V.—DISCUSSIONS.

REALISM, PRAGMATISM, AND WILLIAM JAMES.

PROF. PERRY'S Discussion in No. 94, while it advances matters in several not unimportant directions, leaves me still unconvinced of the importance (or wisdom) of making the controversy between idealism and realism the one issue in philosophy. I agree however that there are more important questions to discuss than that of whether this controversy is important. So I am content to repeat in a general way that my objection rests on the enormous number and variety of doctrines labelled realism and idealism, on the difficulty of distinguishing many called 'realism' from others called 'idealism,' and on the distressing unprogressiveness and sterility of a controversy which has endured inconclusively for hundreds or thousands of years.¹ I would point out further that 'realism' and 'idealism' are not the only alternatives, and that the actual philosophic systems can nearly all be classified as 'realism' or as 'idealism,' according as one chooses to emphasise one side or another of them. If it is not considered a fatal objection in philosophy to show that the alleged alternatives under discussion are neither (1) determinate, nor (2) clearly distinguishable, nor (3) exhaustive, that would seem to be not so much an argument for the discussion as against philosophy.

I.

While protesting therefore against Prof. Perry's way of speaking of '*the* philosophy known as idealism' and finding myself able to discriminate about a dozen 'new realisms,' I am quite willing to discuss *his* particular doctrines, which seem to me to illustrate, very subtly, confusions which are of great logical importance, and well worth analysing.

(a) To begin with that marvel of philosophic nomenclature the Ego-centric Predicament. I am relieved to hear that when Prof. Perry called it "one of the most important original discoveries that philosophy had made" that was 'writ sarcastic'. I regret

¹ For detailed argument in support of these contentions I must again refer to *Studies in Humanism*, chap. xx.

only that one who is capable of being "mildly ironical at the expense of philosophy," should not after that have suspected "an author of MIND!" of irony in suggesting that certain terms are "most useful when their meaning can be made to vary as required".¹ But while it seemed worth while to get the verbal discrepancy between *Phil. Tend.*, page 129, and MIND, No. 88, page 545, removed by Prof. Perry, I did not seriously suppose that he literally meant either that the Ego-centric Predicament was one of the most important philosophic discoveries, or that nothing at all followed from it. And in spite of what he now says (p. 242), I still cannot suppose it. For the 'Predicament' has at least the power to rule out two of the most popular opinions in the realism *v.* idealism controversy. I cannot seriously suppose that when it is acknowledged that no argument *for* idealism can be based on the Ego-centric Predicament Prof. Perry's realistic heart is unmoved, even though his withers may be unwrung when what I called "a strictly transcendent reality" is ruled out similarly. At any rate he can hardly regard it as unimportant that as he himself says "we must look elsewhere" for evidence bearing on the dispute between idealism and his form of realism. For that seems an important inference, though of questionable soundness. It not only assumes that the issue is a good one, that his realism must be capable of being established (as it is natural enough for him to assume), but it overlooks the possibility that the situation entitled the Ego-centric Predicament may be so ultimate a fact that it may be useless to look beyond it and impossible to give a meaning to the questions raised about it.² This possibility has the advantage of being the simpler alternative. Now simplicity and economy of thought are probably suspect to Prof. Perry as savouring too much of pragmatism, but he might note that so good a 'realist' as Mr. Bertrand Russell has been resorting to Ockham's Razor as an effective weapon for cutting Gordian Knots. However as I merely wish to remind realists of the fact that there are other alternatives to realism besides idealism, I will

¹ I fully recognise that there is always a certain amount of *unavoidable* ambiguity, entailed by the progress of science when it proceeds to discriminate further within terms that were sufficiently determinate for previous purposes. Thus the modern principle of Relativity has rendered ambiguous the old notions of 'where' and 'when,' and the *metageometries* the whole of geometrical terminology. But the amounts of ambiguity and indefinition which philosophers habitually have in their fundamental conceptions are far from unavoidable, and constitute a scientific scandal.

² Hence I cannot admit that Prof. Perry has shown that "the question is whether our *reals*, or known *reals*, require to be such in order to be *reals*" (p. 241). That seems to me to be a bad question, in point of method, because I can see no way of answering scientifically a question to which a good answer cannot be discriminated from a bad one by any scientific process.

pass to Prof. Perry's interpretation of the situation in terms of his own doctrine.

(b) Here I will not complain that Prof. Perry begs the question by describing the facts in terms of his theory. For I know too well that although logic has long regarded arguing in a circle as a fallacy and arguing in a system as an ideal of proof, it is unfortunately not yet able to distinguish formally between them.¹ But Prof. Perry appears to misdescribe the facts, because he relies too much on common speech and does not rise to a sufficiently critical level. He should have raised the general question of how we distinguish between the cases in which we say the process of perception has affected the 'object' perceived and the cases in which we say it has not. Why, *e.g.*, when the visible size of a body changes, do we sometimes regard it as having *changed* and sometimes as having only *moved*? Why, when we perceive an object that seems familiar, do we sometimes say it is *the same* as something we perceived before, sometimes that it is only *like*? If Prof. Perry would consider such questions he too would probably note, (1) that until a subject has been pretty fully explored, there is always a doubt and alternative views may be taken, (2) that the rival theories are always valued and tested by their consequences, and (3) that the decisions as to what the object perceived 'really was' is, and remains, relative to the evidence on which they rested, and to the relative value of the theory accepted as compared with others alleged then or later. A theory so accepted is plainly not an absolute truth nor a cognition of absolute reality. Its 'truth' remains immanent in man's struggle to know his world, nor is any way of taking it out of this context visible or needed. To think that because we commonly say that to get good results we must guard against certain 'errors of observation,' we must be dealing with metaphysically independent reals is surely to misinterpret a *façon de parler*. Just because it is an "elementary maxim of observation" that conditions which *have been found to be* detrimental to the value of observations must be eliminated or discounted (if possible), we must beware of erecting a metaphysic on such an obviously pragmatic distinction.

In short the pragmatist objection to Prof. Perry's theory is that it makes out no case. It may freely be granted that when we have realised that a certain relation to mind is a condition of observation, we may raise a question as to how far this condition matters, and may conceive the ideal of discounting it completely. We may even say that the question is 'left open,' if we merely mean that no metaphysical solution of it is in sight. These concessions do not touch the point. To have a meaning, questions have to be proved soluble, and ideals applicable. The real question therefore is as to the burden of proof. Does it fall on the 'realism' of Prof.

¹ Cf. *Formal Logic*, p. 360.

Perry or of the pragmatists? The latter is simpler, because it affirms nothing metaphysically. Nor does Prof. Perry make any attempt to show that it cannot adequately describe scientific procedure. His own theory, on the other hand, has to make embarrassing admissions. "The Martian canals may be in the telescope" (rather, in the *seeing*), "things generally may be created or conditioned by the human conscious approach to them," and "illusions, secondary qualities" (+ hallucinations, after-images, dreams, misinterpretations, etc.) exist. Surely this is to admit the urgent need of *discriminating* all these things from true perceptions of completely objective reality. It is not enough to say they form "a limited class," because no one knows, or can know by any realist metaphysics, where the limits of the class are laid down. Moreover scientific investigators are in practice very well aware that every observation is liable to error and none is exact, and are entitled to demand from philosophers a systematic 'theoretic' recognition of these facts, and a repudiation of their utterly unscientific claim to possess infallible knowledge of indefeasible reality.

It seems clear therefore that Prof. Perry has, after these admissions, undertaken an extremely difficult task in showing that these sources of error *are* capable of total elimination and that inerrant observation exists, and the pragmatic realism, which does not go beyond the acknowledged facts into metaphysics, occupies a far more defensible position than either idealism or Prof. Perry's realism.

(c) I agree with Prof. Perry that the conception of *independence* is 'crucial' for his theory, and appreciate his efforts to define it. But I do not see that he has attempted to answer my simple logical objection to his definition. The objection was that he defined 'independence' merely in negative terms, as the absence of certain specified sorts of dependence, without offering any guarantee that his list was exhaustive. That such a definition is objectionable is taught even in formal logic, which can generally tell thinkers what they should not do, even though it is never able to tell them what they should do. If Prof. Perry replies that a negative term must be defined negatively, I must reiterate my doubt whether his conception of independence is negative. It seems to me very positive, and the basis of his whole metaphysic. At any rate he has *not* told us how he proposes to guard against the possibility that his enumeration of the forms of dependence has not been complete and that his 'independence' should have been included among them. The dictum, therefore, that "entities are independent unless they are proved dependent" (*New Realism*, p. 122) contains a logical fallacy.

(d) I note that Prof. Perry wishes to add to the usual meanings of 'transcendent,' and to define it as "that which is independent of the relation to cognising or experiencing mind" (p. 243). But

what is this but to reiterate that the notion of 'independence' is vital to his theory? And if this is the meaning demanded by "the American neo-realists," I can only deplore that they should have found it convenient to import this further ambiguity into the term. For it was already hard enough to determine in any particular contest in what sense the 'transcendent' transcended experience (whose? and how?).

(e) Prof. Perry's (realistic?) distinction between "knowing" and "viewing things knowledge-wise" seems to me unnecessary, and I should dispute also that the latter "inclines the mind to the view that the cognitive angle or relationship is essential to the things". We learn, however, from the remark that (in Prof. Perry's mind) this distinction depends on the prior distinction between the *essential* and the *accidental*. Now this is one of the vaguest and most elusive of the antitheses in the philosophic vocabulary, and it would be interesting to hear how the new realism conceives it. Does it endorse the old usage, which is intelligible (though not perhaps defensible) in the context of the Aristotelian philosophy, but is now gravely suspect of being scientifically out of date? Or would it accept the pragmatic interpretation which defines the 'essence' of a thing as whatever is 'important' for a purpose and as 'accidental' whatever is similarly irrelevant? Or will it denounce these definitions as 'subjectivistic,' without giving any definite meaning to the terms? On my 'correlation' theory on the other hand there is no need to decide whether the relation of objects to minds is a 'necessity' or an 'accident'. There is a third alternative: it may be simply a *fact*.¹ Moreover, however much it is abused as an 'accident,' it nevertheless remains a fact.

(f) I fully recognise that several realists have made attempts to deal with "the special difficulties connected with illusions, hallucinations and errors," and in this respect shown themselves superior to their idealist rivals. But these attempts do not seem to me to have been attended by any considerable measure of success,² and they fail completely to grasp the enormous theoretic significance of the problem of error and unreality and the need for a general philosophic account of it. This is not the occasion to establish these conclusions, but it may be pointed out that the excuse Prof. Perry gives for ignoring the relevance of error and unreality to his theory of reality is far from convincing. To consider it "would at most lead one to a differential or dualistic view, in which one would recognise certain peculiar *exceptions* to the rule that what is known is independent of that fact" (p. 243). But is that a sufficient reason for disavowing a fact, and had he not committed

¹ I am sorry, therefore, that I cannot explain to Prof. Perry why it should be a 'necessity': ever since reading Hume, I have been unable to understand what meaning an 'objective' necessity could have.

² Cf. *Arts. Soc. Proc.*, vol. x., pp. 218-231.

himself to just this 'dualism' by admitting (p. 241) that errors of observation, etc., occur?

To sum up, we appear to have gained from Prof. Perry an explicit repudiation of reals *per se* which are strictly transcendent, and therefore unknowable, and of which the reals which we all practically recognise in our experience and treat as pragmatically real and 'independent' and superior to the unrealities in which they are involved, are only representatives, intimations, or adumbrations. And this is a great gain. It reduces the difference between the pragmatic realist and the neo-realist to a question whether it is legitimate and advantageous to allege that the 'immanents' which exhibit certain properties and behaviours when we know and observe them, must also do these (or other) things when no one is looking. To the pragmatist this allegation seems unnecessary, sterile, incapable of verification, and therefore scientifically null; it accords indeed with a certain amount of popular phraseology (which is capable of explanation), but it adds nothing to our knowledge of our world. It is therefore best regarded as an 'over-belief,' which need not be forbidden, but certainly should not be insisted on. To the 'neo-realist,' however, who has made his reals strictly immanent, a further question may be suggested as to whether they can satisfy the demands of physical science. For physics appears to postulate reals, like atoms, electrons, ethers, etc., which not only are not perceived, but cannot conceivably become objects of perception. It would seem therefore that they are strictly 'transcendent,' and incapable of being 'immanent' in experience. The neo-realist therefore must either revert to the transcendent reals he had disavowed, or he must agree with the pragmatist in construing these entities of physics as pragmatic constructions which are relative to, and justified by, the scientific success which attends their working, but should *not* be construed as metaphysical assertions. It will be interesting to see which alternative neo-realism will find more tolerable.

II.

As regards Pragmatism, it is satisfactory to learn that Prof. Perry does not dispute its psychological case for denying the absoluteness of the distinction between 'theory' and 'practice'; but it seems doubtful how far he has appreciated, and certain that he has not exhibited, the significance of this denial. At any rate he does not appreciate, even now, how hard it is to analyse what passes for 'truth' into its various component values and to determine what part various motives play in the acceptance of what appears to be a 'theoretic' truth. And it is surely an egregious delusion of the academic chair to imagine that first of all there are truth-values, established by a pure dispassionate contemplation of an absolutely objective reality, and that they are thereupon sub-

jected to deplorable corruption by the infusion of volitions and emotions and non-theoretic values, all of which it is the sacred duty of philosophy remorselessly to excise. In actual fact no 'truth' is established without the stimulation and cooperation of the very agencies which are declared to be fatal to its truthfulness, nor can the most careful analysis ever make sure that it has uncovered all the ramifications of the interests that make all belief so intimately personal an affair. If only philosophers could be got to face the facts of actual life, could any of them fail to observe the enormous object-lesson in the truth of pragmatism which the world has been exhibiting in the present crisis? Everywhere the 'truths' believed in are relative to the nationality and sympathies of their believers. It is indeed lamentable that such an orgy of the will to believe should have been needed to illustrate the pragmatic nature of truth, but who will dispute that for months say 999 persons out of 1,000 have been believing what they please, and consciously or unconsciously making it 'true,' with a fervour rarely bestowed even by the most ardent philosophers on the most self-evident truths? No improbability, no absurdity, no atrocity has been too great to win credence, and the uniformity of human nature has been signally attested by the way in which the same stories (*mutatis mutandis*) have been credited on both sides. But this, we shall be told, is all 'the fog of war': when peace is restored, truth will reappear in her pristine beauty, and events will be seen in their real outlines. What reason is there to anticipate anything of the sort? With the best intentions to be 'objective,' will not historians still find the evidence defective and contradictory and the motives of the actors conjectural? They will all therefore have to select and reject, and each will write history as the truth has appeared to him. And what would happen if the victors prevailed so utterly as to establish their version of the truth? Would not the divergent accounts be voted down as false? According to Prof. Perry some of these may deserve to be called truer, but is it not amazing that he should regard the situation as not in the least derogating from "the theoretic truth" of the beliefs that are rejected? It is not the part of Pragmatism to prescribe *a priori* what value-claims shall prevail over what; but it may at least claim to have discovered a problem of profound social significance in what is facetiously described as 'theoretic truth'.

III.

As regards the third part of Prof. Perry's paper, I am rejoiced and relieved to hear that we are to have a reprint of James's Californian Address after all, and that I was wrong in supposing that the volume of "papers having biographical or historical importance" mentioned in the Preface to *Essays in Radical Empiricism*,

portended only a continuation of *Memoirs and Studies*. I am glad also to have elicited from Prof. Perry a defence of his exegesis of James, even though it appears to proceed on the militarist principle that the best defence is to take the offensive, and implies that it was the duty of my review to provide a completely elaborated alternative to his interpretation of James's work. I thought myself it was enough to challenge his interpretation, though I regret that my criticism should have annoyed him so much. I do not however feel unequal to propounding an alternative which will bring in harmoniously all the many sides of James's philosophic activity, his psychology, his pragmatism, his interests in religion and psychical research, as well as his radical empiricism, if Prof. Perry will only tell me where precisely in the *Essays in Radical Empiricism* he regards James as having committed himself to a 'new,' as against a pragmatic, realism.

The references he has so far given are not, I think, relevant to this issue. They refer to utterances no pragmatist could fail to welcome, least of all myself. On the other hand they do *not* include James's pithy reply to Prof. Perry's collaborator, Pitkin, who had attacked him for saying that "to be radical, an empiricism must not admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced". James proceeded to explain that "in my own radical empiricism this is only a *methodological postulate*, not a conclusion supposed to flow from the intrinsic absurdity of transempirical objects. I have never felt the slightest respect for the idealistic arguments which Mr. Pitkin attacks and of which Ferrier made such striking use; and I am perfectly willing to admit any number of noumenal beings or events into philosophy if only their pragmatic value can be shown."¹ Precisely, *if only their pragmatic value can be shown*! *Je ne demande pas mieux*: James's realism is pragmatic, and means very much what I said *sub* I.

As for the *Journal of Philosophy* papers of 1904-1905, it may, as Prof. Perry has been charitable or rash enough to imagine that I had not read them, advance matters, if I state what was my attitude towards them at the time. I was of course greatly interested and delighted by them, as by all James's writings, and ac-

¹ *Ess. in Rad. Emp.*, p. 241-242, from the little three-page polemic which alone dates from 1907, and detracts from the entire accuracy of Capt. Knox's dates, 1884-1905, for the contents of this volume. In point of fact Capt. Knox has by no means neglected it and quotes from it as often as from *Pragmatism* (five times, as against once from *The Meaning of Truth*). I quite understand however why Prof. Perry dislikes his book on James. It is based chiefly on the *Psychology*, and exhibits James's philosophy as an application of the principles there laid down, holding that "when the main drift of that work is properly understood, the organic unity of James's teaching becomes manifest". But as the *Psychology* is admittedly James's *magnum opus* and as Capt. Knox's account is made up mostly of quotations, those who dislike it will have some difficulty in disposing of it.

cepted the great mass of their doctrine, cordially agreeing, *e.g.*, that relations are experiential facts, and that to reify 'consciousness' and to regard it as an entity was pragmatically uncalled-for. But I ventured to think that in certain passages the statement was so ambiguous or incomplete as to be liable to misconstruction. I pointed some such difficulties out to James, who with his usual candour admitted their existence; and it was on the strength of this correspondence that I doubted whether James would have republished these papers as they stood. I believe that he would have improved them greatly and have removed my scruples. But whether these scruples referred to the very points Prof. Perry regards as conclusive in favour of his interpretation of James, I cannot say until I know what these points are.

Further, I was of course aware that James had finally adopted Radical Empiricism as the technical name for his metaphysic, and regarded the pragmatic method as leading up to it. But I wonder whether Prof. Perry has also noted another fact, *viz.*, that the meaning of the term varied during different periods of James's life and that originally it covered his 'pragmatism' and underwent progressive specialisation?¹ One must be careful therefore not to assume that wherever the words occur James means the same doctrine or the same *part* of his doctrine.

Lastly I cordially agree with all that Prof. Perry so finely says about James on pp. 248-249. It shows that where his own pet metaphysics are not concerned he can see the truth about James. But I do not see why his appreciation of James should lead him to disparage Bergson, or to accuse me of identifying their doctrines. I am of course well aware that great and technically important differences exist between them. But is it never permissible to dwell on the spiritual affinities and mutual comprehension of two great philosophers without any pettifogging insistence on arid technicalities?

F. C. S. SCHILLER.

¹ *E.g.* in the Preface to the *Will to Believe*.