

HEGEL AND HIS RECENT CRITICS.

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The history of literature shows that upon the whole justice has been meted out with a fairly even hand to philosophers. If a great thinker has received too little recognition in one period, he has generally bulked too largely in the public estimation in another. And if he has exercised an excessive influence during his lifetime, he is tolerably certain to be altogether underestimated at some time afterwards. In the long run, the exaggerations alike of merits and of demerits become corrected as the name to which they relate ceases to be a party-badge. Until, however, there is no longer a motive on the one hand for abusing all that is associated with that name, and on the other for declining to admit its connexion with error even in matters unessential, a fair verdict on the services of him who bore it to the cause of knowledge is hardly to be looked for.

Hegel seems to me to belong too nearly to the present generation to be fairly dealt with. While he was alive his philosophy was regarded as a revelation. For some time past it has been the fashion, if not to deny that there is any merit in it, at least to regard with grave suspicion all those who make the admission that it has influenced their ways of thinking. The merits of Hegelianism are in short still a party-question. And this is scarcely to be wondered at. For Hegelianism has been used by its founder, and still more by his disciples, not merely as a point of view from which to criticise other modes of thought, but as ground upon which to place props for speculations in both ontology and theology. This circumstance may afford good ground for blaming individual philosophers; it cannot justify the inference that, because some of these props are rotten, therefore the ground on which they have been placed is likewise rotten. And yet this is just the inference which recent critics of Hegel, such as Mr. Balfour and Prof. A. Seth, would appear to wish to have us draw.

The purpose which I have ventured to set in front of me in what follows is twofold:—to endeavour to indicate what it is that some who believe in much of Hegel's work think that he has done, and not less to indicate what these same people think he has not done; to define in outline the claim on his behalf, and to repudiate a great deal that is attributed rightly or wrongly to him, but unquestionably wrongly to the Neo-Kantians. What I complain of in the recent criticisms referred to is that they have sought to fasten on the Neo-Kantian school in this country doctrines which have been professed only by certain of its adherents, and have ignored what is its distinguishing feature.

Mr. Balfour has given us (*MIND* ix. 73) a definition of Neo-

Kantianism which is substantially sufficient: "The members of this school are bound together by the common conviction that the solution of the larger problems of philosophy is to be sought along the path which was opened out by Kant, and further explored by Kant's German successors". In other words, it is a similarity in method rather than creed which binds the members of this school together. Now that method I take to be capable of being described very shortly. It accepts Kant's criticism of Hume. But it goes further than Kant in asserting that not only can we not go outside the closed circle of consciousness, but that there is no outside which has really any meaning. All that is, is for—not the self which is a particular object in space and time, nor yet any transcendent self, but—knowledge. And this is asserted not as a metaphysical or dogmatic statement, but as the result of that same new question which Berkeley put to himself. Now the great advance which Hegel made upon Kant was in the results he got by turning knowledge to the investigation of its own nature. This result lay not so much, as it appears to me, in the rejection of the doctrine of Things-in-themselves, or even in the development of Kant's doctrine of the Categories, as in the recognition that those features of experience which Kant relegated to the *Critique of Judgment* and to the ideal region of Ethics were just as much part of experience as the Categories of Kant themselves. Real experience was limited for Kant by the possibility of expressing its relations in space and time, and consequently such apparent phases of it as organisation and adaptation had to be relegated to the regions of unreality. It may be true that one result of these and the like points in the *Critiques* is that, as Prof. Seth points out in his *Hegelianism and Personality*, the Thing-in-itself of Kant is quite different from a mere ontological construction, and is really the indication of a deliberately recognised limit to the scope of his method. It is probable that Kant has been a good deal misunderstood on this point. But it is equally true that, whether Hegel did or did not afterwards go on to erect into a Divine Existence a synthetic Unity, which was with his predecessor a principle adopted merely because apart from it experience was inexplicable, it was not necessary to Hegel's theory of knowledge that he should do so, nor was it in any way implied in his rejection of the Thing-in-itself. What is essential in Hegelianism is its mode of investigating knowledge itself. What philosophy has gained from Hegelianism is a demonstration of the mischief which arises when categories which are applicable in a certain way are indiscriminately applied in every other. It has taught those who believe in it, or at least they ought to have learned, not to look for the self which makes experience possible under a category of substance which is proper only for objects in space and time, nor on the other hand to rest content with the expression 'subject' without assigning to it a meaning. And its warning against current assumptions

and metaphors extends not only to philosophy but to the metaphysics to which men of science are so often unconsciously a prey. Hegel may have been wrong in his statement of the relation of the categories of teleology to those of mechanism. But it cannot be right simply to assume that all the phenomena of organisation must be reducible to mechanism, or capable of expression in relations of space and time. Again, for example, this method has shown new reasons for doubting the application of the category of Cause to the experience of Volition, and consequently the foundation of the old controversy about free-will.

The service rendered by Hegel to philosophy is really of a negative nature. By teaching us how to criticise our categories he has rendered a lasting service not only to those who have been deceiving themselves in the search for the solution of what Mr. Balfour speaks of as "the larger problems of philosophy," but he has put people on their guard in almost every department of research. I admit that Hegel has, after the fashion of his time, gone further and professed to found a system that savours suspiciously of Ontology. But the point is that, though Hegel and the Hegelians may have committed themselves to this system, it is separable from what comes first in his work and has been adopted by the Neo-Kantians. I am not concerned to dispute with Mr. Balfour and Prof. Seth the force of their attack upon the metaphysical basis of Green's ethical system. Not only Green, but also Hegel himself, appear to me often to fall into the very fault which they are continually condemning—the indiscriminate use of metaphors as the foundation of inferences which, on their common principles, are illegitimate. The theory of knowledge becomes, in their hands, over and over again transformed, as Prof. Seth rightly remarks, into a metaphysic of existence or absolute philosophy, in which a transcendental self, which for this theory has no meaning excepting as the implicate of all experience, is hypostatized first into an absolute subject, and presently into an absolute cause. If anyone were asked to indicate the kind of contribution which Hegelianism (in the restricted sense in which the Neo-Kantians adopt it) has made to philosophy, reference might be made to Mr. F. H. Bradley's article on "Reality and Thought" in *MIND* No. 51. Mr. Bradley, like many other sober-minded people, would probably not care to be called an Hegelian. But his essay, though it bears on every line of it the mark of independent thought and work, appears to me to be a piece of the purest Hegelianism which has been produced for some time past. His problem is to ascertain the nature of the reality which there is in the object of knowledge over and above ordinary knowledge itself. The question is, he justly says, not whether the universe is in any sense intelligible, but whether if you thought it and understood it there would be any and what difference between your thought and the thing. He agrees of course that thought and fact, in the ordinary sense

of thought, are not the same. But his analysis leads him to the conclusion that what constitutes the difference is not the presentation of some element itself of a foreign nature on which thought works, for such a presentation and such an object he finds alike meaningless, but the fact that thought does not as we find it in our experience exhaust the predicates of the subject of its judgments or present these contents in the form of individual existence here and now.

"The object of thought (says Mr. Bradley, p. 380) aims at possessing the whole character of which thought already has the separate features. These features thought cannot combine satisfactorily, though it has the idea and even the partial experience of their complete combination. And, if the object succeeded in its aim, it would *become* reality; but it would cease to be an object. It is this completion of thought beyond thought which remains for ever an Other. Thought can form the idea of an apprehension, something like feeling in directness, which contains all the features desired by its relational efforts. It can understand that, in order to attain to this goal, it must get beyond relations. Yet it can find in its nature no other way of progress. Therefore, to reach its end, it perceives that this essential side of its nature must somehow be merged, so as to take in the other side. But such a fusion would force it to transcend its present self—how in vague generality it does apprehend; but how in detail it cannot understand—and it can see the reason why it cannot. This self-transcendence *is* an Other, but to assert it is *not* a self-contradiction."

Mr. Bradley gets at this result in his own way and in his own language. He has retraced the steps which Hegel first took, and carefully scrutinised the ground anew. But the pilgrim carries the same staff. The passage I have quoted, and indeed the whole article, might have been written by any Hegelian, whether of the left wing or the right. For it depends on what will remain in Hegel after the world has ceased to dispute about his metaphysics and theology,—the new method which he elaborated for the investigation of the contents of consciousness. Outside that consciousness we cannot and need not get. And we need not and we must not assume the existence in any ordinary sense of an absolute intelligence in which thought and its object would be one and the same. Hegel having got thus far did go on further and develop a systematic exposition of the nature of such absolute intelligence. But with this further portion of his system Neo-Kantianism, as such, is not concerned. Kant declined to identify the logical unity of thought with a divine or creative self; Hegel was under no greater necessity of making the identification. In consciousness he found thought as we know it confronted with a reality which never could be expressed in terms of any judgment of such thought. It might be the only way of explaining this otherness to refer it to the difference between thought as we find it in the individual and an ideal kind of thought, but it was not necessary to the method, or even a legitimate consequence of its application, to identify this ideal with Divine Existence. What-

ever Mr. Balfour and Prof. Seth may say, this identification is *not* the central tenet of Neo-Kantianism. If reference is to be made to the works of Green, his Neo-Kantianism must be looked for in the *Introduction to Hume* rather than in the *Prolegomena to Ethics*.

Turning to Prof. Seth's book, what I complain of is not merely that he has ignored what is characteristic of Neo-Kantianism, but that he has represented it as insisting on the worst features of the superstructure reared not merely by Hegel himself but by Green. It may be quite right to attack Hegel for having called his Absolute the legitimate outcome of Kant's Criticism. It may be quite right to show that Green gets to his Universal Spirit only by an abuse of metaphors. But for the rest the book is misleading. One would have expected the author of the essay on "Philosophy as Criticism of Categories" to have been most careful while condemning what was bad to separate out and defend what was good in the source of his own inspirations. And yet it is only at the end of the book, in the concluding words of a chapter which contains a lecture to the gallery, that Prof. Seth has anything approaching to a good word to say for the Hegelian method. He is a Neo-Kantian himself, excepting, indeed, where he seems to hint that Things-in-themselves may be resuscitated in the form of Monads; not, it is true, a Neo-Kantian in the sense of maintaining the doctrines which he associates with Neo-Kantianism, but in the sense that, in common with Mr. Bradley and Green, he in reality bases his method entirely on that which Hegel elaborated out of the critical method of Kant. Prof. Seth has done well to cut himself adrift from Hegel if by this is meant the ontological developments of Hegel's results. But he would have done better if he had distinguished in Hegel the method from its applications, and not thrown, as he seems to me to have done, the mind of the philosophical public into confusion by declining to say that he is neither Hypothetical Dualist, nor Natural Realist, nor disciple of Lotze—nor defender of any of these ways of looking at things to which his own methods allow but short shrift. So far as I can judge, the real position of Neo-Kantianism in this country has not been touched either by Prof. Seth or by Mr. Bradley, who is its friend at heart, or by Mr. Balfour, who is only a half-hearted enemy. I believe that it will yield further and valuable results; not, it may be, in pure metaphysics, but in such investigations as Mr. Bradley has himself undertaken, and above all in the hands of those scientific specialists who are becoming alive to the necessity of a criticism of their Categories.