MIND

A QUARTERLY REVIEW

OF

PSYCHOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY.

I.—PHILOSOPHY AND THE STUDY OF PHILOSOPHERS.¹

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THOSE who are engaged in the study of metaphysical philosophy often find themselves criticised by those who are working at the special sciences on the ground that, while the special sciences are continually adding to the sum of human knowledge and to man's power over nature, metaphysical philosophy makes no progress, but consists merely in a chaos of rival and contradictory speculations. And it is sometimes said that a clear proof of the barrenness of the pursuit is to be found in the attention devoted to the philosophers of the past, and even of a very remote past. The student of chemistry or biology is referred to the latest text-books; the student of metaphysics is sent back to Locke and Kant, to Descartes and Spinoza, or even to Plato and Aristotle. Some great scientific workers have themselves been imbued with the taste or passion for philosophy, and, like Huxley for instance, have been able to appreciate both the scientific and the philosophical work of Descartes or Aristotle. Some scientific men also recognise that in their own special departments a study of the history of scientific ideas is not an altogether irrelevant part of their work. Still it remains true, that the average scientific specialist feels convinced, or speaks as if he were convinced, of the futility of metaphysics, and regards the history of metaphysical variations and our occupation with it as a confirmation of his sceptical attitude.

¹ Presidential address delivered to the Aristotelian Society, 4th November, 1898.

Even those who are themselves busied with philosophical studies at times feel a certain doubt about their own position. The uncomfortable suspicion suggests itself that the great amount of writing and discussion actually going on upon philosophical subjects may perhaps after all be no real proof of the vitality of metaphysics ; for a very large and, as some may think, the most interesting and most valuable part of it is concerned with the careful exposition and criticism of the great philosophers. Philosophy, especially in Germany, long the chosen home of metaphysics, appears to have become very largely the study of its own history. The age of creation seems at an end, and our days have fallen in an " Alexandrian " period of commentators and critics. The biography of metaphysics is being so minutely written that we begin to fear that metaphysics itself must be dead, and that what we are studying and elaborating so anxiously is but a long and not altogether favourable obituary notice.

With such objections and doubts I propose to deal at present by asking two questions : (1) May not the nature of philosophy itself render inevitable this perpetual recurrence to the thought of the past ? and (2) may there not be special reasons in our own age why this historical interest should be predominant ? These questions are not new, and I do not profess to have anything very new to say upon them ; but they seem to me to be worth discussing afresh in a philosophical society which devotes no small part of its time to the study of past philosophy, and which by its very name professes a permanent debt to him whom several centuries called " the philosopher ".

I do not think it accurate to describe the progress of the special sciences as consisting in a continuous accumulation of facts. An accumulation of facts is never science, but only the materials for science. Progress in the sciences consists in the substitution of more adequate concepts or categories for those by which we have hitherto attempted to unify and make intelligible to ourselves some parts or aspects of our experience. New facts are, indeed, the occasion for framing new concepts, and new concepts aid in the discovery of new facts ; but the accumulation of facts is not what is essential in scientific progress. To take a simple illustration, the fact that the sun is seen on one side of the sky in the morning and on the other side in the evening can be explained by the movement of the sun over the earth—the theory which we all use in our " common-sense " thinking and when we speak of " sunrise " and " sunset ". The fact has been explained more adequately by the revolution of the earth on

its axis. So again, while the Darwinian theory of natural selection has incidentally led to the observation of many previously unnoticed facts about plants and animals, the theory itself is not an addition to our sum of facts but the substitution of a new definition of "species" for an old one. Indeed the old type of naturalist often collected many more facts (and specimens) than the new biologist, but his facts lay simply alongside of one another and were not held together by a continuous thread of theory.

Now, if the sciences, being, in Mr. Herbert Spencer's phrase, "partially unified knowledge," have their history marked by changes in their unifying concepts, much more must this be the case with philosophy, which attempts to reach complete unification of knowledge—I say "attempts to reach," for, just as Pythagoras took "lover of wisdom" and not "wise" for his title, so must we define philosophy, not as "completely unified knowledge," but as the effort or endeavour to reach it. A new fact may upset an accepted scientific theory; but not merely every new fact and every new event in the physical universe, but every new scientific theory (being a new event in the region of mind) is a new fact for philosophy, and the unifying and systematising concepts of philosophy must therefore be constantly subject to revision and modification. The main occupation of philosophy comes therefore to be the examination of those concepts that serve well enough for the provisional and very partial unifications of ordinary life, and of those concepts that serve well enough for the unification of the special sciences which deal with particular aspects of the world taken in abstraction from one another. Philosophy must primarily and at least be "a criticism of categories". The criticism consists in seeking to discover the relations of the various concepts, which are used uncritically in ordinary and in scientific thinking, to the ultimate data of experience (and what these are it is of course the concern of philosophy to discover, for common-sense and even the special sciences are alike content to accept as facts what are really unanalysed and unconscious theories); but beyond this primary task of philosophical criticism, it must, in the very effort to be thoroughgoing, proceed to consider the relation of these fundamental concepts to one another, and in doing this even a professedly critical philosophy must to some extent become constructive and speculative.

If we define philosophy (or metaphysics) as the theory of reality and its method as the analysis of experience, I do not think this can bring us to a conception of philosophy and of

its relation to the special sciences different from that which I have just adopted. The reality which philosophy attempts to understand must be *reality as a whole, but as knowable by us*. With the genuinely "unknowable" we can have nothing to do, and it is waste of words to talk about it. The reality we deal with must mean the same thing as experience—"experience," however, being taken in its very widest sense. Each of the special sciences takes up some aspect of reality. Each of them, therefore, deals with abstractions of varying degrees of abstractness and not with the whole concrete fact. It is with the totality, with the concrete, complex whole that philosophy attempts to deal. If we consider psychology as one of the special sciences, we must nevertheless recognise that it divides the field of experience with the other sciences in a different way from that in which they divide it between themselves. They are each concerned with some aspect of the content of experience, some with more abstract, others with less abstract, aspects; but all, even the least abstract of them, *e.g.*, biology and sociology, leave out of consideration the fact that no reality exists for us at all save as an actual or possible object of consciousness. Psychology, on the other hand, makes the opposite abstraction. It is concerned with experience only on its subjective side, with the mental process as such, and is not directly concerned with this or that aspect of the content. Now, philosophy as the attempt to understand experience as a whole, to get at "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," must inevitably take up an attitude of criticism towards the concepts which the various special sciences, including psychology, use in dealing with their problems. The thinking of experience as a whole remains the ideal for philosophy, an ideal which to different persons may seem more or less attainable; but the task which all philosophers must accept includes at least the criticism of the concepts used in the sciences and in ordinary thinking. The question which Kant came to formulate explicitly as the problem of what he called "Transcendental Logic," "How is knowledge possible?" is a question with which every serious philosophy deals in some way or other, however much the particular form and the particular results of the Kantian criticism be ignored or rejected or superseded. Only the thoroughgoing sceptic gives up the problem of how knowledge is possible, and in giving up this, he gives up metaphysics altogether and cultivates some other intellectual garden as best he may. Empiricists and idealists alike have their answer to the question, more or less dogmatic. They have some account to give of the concepts, such as thing

and quality, cause and effect, matter and mind, by the help of which the obscure chaos of uninterpreted sensation or feeling is arranged into the more or less orderly world of ordinary and scientific belief. Our ordinary or common-sense knowledge is full of tacit assumptions and presuppositions, some of which are retained, while others are discarded, by the special sciences. However much we try to avoid assumptions in speaking about the facts of consciousness, we cannot do so. The language we have received as part of our social inheritance is full of *idola fori*, and (unless we are barbarians) of *idola theatri* also. No avoidance of metaphysics, but only serious metaphysical effort enables us to detect these assumptions. "Enough metaphysics to get rid of metaphysical ideas" means in truth a very thorough metaphysical training, and, not merely a great deal of logical acuteness in unravelling complex concepts lurking under apparently simple words, but a knowledge of the history of thought in the past which has gone to form the intellectual ground on which we are standing, the intellectual atmosphere we breathe. If geology and chemical analysis have a scientific interest, apart from the practical benefits they may bring to the health and the wealth of nations, the study of the ideas of the past which have gone to mould our language and our beliefs has as great, if not a greater, intellectual interest and may have a very important, even though indirect, influence on the life of society, especially in the spheres of politics and religion, where unconscious and therefore uncriticised metaphysics is apt to cause serious mischief.

Undoubtedly there is a great attractiveness in the seeming freedom from the burden of historical tradition and from the dusty toil of historical research with which some philosophers, and among them some of the greatest, have attacked directly and single-handed the problems of knowledge and reality. Why, it may be urged, should we not always discuss our questions at first hand, with the freshness of a Socratic dialogue, instead of cumbering ourselves with the opinions of our predecessors, as Aristotle does in his *Metaphysics*, the book in which philosophy seems to lose its primitive direct outlook on experience and to begin to stiffen into scholasticism? Undoubtedly a great deal of the prevalent historical interest in philosophers of the past is not properly interest in philosophy; the two interests may even sometimes, as Green said, be in the inverse ratio.¹ Much of the study of Plato

¹ Cf. his edition of *Hume*, vol. i., p. 4 ("General Introduction," § 4). I suppose he was thinking primarily of G. H. Lewes' biographical *History*.

and Aristotle is scholarship. Much of the minute study of Kant has been correctly called "*Kantphilologie*". The humanist tradition in education, which has thrown a charm round the art and the literature and the life of periods that seem unprofitable subjects of study to those immersed in practical business or in the sciences that are directly connected with the things of industry and commerce—this humanist tradition is undoubtedly a chief support of the study of the old philosophers.

Apart, however, from any side interest in such a study, there are sufficiently strong reasons for it in the nature of philosophy itself. Bacon and Descartes, Locke and Kant, each in his turn, thought that he had shaken off the fetters of the past. Yet each in different degrees and ways shows that the ideas of the past do not bind us by mere external fetters, but have grown into the very structure of our minds. Bacon urges the study of facts without the assumption of philosophical theories; but his whole thinking about nature is pervaded by the assumption of the atomist doctrine, which, though unacknowledged, lies at the basis of his, as of most popular philosophy. Descartes, a far greater and more original philosophical thinker, succeeds in clearing his mind more completely of traditional concepts; and yet even he cannot escape from the system against which he rebels, and he fails to escape just because he turns away from the study and criticism of older theories. No sooner has he reached his solid basis, the one indubitable fact of self-consciousness, on which to rebuild the fabric of philosophy, than the scholastic notion of substance slips unrecognised into his thinking; and the self, the *ego*, becomes "a substance that thinks" set over against the substance that is extended. The dualism of popular philosophy, inherited from scholasticism and indirectly from Platonism, is exaggerated and stiffened in the philosophy which professed to start clear of all assumptions. Locke, who in his turn seeks to make an absolutely fresh start and to interrogate consciousness for himself, retains this same notion of substance, though he is clearly puzzled by its strange emptiness of meaning. What is still more significant, Locke like Bacon assumes the passivity of mind. It is a mirror or a blank sheet of paper on which things produce more or less perfect copies of themselves. Plato and Aristotle had used this picture of the writing tablet, but had used it in a more careful and conscious way, and a study of their psychology might have made Locke more cautious in his dealings with the metaphors of mental "images" and "impressions". Even Kant, who to escape the difficulties

in which Hume's clear-sightedness had placed Locke's empiricism, makes his "Copernican" change and tries the hypothesis of mind acting upon the material given to it—even Kant thinks he is introducing an absolutely new method into philosophy. Like Locke, though in a less degree, he tends to ignore his predecessors; and as a consequence he carries over into his theory of knowledge the mysterious "thing-in-itself," which seems to be a mixture of the scholastic "substance" with the Leibnizian "monad". He accepts, moreover, an absolute division between the intelligible and the phenomenal world, which is an inheritance from the Platonic doctrine that Aristotle had criticised in the *Metaphysics*, and that Plato himself had criticised in the *Parmenides*. I do not mean that the thought of the world would necessarily have gained if Bacon and Descartes, Locke and Kant, had devoted themselves to writing commentaries on Aristotle. There are times when a violent revolution seems to be needed in order to effect a reform, whether in thought or in politics or in religion; and the revolutionary leader cannot be expected to be always just to the past or to see his own work in correct historical perspective. I have referred to these four revolutionary thinkers simply as illustrations, to show how difficult or impossible it is to escape the *idola theatri*, while attempting to give an account of experience without a clear and explicit consciousness of the history of the metaphysical ideas which have become embedded like fossils in the language of ordinary life and the habits of ordinary thinking.

We may distinguish three main attitudes towards the doctrines of older philosophers. First, there is the attitude of submission to authority. Of this the most fully developed example is to be found in Scholasticism; but it was a habit of thought which had already shown itself in pre-Christian times in the Alexandrian period and even earlier. The reverence for the written word which contains the doctrine of the great teacher leads even the most gifted and original thinkers to put their ideas in the form of commentary on the sayings of the master. Discussion, however much freedom it may actually attain, takes the guise of rival interpretations of the same authority or of disagreement in the weight assigned to different authorities or to different elements of the same doctrine. It is a manner of philosophical discussion which is apt to arise wherever famous names have won a widespread veneration. Plato makes Socrates use it ironically when, instead of frankly asserting that Simonides the poet (and these old poets were the Greek "Bible") was

wrong in his opinion, he argues that the saying of Simonides must be otherwise interpreted or that the saying was wrongly ascribed to Simonides.¹ The same habit exists among ourselves, practised in all seriousness and not only with reference to the Bible. The discussion between sensationalist and intellectualist has sometimes taken the form of different interpretations of Locke, especially where Locke's *Essay* has become the traditional student's book. Idealist and realist, intuitionist and positivist have each been anxious to invoke the name of Kant; and opposing parties have sheltered themselves under the broad shadow of Hegel, distinguished as Right and Left and Centre, like the groups in a French Chamber of Deputies. Even those who protest against a dominant authoritative system often do so in the guise of a return to some favoured doctrine of the past. "Back to Kant" is one form of the revolt against the post-Kantian idealists.

The second attitude is that to which I have already referred as represented by Bacon and Descartes—revolt against authority, assertion of individual independence in thinking. Earlier philosophies are regarded as false. They are systems to be thrown aside. If they are dealt with, it is only that they may be refuted. But if they are dealt with at all, distinctions have soon to be made. They are not all false in the same degree. Bacon, *e.g.*, has a kindlier feeling for the older Greek philosophers, "*quorum scripta perierunt*,"² than for Plato and Aristotle, whose works have floated down on the stream of time to encumber the intellectual powers of mankind. If some of the ideas of older philosophers are less to be condemned, they receive a certain relative approval. And so this attitude of protest and revolt can only maintain itself as a purely negative attitude towards the past by ignoring the study of it altogether. When such study asserts itself, as it is sure to do wherever humanist studies are not altogether supplanted by the mathematical and natural sciences, the negative attitude must give way to a recognition that the philosophical thinking of the past was a preparation for the better philosophy of the present. A Comtist history of philosophy is indeed only a history of successive and conflicting forms of error; but these systems which are refuted one after the other are regarded as preparing the way for the clear-sighted, disillusioned positivism which has learnt to escape the metaphysical, as well as the theological, stage of thought. As we have seen, however, the metaphysical stage

¹ Cf. *Republic*, I, 531-535.

² Cf. *Novum Organum*, *Præfatio*.

can be escaped by no one except through the careful study of the growth of metaphysical concepts. We must trace the antecedents of our own ideas in the thought of the past in order to guard against the fallacies due to false philosophical systems. But to see the falsehood of a system clearly we must seek to understand it fully; and we can only do so by studying it in the light of the social and intellectual environment in which it arose. When we do that, however, we begin to recognise in it a certain relative truth and value. A doctrine which is false, if accepted blindly and upon authority in our age, and which is easily refuted if judged by our canons of scientific criticism, is seen to have been in many respects sound and valid when taken in relation to the time and circumstances of its origin. We may not be prepared to accept the scholastic philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas as the final word for us; but we may recognise its great worth as an expression of the central ideas of the thirteenth century by a man of much shrewdness, common-sense and moderation. We cannot be Cartesians or Leibnizians now-a-days, and yet we may acknowledge the great debt of modern thought to Descartes and Leibniz more easily than was possible in last century, when Cartesianism and Wolfianism had become new scholastic systems in those universities where mediæval Aristotelianism had been supplanted. But, if we have reached this appreciative manner of regarding the great systems of a sufficiently remote past, we have surely got beyond the stage of looking on them simply as errors and the parents of errors against which we have to be on our guard. When the religious or the philosophical systems of the past are studied in what we have come to consider "the historical spirit," when criticism passes from merely refuting opinions to showing how and why these opinions came to be held, above all when the conception of development or evolution is extended from the natural world to the world of human thought, we have left behind the purely negative attitude to ideas that we no longer accept, and we come to see the long series of attempts to grapple with the central problems of knowledge and reality not as stray opinions with which we do not happen to agree, but as parts of one continuous movement in which our own thinking is itself included. The development of ideas is, indeed, in some respects more intricate and difficult to trace than development in the organic sphere. The genealogy of ideas (as of institutions) is more complex than that of animal or vegetable species. Still the leading threads can generally be detected; and just because we are dealing with expressly

formulated ideas, the development of philosophical systems often gives the clearest indication of the relation in which successive stages of society stand to one another. In other words, the history of philosophy may often serve as a clue to guide us in the attempt to reach a philosophy of history. Plato and Aristotle help us to understand the Hellenic world, Thomas Aquinas to understand the middle ages and their relation to the ancient world, Descartes to understand the period of the Reformation, and so on.

It may be most convenient to discuss this third attitude towards the philosophers of the past—an attitude which I think is coming to be more and more adopted at the present day—in connection with the views of Hegel, who gave to it its most prominent expression and who may seem to many to have exaggerated it into falsehood. Every philosophy, Hegel admits, has been refuted. The very fact that a philosophy was the philosophy of some past age proves that it cannot be the truest system for a succeeding age. But it is also true that no philosophy has ever been refuted. "Every philosophy has been and still is necessary." There is but one philosophy manifesting itself in the succession of philosophical systems. The history of philosophy is thus an integral part of philosophy itself. It is philosophy taking its time.¹

What is usually quoted from Hegel is his saying that the sequence of philosophical systems is the same as that of the sequence of the categories in his *Logic*; and this is commonly supposed to be a dictum which refutes itself by its absurdity and preposterous conceit. And the dictum is contemptuously put aside even by historians of philosophy who have learnt Hegel's lesson very fully. Let us see first what Hegel really said and what he meant. Now what he says in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*² is that "on the whole (*im Ganzen*) the sequence of the philosophical systems is similar to the sequence of the categories". And again in one of the *Zusätze* to the *Encyklopædie*, § 86, he says: "the relation of the earlier to the later systems is in general (*im Allgemeinen*) much like the relation of the earlier to the later stages of the logical Idea, and is of this kind that the later contain the earlier sublated (*aufgehoben*, taken up, annulled and absorbed) in them". Hegel does not assert this as if he had got hold of a magical formula which saved him the trouble of studying history. He gives the

¹ Cf. *Encyklopædie*, § 86, Zusatz, 2; *Gesch. der Phil.*, Einleitung, A., § 8. (*Werke*, vi., pp. 166-168; xiii., p. 42 *seq.*)

² *Werke*, xiii., p. 48, ed. 1840. This particular sentence was not given in the edition of 1838.

reason why we should expect to find such a general correspondence between the logical and the historical order. The earlier systems are not, as used to be held and as was still held by many in his day, the depositories of a higher and purer wisdom to which later generations must look back. He would indeed agree with Bacon about the reputed wisdom of the ancients: "*Antiquitas saeculi juvenus mundi*". The earlier systems are the poorest, the emptiest, the most abstract. They give crude and one-sided answers to a vaguely put question about the underlying principle of things, and it is only through the conflict of opposing systems that the discussion of the problem gradually became more adequate. Thus Plato's philosophy is an attempt to get beyond the one-sided theories of Eleatics and Heracleiteans, while recognising the element of truth in each of these opposing systems. And it is Plato, too, who calls philosophy "dialectic," and comes in his great metaphysical dialogues to occupy himself precisely with what Hegel calls logical categories, while always keeping in view the historical controversies that had preceded him. Hegel sought to arrange the concepts of our ordinary and of our scientific thinking in their logical order, i.e., to proceed from abstract to concrete, and to show how the dialectical antinomies into which our reason inevitably falls are no argument for complete philosophical agnosticism, but only prove the necessity of struggling to get beyond one-sided and superficial views of things and of trying to see them in the totality of their complex relationships to one another. He, therefore, expected to find traces of a similar dialectic movement in the long labour of the human mind throughout the ages. Nor are we to suppose, as the language of many of Hegel's critics might suggest, that he turned away like Descartes from the world of books and from the world of men and spun his complete system of logic out of his own inner consciousness and then sought with this fanciful cobweb to entrap the living universe. His early studies were chiefly devoted to Greek literature; and it was undoubtedly in the history of Greek thought, as he read it, that he found a main reason for rearranging and supplementing and "objectifying" the categories which German philosophy had inherited from Kant. Hegel's *History of Philosophy* and his *Logic* may both be open to many criticisms; but one criticism is quite unfair, viz., that he brought a ready-made dogmatic system to the interpretation of preceding philosophies, enslaving facts to his logic. His *Logic* is in great part the outgrowth of his historical studies, and represents the inferences he had drawn

from history as he understood it. His actual procedure was inductive and experiential—as much as any real scientific procedure can be inductive and experiential.¹ Common-sense laughs at Hegel for saying that mere Being = Nothing. But he could find abundant historical evidence for the logical transition. If the Absolute be thought of as that of which we may not predict anything determinate, it becomes equivalent to Nothing. Oriental religions and philosophies and Neoplatonic conceptions of the Absolute confirm his view; and did not Eleatic philosophy end in the paradox of Gorgias who wrote: *περὶ φύσεως ἢ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος*?

Hegel and some of his followers have been blamed for reading his system into Aristotle. The answer is given by Karl Michelet in his Preface to his Commentary on the *Ethics*: "*restituit tantum magistro suo quae ex ipso mutuatus est*". Scholars have been scandalised by an unhappy mistranslation which Hegel made of a passage in Plato's *Sophistes*. He mistranslated a particular sentence now and then, as many more special students of things Greek have done;²

¹ Rosenkranz, *Hegel's Leben*, pp. 10, 11, 14, supplies evidence that Hegel was studying not only Euripides and Sophocles, but Thucydides and Aristotle's *Ethics* (in 1788) before he studied Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (in 1789). The first traces of a tendency to philosophy are to be found in a little note-book which he began to keep in 1785, in which he collected definitions. The definition of logic (from whatever source derived) is certainly remarkable and significant: "*ein Inbegriff der Regeln des Denkens, abstrahirt aus der Geschichte der Menschheit*"—"a summary of the rules of thinking, abstracted from the history of mankind". In 1788 (his first year at Tübingen University), in a dissertation "On some of the Advantages of Classical Studies," he speaks of the reading of Greek and Latin authors as an appropriate preparation for the study of philosophy. We are exercised in the use of abstract conceptions and we find the germs of the philosophy of later times. "The many contradictions of the ancient philosophers, especially in their speculations on the practical part of philosophy, have at least lightened our trouble in finding the *via media* where the truth lies" (Rosenkranz, p. 27). By themselves such remarks might seem only the conventional apologetics of classical education, but in Hegel's case they are undoubtedly the germs of his conception of the relation between philosophy and history. Ueberweg in his *History of Philosophy* (Engl. transl., vol. ii., p. 235) says that for his master's degree (1790) Hegel wrote an essay "On the Study of the History of Philosophy". This is not mentioned by Rosenkranz, who makes the mistake of supposing Hegel himself to have written the thesis *De limite officiorum humanorum seposita animorum immortalitate*, which he had to defend (see Karl v. Hegel's edition of his father's *Letters*, i., p. 16 note). It is quite clear that Hegel had laboriously studied history and Greek literature and philosophy before he had definitely arrived at his philosophical system, and certainly before he elaborated his *Logic*.

² E.g., Grote and Zeller in their astonishing interpretation of a passage in Aristotle's *will*. (Cf. *MIND*, N.S., vol. vi., p. 585.)

and since his time the materials for the history of Greek philosophy have not only increased in bulk but have been more critically estimated and made more intelligible and accessible, so that much of what Hegel has to say on the subject is out of date. Nevertheless to Hegel our whole study of Greek thought owes an enormous debt; and his influence may be traced, not only in his acknowledged disciples like Michelet and Schwegler, not only among those who came under his influence and passed out of it, like Zeller, but among many who have never directly owned allegiance to him and are even unaware how much of his thinking they have inherited. That we now study Plato without Neoplatonic and Aristotle without scholastic glosses is largely due to Hegel's historical spirit in seeking always to understand a philosopher in the light of his own particular environment. His wonderful insight into the real significance of the Greek Sophists (an insight which anticipates Grote without Grote's exaggeration and one-sidedness) may be taken as a crucial instance of his objectivity of outlook, freedom from bias and historical sympathy. I do not mean to assert that Hegel's historical judgments are always equally sound. Much has been discovered about the origins of civilisation since his days; much of what he says about the Oriental world was based on imperfect knowledge and has lost its interest; he does not perhaps sufficiently appreciate the work of the Roman spirit. Reaction against the unhistorical rationalism of the eighteenth century¹ leads him to be somewhat unfair to the newer type of constructive historical criticism which Niebuhr represented in his time. Teutonism, as with many of his patriotic countrymen, bulks excessively, it may be, in his interpretation of the modern world. But when he is dealing with the Hellenic world, he is dealing with what he had studied carefully and in the ardour of his youth. And I think, if we were to try to characterise Hegel's philosophical position briefly, the least inaccurate statement would be to say, that the main stream of German philosophy, which descended from Kant though Fichte and Schelling, was met in Hegel's mind by another and equally powerful current coming straight from Plato and Aristotle as well as by

¹ Yet Hegel was on the whole less influenced by mere reaction than most of the intellectual leaders of his age. He never disowned the debt even of Germany to the French Revolution. With all his enthusiasm for the Greeks he would not assent to Cousin's exaltation of ancient above modern philosophy (*Cf. Briefe*, ii., p. 297). Cousin indeed, after telling of an indignant outburst of Hegel's about Catholic superstitions, remarks that Hegel had retained the prejudices of an eighteenth century philosopher (*Art. in Revue des deux mondes*, August, 1866).

smaller side currents coming indirectly from them also but through Neoplatonic and Christian mystics. It is not only from Kant's Antinomies and from the philosophical method of Fichte, but directly from Plato and Aristotle that Hegel derived his dialectic; and it was from them, far more than from any modern philosopher, that he derived his ideas of the relation between philosophy and its history. None of Hegel's modern predecessors, except Leibniz, had appreciated the thought of the past in a catholic spirit; and Leibniz treats previous philosophical systems rather eclectically, accepting suggestions from many diverse sources but not applying the categories of continuity and of organic growth to the history of human thought in the same thoroughgoing way in which he applied them to the phenomena of the physical world.

In his use of the word "dialectic" Hegel may be said to bring it back to Plato's signification, in order to escape the deadlock into which Kant had brought metaphysics. In Plato the suggestions for a dialectic movement in the history of thought are slight, but they are not wanting. I have referred already to the relation in which Plato expressly puts his own doctrine of ideas to Heracleiteanism on the one side and to Eleaticism on the other; and Plato evidently regarded the Pythagorean doctrine of numbers as a "propædæutic" for his own theory. But even in the simpler "conversations" of Socrates we may find the germs of what we may call a dialectical interpretation of the history of thought. The beginning of the *Republic* seems to me a clear example of that method of seeking to arrive at truth through the conflict and clash of preceding opinion which is common to Plato, Aristotle and Hegel. In the old man Cephalus and his son Polemarchus, both living in the stage of proverbial morality and submission to the sacred authority of the poets, in the rhetorical sophist Thrasymachus and Plato's brothers, Glaucon and Adeimantus, educated young Athenians who have come under the sway of the "Sophistic" rationalism but are dissatisfied with it—in these persons of the dialogue we have a series of types representing the development of Greek thought and the preparation for Socrates. Against the definitions of Justice which the first two give very superficial—we might say "sophistical"—arguments suffice. The contradictions easily show themselves. The thesis of Thrasymachus requires a harder struggle before it can be made to disclose its incoherence and refute itself—and, it is to be noted, the Socratic method is always dialectical, it is to make an inadequate theory when carried out into its

consequences lead to its own negation. Glaucon and Adeimantus have advanced farther; they have absorbed a subtler rationalism than Thrasymachus, but have recognised its inadequacy, and so they are fitted to stimulate and to follow the Platonic Socrates in his constructive idealism.

This dialectic method is formulated in very simple terms by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* VII. 1, § 5, 1145, b 2, where he proposes in discussing the subject of ἀκρασία to follow his customary plan of stating current opinions (τὰ φαινόμενα, τὰ λεγόμενα), going through the objections which may be made to them (διαπορήσαντας), and so arriving at a solution (λύσις), which if possible shall recognise the element of truth in all, or at least in the most important of these opinions.¹ Here we have the germ of the Scholastic method of *quaestio, objecta, conclusio*. But with Aristotle it has not yet stiffened into a formal and external method; and his solutions are not as cut and dried as those of theologians were expected to be. Many illustrations of this method of ἀπορία may be found in the Aristotelian writings, e.g., in the *Ethics* in the discussion of pleasure both in book vii. and in book x. One very conspicuous example on a large scale is supplied by the *Politics*. The whole of the second book is occupied with a criticism of Plato and other political theorists, and also of actual constitutions which had been held up as ideals.

In the *Metaphysics* we have the same method applied to "First Philosophy"—what we call "metaphysics". Aristotle thinks it necessary to go through the opinions of his predecessors. As he was the first to write (or inspire) a constitutional history,¹ so he was the first to write a history of philosophy, and he writes it as an integral and necessary part of his own metaphysical system. Schwegler indeed (in a note on *Met.* I. c. 3) holds that "the modern philosophical view [he means, of course, the Hegelian view] of the history of philosophy is entirely alien to Aristotle. He sees in it not a regular process of development going on with logical necessity, but regards it only from the pædagogic side, as a school

¹ The recently discovered 'Αθηναίων πολιτεία, which if not written by Aristotle must have been written for his use, is not merely a description of the Athenian constitution at some particular period, but an account of its successive forms. It is the first constitutional history ever written. The other 157 πολιτεῖαι were probably less elaborate documents. But this extensive survey of the actual political institutions of mankind, barbarian as well as Greek, shows how Aristotle like Hegel prepared himself for philosophy by historical study.

of exercise for thought."¹ Now, Aristotle's philosophising of the history of philosophy is certainly very rudimentary compared with Hegel's; but it seems to me a treatment of that history essentially the same in kind. The various opinions are not simply put alongside of one another in scholastic fashion, as if they were all utterances of persons on the same mental level and conscious of precisely the same problem. Aristotle expressly groups them according to the degree in which they realise the fourfold question that has, in his view, to be asked about reality. As Hegel sees the categories of his *Logic* gradually reached by the successive philosophical schools, so Aristotle finds his doctrine of the four causes bit by bit emerging from the progress of Greek thought. The earliest philosophers, when they asked themselves what is the underlying principle of things, were content to assign the "matter," that out of which the world of phenomena came and into which it returns. Empedocles felt the need of efficient causes, and "in a stammering way" expressed a principle of movement in his "love" and "strife," but he then went on to treat these as if they were simply material elements alongside of the other four. Anaxagoras made an epoch by assigning Reason or Intelligence as the efficient cause which produces order out of chaos, but he did not work out the principle in detail. Similarly, the Pythagoreans had advanced beyond the Ionians in assigning Number (or rather we should say "Figure," for Greek arithmetic was geometrical) as the principle of things; but they went on to treat this formal principle as if it were material, as if the universe were actually pieced together out of geometrical points, lines and figures. The Pythagorean "number" was the germ of the Platonic "ideas," which are a formal principle clearly recognised as such. And thus there only remains the final cause for Aristotle himself to put forward as his distinctive principle, though the germs of that also are to be found in earlier philosophy and especially in the Platonic. Now, whatever be thought of this particular interpretation of the history of Greek philosophy, it seems to me an interpretation of the same kind as that which Hegel applies to the history of all philosophy. Besides, we find Aristotle expressly recognising a logical necessity in the transition from

¹ Schwegler also thinks that the notion of a cycle in history excludes the idea of logical development. Aristotle certainly has the popular Greek notion of a cycle as a background to his thinking now and then; but it nowhere prevents him from taking a thoroughly scientific view of social or intellectual evolution. Contrast *Pol.* I. 2, with Plato's *Laws* III., 678-680.

one system to another. Thus in *Met.* I., 3, § 15, 984 a 18, he writes *αὐτὸ τὸ πρᾶγμα ὥδοποίησεν αὐτοῖς καὶ συνηνάκασε ζητεῖν*, which amounts to recognising that the individual thinker is led on to a fresh stage by the logical necessities of the problem itself. And, again, a few lines farther on (§ 21, 984 b 9), *ὑπ' αὐτῆς τῆς ἀληθείας ἀναγκαζόμενοι τὴν ἐχομένην ἐξήτησαν ἀρχήν*, i.e., the principles follow one another in a necessary sequence (*τὴν ἐχομένην ἀρχήν*), and thought is inevitably led on (*ἀναγκαζόμενοι*) from one step to the next in logical order. In any philosophical interpretation of history purely chronological sequence must be put aside for logical sequence, philosophical history being something other than annals; and thus we find Aristotle placing Anaxagoras after Empedocles as the more advanced thinker, though younger in age (*Met.* I., 3, § 13, 984 a 12. In the context this is the only meaning that can be put upon *τοῖς δ' ἔργοις ὕστερος* applied to Anaxagoras.)

Hegel's treatment of the history of philosophy is then no audacious eccentricity of his own, but a development of what his studies of Greek philosophy and what the example of Aristotle suggested to him. Moreover, we may say, in Aristotle's words, that he was led to it as the inevitable next step by truth herself, that is to say, by the special truth which it fell to his age to recognise and proclaim. In passing from Kant to Hegel we pass from the period which culminated in the French Revolution to the period of reconstruction after the abstract and essentially unhistorical rationalism of the eighteenth century.¹ Hegel's attitude to history is no isolated phenomenon. On his own principles of interpretation he is significant simply because in the department of philosophical thought he gave express formulation to ideas which were at work in his age. Goethe and Sir Walter Scott² are conspicuous representatives of that movement of thought and sentiment which has made the nineteenth century so different from the eighteenth. And if we contrast Auguste Comte with Voltaire, we have another example of the subtle intellectual revolution which has changed so many of the categories through which we apprehend the past. We often

¹ Though, as has been already pointed out (p. 13, note), Hegel was never carried off his feet by the wave of reaction, like the Romanticists, Mediævalists, and other supporters of obscurantism and absolutism among his contemporaries.

² Hegel calls Scott "*seichter Kopf*" (*Rosenkranz's Leben*, p. 560), because of some of his moralisings about the French Revolution. But it was not by his *Life of Napoleon* that Scott helped to create the new historical spirit of studying institutions and ideas.

speak of our century as specially the century of progress in natural science. As mathematics gave a special colour or tone to the philosophical thinking of the seventeenth century, so biology seems to exercise the predominant intellectual influence in this century. And there is no doubt that the categories of "organism" and "evolution" now everywhere affect our language and make impossible to us many modes of thinking about human society which were customary and unquestioned a hundred years ago. But along with the progress of biological science we must certainly take account also of the influence exercised by scientific history and the scientific criticism of documents. This influence has worked entirely in the same direction with the biological, and has contributed a great part of what "Evolution" in its largest sense means. To regard human nature as a constant factor in all times and places, to which varying circumstances have simply to be added on, or to believe the history of mankind to be a degeneration from a primitive state of perfection—these are modes of thinking impossible to the educated man of our days. Yet they were an accepted part of the *Weltanschauung*, or picture of the universe, which our grandfathers had before their mental eyes. What considers itself "orthodox" belief and what considers itself "free-thinking"—except among the most ignorant and backward—have both taken on a different character from that which they had in last century or the earlier half of this. "The historical spirit" has penetrated even into the minds of journalists and popular preachers; it has become almost a commonplace of these "sophists" of our day. And a great deal of the best scientific work which is now being done in the world is in the region of historical and anthropological investigation, in the endeavour to get a true understanding of the past of the human race.

Of this historical spirit Hegel's philosophy was one of the earliest prominent expressions, and Hegel's philosophy has in course of time come to contribute greatly to its growth and diffusion. Hegel sometimes speaks as if the philosopher only summed up a completed stage of life and feeling; but the truth in this does not justify the inference that the philosopher exercises no influence on his age. To give a philosophical expression to the new interest in history was to promote the passing of the historical spirit into the common possession of the educated world.

It may, however, be objected that to recognise the importance of history and to study the problems of religion, law, politics and philosophy in an historical spirit is not the same

thing as to hold that the stages of historical development correspond to the categories of any metaphysical system. Is it not? If the historical spirit comes to be consciously realised and grasped, then I think it necessarily implies something like what Hegel holds. If our interest in the past is more than the curiosity of the antiquarian, if we really mean what we say when we even put aside the old word "history" —which only signified at first investigation and collection of materials for science—and if in the current cant of the day we talk about "the development of institutions" and the "evolution of ideas," we must recognise that the institutions and ideas of the present are the outcome of the struggle and conflict that have gone before; and therefore in our study of the history of philosophy we must hope to see (however difficult we may find it to trace the connecting links through the complex and confused materials) not a mere series of capricious speculations of arbitrary individual intellects but a continuous discussion, a dialectic movement running through the ages. And, while we recognise clearly the occurrence of periods of decline and retrogression, so far as we recognise progress in philosophical thought, we must admit something of the nature of a logical process which proceeds from emptier and more abstract to fuller and more adequate concepts. If we have given up that fatal method of grouping all philosophers in all ages into two parties, Sensationalists and Intuitionists, like the Whigs and Tories of English political life, and if we find, as many do, some indication of a better understanding between different philosophical schools, and look upon them as complementary rather than rival opinions, then we have come to see that progress towards truth consists in a reconciliation of opposites and that the truest philosophical system would, as Aristotle held long before Hegel, take up all the others into it as elements of one whole.

It must indeed be frankly admitted that, while we have before us this ideal of a history of philosophy which should exhibit all the leading systems as the interconnected members of one organism or the stages in one process of growth (it does not matter which metaphor we use, provided that we take it from no less complex region than the organic), we must nevertheless be very careful that the details of historical fact are not distorted for the convenience of philosophical exposition. In other words, we must fully recognise the historical importance of tracing links of connexion and discovering the psychological sources of theories which may appear to be merely "accidental" and incapable of being

fitted into a scheme of logical development. The "contingent" element, the personality of the individual philosopher, his particular education and the various influences under which he came, cannot be safely neglected by the student of philosophical theories, however anxious he may be to keep to the main currents of thought and to escape the distracting toil of exploring side-channels and back waters.¹ Too much may, indeed, easily be made of this "contingent" element, as is done I think by those who would make a whole stage in the development of Plato's philosophy depend upon a supposed visit to Megara. On the other hand, when an historian or teacher of philosophy gives a complete account of Hume, based of course mainly on the *Treatise*, and then passes on to Kant and considers him as "answering Hume," accuracy is sacrificed to an appearance of precise dialectical opposition; and some misunderstanding of Kant has been the result of this not infrequent manner of exposition. In the first place, it might very well be said that Kant does not "answer" Hume. He appreciated Hume better than to treat him as Beattie and the other "answerers" do. But, in the second place, Kant had only read the *Essays*, and therefore he only knew of Hume's attack on the necessity of the causal nexus, and he was unaware of Hume's attempt to base mathematical truth upon experience.

The kind of commentary which we most need now upon the great philosophers of the past is not so much an exposition of their doctrines which shall make them more consistent with themselves than they really are, nor a merciless exposure of the inconsistencies and contradictions which can easily be found in systems from which we stand at a sufficient intellectual distance. Both these kinds of commentary are valuable in their way; but what is most necessary is a minute and accurate study of the sources from which a philosopher derived his ideas and of the particular circumstances which led to his laying stress on one rather than on another aspect of the truth as it appeared to him. To understand what the philosopher meant and in what order his ideas grew is the first thing; we may then go on to reconcile apparent contradictions or to detect new ones. But to understand a philosopher in this way implies that we study him in his historical environment. A "psychological" account of the genesis of a philosophical system, an exact intellectual biography of a

¹ It must be understood that I admit the "accidental" or the "contingent" element in history only in the same sense in which the biologist speaks of "accidental" or "spontaneous" variations. They are names for what we do not fully understand.

philosopher, is not a different method of approaching the study of a philosopher from the philosophical history of which I have been speaking, but implies the same principle carried out into preciser detail. The minute and careful study of the great leaders of political history does not take us away from "the spirit of the age" or the tendencies of "the general mind," but teaches us more about them; for no man however "original" we may consider him can do anything great, unless he finds a suitable time and place for his special work, *i.e.*, unless in some way or other he represents and expresses his own age and nation. The old controversy about great men and their importance as a factor in history was admirably dealt with long ago in the Greek story which Plato tells at the beginning of the *Republic* (329 E, 330 A). Themistocles was taunted by a native of the insignificant island of Seriphos with owing his fame to the accident of his being an Athenian. "Neither would I," he answered, "being a Seriphian, nor would you being an Athenian, have attained greatness." In treating of men of action what we call the "contingent" element, *i.e.*, the element which we cannot yet and may never be able thoroughly to know and understand, bulks very largely; but, as Hegel points out, in the Introduction to his *Lectures*, in the history of philosophy the purely personal element does not come in to the same degree as it does in political history. The man who is making a nation may seem to choose sometimes rather arbitrarily, and perhaps from private motives, whether he will enlarge his country by quarrelling with his right hand or his left hand neighbour—though such purely personal motives are always a very trivial part of the explanation of great historical events. But the really serious philosopher does not make an arbitrary choice of his problems or of his point of view. He finds his problems determined for him by his age and by the special work of his predecessors; and his system grows in his mind under the influence of what he honestly takes to be logical necessity. In one sense the problems of philosophy are always the same, because they are simply a few leading questions about the ultimate nature of things; but the particular form which these problems take must vary from age to age, and the great philosophers who serve as landmarks in the course of thought are those who have grasped most clearly the special aspect which the problems have assumed for their own time. Those who have adhered to traditional ways of dealing with the questions or those whose type of thinking is so peculiar and independent as to have no affinity to what is seething in the minds of

their contemporaries may be interesting as survivals or as precursors, but they do not help us to trace the main currents of human thought.

If it is objected that we may indeed detect the links of causal connexion in the rise and fall of particular opinions, but that that gives us no warrant for seeing any progress towards truth or any development of one eternal philosophy amid the changes and chances of mortal speculations—to this objection the only answer can be that all knowledge rests upon faith, in the sense that a faith in the ultimate rationality of the universe is the presupposition (however unacknowledged) of all serious science and of all strenuous conduct; and that the very task of philosophy, however difficult it may be, however unsatisfactory our best attainments, is to make this “faith in Providence” intelligible.¹ *Credo ut intelligam* is a double-edged motto. And if we can hope to find a meaning in the course of events in any part of the universe, most surely it ought to be in the movement of thought from one clear consciousness to another. A blind faith—and some of those who call attention to our dependence on faith seem to take for their motto *Credo ne intelligam*—may be more convenient for ecclesiastical authority, but can only be recognised by philosophy as a sceptical or ironical device for keeping science free from theological interference.

Another objection sometimes made to the Hegelian treatment of the history of philosophy is this, that on Hegel's own principles that method must now be superseded, and yet if Hegel was right his philosophy is the final truth. The argument makes a plausible dilemma; but both horns may be evaded. In the first place, I do not think that any one, however much he may feel the debt of the world to Hegel, will now be found to set up Hegel as a final authority, a new St. Thomas Aquinas, on whom we must be content to write commentaries. Hegel's “Encyclopædic” method of exposition, like the mathematical form adopted by Spinoza, has injured his reputation and prevented him being rightly understood; but it was due to the influences of his surroundings. He lived in a time of audacious system-building. Moreover he was a professor of philosophy, and had been for seven years a tutor in private families and for eight years

¹ Cf. Hegel, *History of Philosophy*, Engl. transl., i., p. 85 (*Werke*, xiii., p. 49). “The great assumption that what has taken place in the world has done so in conformity with reason—which is what first gives the history of philosophy its true interest—is nothing else than trust in Providence, only in another form.”

the headmaster of a school. If a university professor is apt to be dogmatic (and the German practice of *Dictaten* has something to answer for), a teacher of boys is bound to be so, and it was during these years of schoolmastering that Hegel elaborated his logic. We might remember too that he edited a newspaper for a year, and the journalist inevitably tends to assume the attributes of omniscience and infallibility. On Hegel's own principles his "finality" is only provisional; he sums up the thought of his time as he understands it. Is his point of view then no longer tenable? What is the system that has superseded his, and what is its attitude towards the history of philosophy? Great philosophies do not give place to one another like changes in the fashions. We are apt to think ourselves very new in our ideas compared with our predecessors of ten years ago; but periods in thought cannot always be counted so rapidly. It will probably take some time yet before Hegel's system is superseded, because it will not be superseded till it has been assimilated in the ordinary thinking of the educated world. Now that is a process which, though slow, has been going on very steadily and yet to a great extent unconsciously. And in the region of philosophy, the special characteristics of our time, the attention given on the one hand to minute psychological investigation, the endeavour to get a genetic account of the individual human mind, and on the other hand the labour expended on the history of institutions and of ideas—these two prevailing types of intellectual activity mean that the task which Hegel set to philosophy is being taken very seriously. It is only through more careful study of "subjective mind" and of "objective mind" that we can hope to reach a clearer outlook towards "absolute mind," which is the distant goal of our systematic thinking.

In this sense we may accept what Green said about Hegel's work: "It must all be done over again".¹ And to recur to my special subject—the study of past philosophy must be as minute, as scholarly, as possible, if we are to hope to understand the development of thought and to understand our own problems. This sets us an ideal of study which is terribly difficult and may seem unattainable. For we know how we lose sight of the forest in the trees, and how "philology" or minute scholarship and antiquarian research are apt to be hostile to that looking at things as a whole which philosophy requires. But we must make

¹ I think he used these very words. The idea, at least, will be found in his review of Principal Caird's *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (reprinted in Green's *Works*, vol. iii., p. 138 *seq.*)

the best of the inevitable. Here, as everywhere, we have an ideal of totality which we cannot complete and which nevertheless regulates our thinking at every step. We each of us must be content to take a great deal at second-hand. There is a sentence of Hegel's which even his most adverse critics may approve. "There are periods," he says, "with regard to which it is to be wished that others had read the works of the philosophers and provided us with extracts."¹ It is a suggestion that may be applied even to large parts of Hegel's own works and to most of what was produced by his contemporaries. Co-operation can certainly in this way be applied in philosophy, so far as it means a study of philosophers. And this is a matter in which, if I may say so, I think a society such as this and the philosophical journals which are a comparatively new feature in the English-speaking world may do great service to all students of philosophy. Whoever has made a minute study of any particular philosopher or of any particular philosophical book should put his results in such a shape as to save others from the drudgery he has himself gone through, and in such a shape as to form a trustworthy source of information for others. It is one of the saddest things to see laborious research largely wasted through the results not being put in a convenient and accessible form.

My subject has led me to dwell mainly on one aspect of philosophical thought—its continuity through different ages. But I should be giving a false conception of what I take to be the business of philosophical thinking, if I did not, in a word at least, refer to the other aspect, to what I may call the subjective or personal aspect of philosophy. Every one must have his own philosophy. We can only face the problems rightly if we face them for ourselves. And for that reason one of the dangers we have to guard against is the scholastic habit of becoming the mere expositors of any one master, however great. For that reason we should welcome the rebels and the doubters, and should value every opportunity of serious discussion with those who have grown up under different influences from those that have moulded ourselves, or who by a long labour of systematic thinking have reached an independent position from which they criticise our most cherished judgments about the philosophers of the past.

¹ *Werke*, xiii., p. 128.