IV.—DISCUSSION.

IN THE MATTER OF PERSONAL IDEALISM.

THE present article takes its occasion from two very different events—the review of my *Limits of Evolution* by Mr. McTaggart in the July number of *MIND*, and the publication, soon afterwards, of the volume entitled *Personal Idealism*, by eight members of the University of Oxford. By the former, I am moved to say some things that I now discover to be very much needed for making my own position in philosophy clearer than my reviewer seems to have found it; by the latter, I am stirred to express what I must frankly admit are “very mingled feelings” indeed.

As to the essays by the Oxford Eight, one whose fortune it had been to put before the public some fifteen months earlier a theory bearing the same title of “Personal Idealism” might naturally be expected to greet with lively interest the announcement of a second book under that rubric; especially, a book issuing from the English seat of philosophy justly most venerated. This lively interest I have certainly felt, and I have accordingly turned upon the contents of the new volume, not merely with curiosity, but rather with the earnest hope of finding weighty auxiliaries for views which I count to be so inwrought with our greatest human concerns. I come back from the reading, in part fortified and encouraged, but in part, I fear in greater part, surprised and disappointed. I had supposed, of course, that the cardinal features of the system of Personal Idealism would be agreed about and accepted, if the title was accepted which had been chosen for it by its author. It is the adoption of the title in spite of rejecting essentials in the system, that surprises and in some measure discomposes me: and all the more when one finds his own lines of division for the discussion, and even his own topical titles, running through the book. It is because I hope to prevent misunderstandings on the part of the public, and to forestall a confusion of ideas in presence of an identical name used to cover very different conceptions, dealt with, above all, by very different methods, that I am prompted to comment on the Oxford volume, and to point out some of the more important divergencies between its conception of Idealism and that which I would call Personal.

That the book has great worth of matter, and will have much weight in the doctrinal controversy that is now upon us, follows of course from the known training and culture of its writers. In many regards, those who are in earnest about a polemic against the current anti-personal philosophies, monisms of one sort or another, may unquestionably rejoice in its courageous, outspoken, and resourceful assault upon Naturalism and Absolutism alike. And if one were to decide upon the philosophical meaning of a movement solely by the general aim of it, in disregard of its method, there would be little or nothing in the programme set forth by the Oxford Eight to which any idealist could demur. "The reality of human freedom, the limitations of the evolutionary hypothesis, the validity of the moral valuation, and the justification of that working enthusiasm for ideals which Naturalism . . . must deride as a generous illusion"—this unquestionably sums up well the cause for which every idealist works; nor could anything much better express the object with which my own volume was prepared. But one doesn't become an idealist simply by attachment to ideals, or by opposition to those aspects of Naturalism which assail the credit of ideals; otherwise many an empiricist, many a positivist even, might be called an idealist, and such a persistent railer at Idealism and all its ways as Prof. James might still rank as an idealist of idealists. Idealism is constituted by the *metaphysical* value it sets upon ideals, not by the æsthetic or the ethical, and rather by its *method* of putting them on the throne of things than by the mere intent to have them there. It is always distinct from Mysticism (which at the core is Emotionalism), and still more from Voluntarism. Its method is, at bottom, to vindicate the human ideals by showing them to be not merely ideals but realities, and to effect this by exhibiting conscious being as the only absolute reality; this, again, it aims to accomplish by setting the reality of conscious being in the only transsubjective aspect thereof, namely, in intelligence.

So the fact comes about that Idealism gets its essential character from its discovery that intelligent certainty depends on such an interpretation of reality as makes the knowledge of reality by the spontaneous light of intelligence conceivable; in short, that Idealism is necessarily Rationalism, or implies an apriorist Theory of Knowledge. No sort of Experientialism, so far as it is consistent, can rightly be called Idealism. Voluntarism, emotive Mysticism, it readily may be, but then it is simply Subjectivism; and if it be taken in cognitive terms, it cannot get beyond Sensationism, unable as it is to provide for any changeless and universal ideas with which to organise experiences into objects that are inalterably the same for all subjects and therefore abidingly real. Not even such a theory as Berkeley's (to which one of the eight essayists appears to hold, with some added helps from Kant) can be consistently called Idealism; for though it teaches that there is an immutable principle at the basis of our experiences, namely the

operation of the eternal ideas in the Divine intelligence, controlling God's communication of sensations to us, yet the assumption of this Divine Mind is unwarranted by the strict Experientialism from which the theory takes its departure.

One might have supposed that all this was settled beforehand, from the time of Locke. But in spite of its title, we find in the Oxford volume Experientialism running at large and everywhere: we find, in fact, (1) empiristic epistemology, (2) an organised new assault upon *a priori* cognitions, (3) a voluntarism of the most pronounced order, (4) ethical mysticism combating the mysticism of the intellect, and, finally, (5) a quasi-personalism resting upon the wholly experiential and purely temporal existence of conscious "individuals," added as a society to his own eternal being by the creative fiat of God. In short, not a single trait of *systematic* Idealism is present; the heart of real individuality, of real personality, is not reached, nay, even the serious attempt to reach it is foregone; yet the whole is brought under the name of Personal Idealism. The force of misnomer could hardly farther go.

One good, however, we shall in all probability reap out of the issuance from Oxford of a co-operative book with this title, and with the contents embraced: the attention of all the thoughtful in the English-speaking world, and even far beyond it, will now surely be drawn to the vital questions involved. Thence it may be hoped that the genuine idealistic implications of freedom, of evolutionary limits, of valid moral valuation, and of justified enthusiasm for the ideal, will more and more clearly come into view. Not until this occurs, certainly, shall we get finally rid of those plausible makeshifts in the way of philosophy that leave our chief ideal interests still at risk, and so only serve to prolong the weary procession of philosophic disputes.

But I must pass on to deal more directly with my own attempt at contributing to this idealistic quest, and with Mr. McTaggart's very suggestive review of my book. I am much indebted to my reviewer for the care and the penetration with which he has considered my theory; and yet I notice some important respects in which he has failed to take my meaning. These I must set forth with all possible clearness, in the hope of preventing further misunderstanding; and then I shall have to reply to the objections which he raises (or, perhaps rather, the difficulties which he suggests) in connexion with my view.

I.

Judging by his other published writings, as well as by his review, I may fairly assume that Mr. McTaggart is in agreement with me in holding to an idealistic Pluralism, an eternal Society of many minds, each absolutely real. It is well to note, in setting out to comment on his criticisms, that there is a head under which his

views and mine might be correctly brought into collocation with the views of our Oxford colleagues, with those of Prof. James, and even with those of more pronounced individualists,—I mean the head of Pluralism : in one way or another, we all hold out for manifold realities that are all alike indisputable. But only some of us set this Pluralism forth by an idealistic method, and hence arrive at what we call the “eternity” of the many minds. By this we mean simply their absolute reality, or the self-based, self-active nature of their being,—nothing else at all, except as something else may be implied by this absoluteness ; least of all, do we mean merely the everlastingness, their existence “from all eternity,” as the common saying is. Our doctrine has nothing whatever to do with the superstition, born of fancy, about pre-existence. In this matter I suppose Mr. McTaggart to be in entire accord with me, and I am therefore somewhat surprised to note in his review certain misapprehensions of my position. These I will now specify.

(1) He speaks of my doctrine that only an eternal being can really be free, as a “remark”. This language is seriously misleading ; the reader must surely get from it the impression that my statement of this view is merely incidental and by-the-way. On the contrary, it is in fact basic and central to the whole theory of my book, is developed with emphatic prominence, and is argued out with much detail. (See my pp. 326-343.)

(2) A more important misapprehension is this : “It [the system of Personal Idealism] offers a God of whom personality, morality, and affection can reasonably be predicated, since, though perfect, he is finite. (I am not sure if Dr. Howison would accept the word finite, but in effect, it seems to me, he holds God to be finite, since he makes him one of a community of spirits, each of whom has ‘a reality as inexpugnable as his own’.)” Indeed I do not accept the word, nor can. I am surprised that my real view in this matter should have escaped Mr. McTaggart. So far from holding God to be finite, I hold, and in my book clearly teach, that all minds are infinite (in the true qualitative sense of the word), and God pre-eminently so. (See my pp. 330 *seq.*, 363, and 373). Eternity, self-existence, self-activity, freedom, and infinity, are to me all interchangeable terms, and are so treated wherever they turn up in the course of my book. My reviewer falls into a *non sequitur* when he concludes that I make God finite because I make him one of a community of spirits, each absolutely real ; not God’s *finitude*, but his *definiteness*, is what follows from that. This confusion of the definite with the finite is very common, and is the explanation of two tendencies in sceptical thinking—the tendency to deny the personality of God, whose infinity is supposed to mean his utter indefiniteness, and the tendency, in recoil from the former, to assert God’s finitude in order to save his personality, which of course must be definite. But the true infinite, as distinguished from the pseudo-infinite, the infinite of quality in

contrast to the infinite of quantity, is entirely definite; more definite, indeed, than any finite can be.

(3) Mr. McTaggart misconstrues my various statements about the imperfection in all spirits other than God. He supposes me to hold this imperfection to be incompatible with their being perfect in any sense whatever, and he mildly blames me for overlooking the classic distinction between the view *sub specie æterni* and the view *sub specie temporis*, whereby the seeming contradiction involved in an imperfect-perfect might be reconciled. But my actual doctrine about the spirits other than God is exactly his own. "*Sub specie æternitatis*, every self is perfect; *sub specie temporis*, it is progressing towards a perfection as yet unattained," he says. And the very quotation from me on which he bases his criticism (see my p. 363) expresses this, almost in open words: "The personality of every soul lies precisely in the relation . . . between that genuine infinity (self-activity) which marks its organising essence, and the finitude . . . to which the infinity [only another name for perfection] subjects itself in defining itself from God." So, too, though more explicitly, when I say (p. 374): "The perfection of the 'creature' lies just in this never-ending *process* of victory. . . . Thus its life shows its peculiar perfection by the mode in which . . . it surely, though slowly and with heavy toil, heals its own inherent wound." And yet again: "The infinity of the 'creature,' the infinity that embosoms finitude and evermore raises this toward likeness with the eternal".

There are sundry other passages in my concluding essay that affirm the distinction drawn by Mr. McTaggart between the complete self-adequacy of the spirit as a whole in eternity and the inadequacy of it as broken up in a time-process and engaged in a perpetual struggle to attain conformity with that eternal wholeness. In fact this distinction furnishes the whole basis for my reply in that essay to Prof. James's *Dilemma of Determinism*. I am really quite at one with Mr. McTaggart in what he says about the perfection of all eternal beings, in so far as they are eternal. I have usually avoided the explicit use of the word, because it is in many contexts misleading, and also because the too free use of it would engender prejudice in most readers, thus preventing the proper appreciation of the arguments offered for the world of real freedom. That world as I intend it, and habitually think it, answers to the principles of unity and harmony quite as Mr. McTaggart suggests.

Accordingly, my argument for the existence of God is not reached by those of his suggested objections which are founded on his assumption that I hold all minds but God to be utterly and totally imperfect, without any aspect of perfection at all. On the contrary, I hold, with him, that all eternal beings are perfect, each in its own way. But the way of God, I maintain, is the way of *absolute* perfection, which eternally excludes defect; whereas the way of every other mind is the way that includes defect, comes (or may come) to include sin, and only exhibits its perfection in its power to return to wholeness through the process of time.

That I have chiefly dwelt on perfection and imperfection as respectively the attributes of God and of the non-divine minds, without entering into the subtle distinction between *kinds* of perfection, is indeed a fact, but it should be regarded as a rhetorical rather than a philosophical procedure. That is to say, my book was aimed at readers of general cultivation rather than at metaphysical experts, and so I thought I should carry my new argument for the reality of God more surely home if I kept out of the region of the supersubtile, and relied upon those aspects of the difference between God and other minds which are the most obvious. The point of my argument, in this connexion, is that in God there is a perfection in which there is no imperfection at all, while in every other mind imperfection is present, though undergoing an endless process of cancellation. Of course, subtly analysed, this last means a species of perfection. But again my point is, that the sole possible basis for species in perfection is, primarily, the contrast between absolute perfection (excludent of imperfection) and perfection that embraces and proceeds to reduce imperfection; and, next, the manifold modes of which this second species is susceptible, resting on what I have called (see my pp. 363, 374) the "rate" of adjustment between the infinite (or perfect) and the finite (or defective) aspects of the mental being.

(4) In connexion with my argument for the existence of God, Mr. McTaggart makes this statement: "Among the different grades [of intelligent beings] which . . . are really possible . . . Dr. Howison assumes that the highest grade of all—that of the ideal Type—is one, and consequently that a being exists who realises the Type. So far as I can see, he does not attempt to prove this." Just what Mr. McTaggart means by his word "this," I am in some doubt—whether he is referring to my "assuming" that the ideal Type is one of the different grades of being that are really possible, or to my taking as a direct consequence of this the actual existence of the ideal Type.

As for the first of these matters, it is not true that I *assume* the ideal Type to be one of the really possible intelligences; on the contrary, I show (see my pp. 353-355) that this Supreme Instance of the intelligent nature present in all possible minds is the one salient certainty in our conception of the whole series, *when we view the series as conceivable simply*: whatever we can *not* tell about the series, or the numbers in it, what we *do* see, and see clearly, is that it must contain, as a possibility, this Type; this I treat as the implication in the entire process of definition by which other members in the series are determined.

And as for the second point, I do not conclude to the actual existence of the divine Type *directly* from its ascertained possibility; that would be merely repeating the thrice-buried Ontologic Proof over again, and the futility of that I have dwelt upon in my pp. 357-358. The identification of the divine Type as a necessary member of the *conceivable* series proves only this: that there is a

necessary connexion between the *idea* of every mind and the *idea* of God,—no mind can define itself except in terms of God. The argument to the actual reality of God is then completed by resorting to each mind's certainty of its own actual existence through dialectic verification: to attempt to posit the contrary, only ends in positing the self again. From this the actual existence of God follows, because the actual existence of the self must carry the existence of whatever the idea of the self synthetically involves. I can hardly imagine how my reviewer can have read pp. 356-359 of my book, and still say that I make no attempt to prove the actual existence of God as the ideal Type of all the really possible spirits; nor how he can still set it down that I *assume* the ideal Type to be one of the series of really possible beings, "and consequently that a being exists who realises the Type".

II.

But enough of these misapprehensions. I must now turn to sundry difficulties that Mr. McTaggart finds with some of the cardinal conceptions in the theory which my book illustrates, or else with my method of advocating them.

(1) He complains that after going closely with Kant to a certain point, I then suddenly separate myself,—“abruptly,” as he says. By this he appears to mean my rejection of Kant's restriction of all our cognition to phenomena and denial of our power to know noumena. He implies that I nowhere give any reasons for rejecting Kant's criticisms on the Paralogism of Pure Reason, but go on to maintain that Pure Reason can know that the self exists, and exists eternally, simply ignoring these celebrated criticisms. It is a fact, of course, that I have not felt it needful to reply in detail to the various branches of Kant's agnostic doctrine, and especially not to his assault upon the possibility of proving theoretically the freedom and the immortality of the self. I have chosen to rely, rather, on a general refutation of the agnostic *motif*, which I have supplied in my first essay; and I have relied more especially on the self-refutation of Kantian agnosticism by its own inner dialectical dissolution, which I have traced out in the fourth part of my third essay. These very essential parts of my general argumentation, my reviewer appears to have quite overlooked. No reader who omits them will properly understand the argumentative procedure on which I rest my case in the seven essays taken together.

Besides, I have throughout assumed readers will see that Kant's agnostic restrictions are anticipated, provided for, and rendered inapplicable by the plain implications of the fact of *a priori* cognition itself, when that is once clearly established and clearly understood; and this fact I have explicitly argued out, in two different places in my volume—in the first essay, and again in the sixth. Then,

too, I have relied on the plain force of the essentially *social* nature of the self-defining consciousness to lead my readers to see how irrelevant Kant's agnostic tenets are. (See, particularly, my pp. 351-353, and cf. pp. 173-175.) That is to say, the Kantian agnosticism is annulled, so far at least as concerns the certainty of the existence, even the noumenal or eternal existence, of the self. In fact, however, my reviewer is a trifle out in saying I depart from Kant on this point, for Kant himself never supposed that *this* was unknown or unknowable: what was unknowable was, not the *existence*, but the *nature* of the noumenon. If nowhere else, then at all events in the *Prolegomena*, Kant declares unmistakably that the existence of selves as *Dinge an sich* is a known certainty. "That there are no *Dinge an sich*," he says in substance, "is absurd". (Cf. the *Prolegomena passim*, but especially in §57.)

(2) A more serious complaint is that which Mr. McTaggart makes that my reasons for treating the Categories as applicable to the self, when I refuse to describe it in terms of Sense Forms, are "not brought out anywhere in the book". This fault, if it is a fault, I have to confess. Within the limits of the brief volume I could not compress everything pertaining to a complete vindication of my general view. In particular, Mr. McTaggart's centrally pertinent question—Why are not the Categories in exactly the same position as Time, as to being necessarily transcended by the noumenal self?—could only be answered after a complete re-examination, going to the foundations, of the whole problem of epistemology. This would need to be taken up along Kant's own lines, and followed to the point where (at the end of the *Transcendental Analytic*) one gets into the position to show that, and just why, Kant has failed to establish the *objective* character of even natural science. It would then appear that, in order to give really objective value to *a priori* syntheses in Space and Time, we must combine a *pure* use of the Categories—a use unmixed with Sense Forms—with their use as "schematised" with the help of these Forms. Thus we should learn that there is no possible escape from the transcendent use of the Categories even when we attempt to employ them only transcendently.

But not only did I feel that this epistemological inquiry was at once too long and too subtle for the public to which I chiefly addressed my book; I was also, in the case of more expert readers, relying upon a previous warning as to the general path the inquiry must follow, which I had given in my contribution to the volume entitled *The Conception of God*, at pp. 124-127. Still, Mr. McTaggart is quite right in pointing out that all this needs to be done in full detail before one can claim to have made a proof of Personal Idealism clear of *all* queries. And this I hope some day yet to accomplish.

(3) My reviewer finds a "weakness" in that part of my argument concerning the existence of God which aims at showing God's soleness (monotheism), in opposition to the charge of "polytheism"

or "apeirotheism" urged against my proposition that all selves coexist with God in eternity. He thinks the argument assumes "that beings who are equally perfect could not be different from one another". But it does *not* assume this; as I have already shown above, when clearing up the misapprehension about perfection and imperfection as applicable to the selves other than God. It does assume, however, that no beings who are *absolutely* perfect can be different, that is, none that are perfect without immixture of imperfection, and that are wholly supratemporal in their being. The conjunction of this unmixed perfection with eternity is what constitutes the proof for the soleness of God. Mr. McTaggart fails to get the force of it, I think, because he silently omits this divine *differentia* before the word "perfect" as I use it of God. And thus contrasting God and other selves as the Perfect and the unrelieved imperfect, he draws the unwarrantable conclusion about "superiority" and "inferiority" which he seems to dislike. But I intend no relation of this sort between God and the souls. They are *different*, and *unchangeably* different; they are even different *in species*, God being perfection eternally fulfilled, the other selves having a time-world of unfulfilment and having to carry it on toward the goal of fulfilment evermore. Thus the difference between them is in this reference permanent,—to answer my reviewer's question on this point.

(4) Finally, Mr. McTaggart objects to my calling this sole mind possessing absolute and eternal perfection God. He insists that the traditional usage shall be absolutely venerated, which makes God the name of one only self-existent Being, who brings all other beings into existence by creation *ex nihilo*. Here I am quite unable to agree with him. I not only do not think that this solitude of self-existence, conjoined with this universal efficient causality, is the central and essential thing in the traditional religious thought of Christendom, but I am sure that the most spiritually minded Christians would at once declare that it is not such; they would say, on the contrary, that the essential thing in the being of God is his holiness, justice, and infinite love. Now, what I point out is, not only that the function of creation, taken literally, is unessential to this moral perfection of God, but that it is in hopeless contradiction with it; and that the obscurely felt fact of this contradiction, a feeling growing ever more clear as the Christian consciousness grows more sure of itself, is at the bottom of all that restlessness in the region of Christian theology which we all know so well, and which is the characteristic fact in the later Christian world.

To remove the name of God from the clarified and purified conception of the eternal Ideal Type, would be to do violence, inexcusable affront, to the deepest and truest element in the historic religious consciousness. I feel the strongest assurance that my new interpretation of the name of God is the genuine fulfilment of the highest and profoundest prescience in the historic religious

life. What offends us in the Spinozistic or other monistic appropriations of the name God is the evident absence from their Absolute of all the essential moral qualities. In *these* it is that true Deity lies ; and all God's metaphysical attributes must be keyed up to them ; not one of these "natural" attributes dare be construed in any way that conflicts with the eternal moral essence. If they have been so construed historically (as indeed they have), genuine theology requires that God's conception shall be relieved of these errors, in order that his true nature may stand revealed as it is.

G. H. HOWISON.