for in no other field of thought. But the searching analysis of Epistemology which the author keeps constantly before him as his task, shows that the sciences of observation or of pure mathematics must take for granted both the trustworthiness of the information gained through the senses, and the laws of nature which the mind by its own proper processes constructs from them. Hence, in order for any physical science to be possible, both sources of knowledge must be relied on with unshaken faith. For if the elements which the senses furnish as the materials for the structure are not real; if they cannot be accepted in themselves as being a counterpart of external nature, then the structure of classified knowledge is only an illusion, a castle in the air. The inner and the outer worlds must necessarily be coordinate, else we never can by observation come *en rapport* with external reality. And if the mental processes are false it follows that no matter how true the information conveyed by the senses may be, the deductions of science have no validity, and the possibility of knowledge of any sort is excluded. Hence successive impressions have no basis; for each in itself being only phenomenal, may have no corresponding reality; and the processes of the mind in dealing with what is not purely empirical being unreliable, the human reason is far worse off than the instinct of the brute.

As modesty is not one of the cardinal virtues of materialism, our author takes occasion to teach it a lesson. The wide interval between the mass of facts of observation and our power to colligate them, and the consequent impossibility of surveying them in all their bearings, should teach all reasonable men humility; more especially as these facts of observation multiply far more rapidly than our ability to systematize them into science. As our discoveries increase, we are constantly more and more impressed with the idea that there is no isolated fact in nature, any more than a particle of matter disconnected from all the rest of the universe. And the repeated failures of scientific men who have pronounced *ex cathedra* each year only to have their theories overturned the next, ought to suggest modesty to all, except those who are brayed with a pestle in a mortar—to no purpose. This tendency to claim infallibility may be seen especially in geology, where the theories of truly great men, like Werner and his many strong followers, have been proved to be utterly without foundation, and are now surrendered by everybody except those who have nothing to preserve but their reputation for consistency. And yet there is no other class of scientists who have more persistently ridiculed those who believe in a historical religion.

The whole complexion of Professor Ladd's book is healthy and invigorating. Its temper is so candid and fair—even when those who ridicule the sciences of philosophy and theology (one in Aristotle's view)—are roasted over the fires of their own kindling—that they cannot justly complain. And those who think they have a faith worth preserving will end their perusal with the sincere hope that this, the Professor's youngest and evidently best beloved child, will not be the last of the family.

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