IV.—ON CERTAIN CRITICISMS OF PLURALISM.

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I.—INTRODUCTION.

IT is incumbent on anyone who attempts to establish and develop a pluralistic view of the universe, to consider, and, if possible, to meet certain vital criticisms which have been urged against such a view. The answers to these criticisms must be prefaced by a brief indication of the standpoint from which they are approached.

The present writer regards a spiritualistic pluralism (essentially such, for example, as that maintained by Dr. James Ward) as the most satisfactory hypothesis on which to base a system of philosophy. It is satisfactory, in the first place, on account of the fundamental conceptions from which it starts. These are perfectly definite and easily realised. Secondly, it affords a most promising method of attacking and of partially or completely solving some of the outstanding problems of philosophy.

In the course of the development of this hypothesis, however, it becomes clear that alone it is incomplete. This is to be expected, for the history of philosophy shows that no system can hope to approach within measurable distance of its object which lays undue stress on either of the dual aspects of the universe (its oneness and its manyness) to the neglect or exclusion of the other.

We find, accordingly, that criticisms of pluralism fall mainly into two classes, those which demonstrate its incompleteness as a final answer to the questions which it seeks to resolve, and those which are aimed at supposed flaws radically inherent in the hypothesis itself. As has been indicated, the former may be regarded as justified, but the latter call for an answer, and it is with certain of them that we are here concerned.

Of the great philosophic systems of the past, the Monadology of Leibniz is perhaps the most remarkable for the logical skill with which it is sustained, and for the keen insight manifested in the fundamental principles on which it is based.

From it all modern pluralisms derive their central theme. But two centuries of criticism have ensured the evolution of systems in which the more prominent weaknesses of the original monadology find no place. These later systems drew inspiration afresh from the great biological advances of the last century, advances made in the light of the doctrine of the evolution of species, a doctrine already foreshadowed in Leibniz' celebrated Principle of Continuity.¹

Yet there remained in pluralism certain vulnerable points which its opponents were not slow to attack. With all the criticisms thus put forth it is both impossible and unnecessary to deal at length. The most important of them are to be found in the writings of two men: Prof. Pringle-Pattison² and Dr. Bosanquet.³ If the objections there urged can be successfully countered, the chief difficulties which block the path of the modern pluralist (not necessarily as regards philosophy in general, but as regards pluralism in particular) will be swept away. Accordingly, it is with the criticisms put forward by Prof. Pringle-Pattison and by Dr. Bosanquet that we are called upon to deal.

II.—EXTERNALITY.

For the pluralist, the environment of the self or subject of experience consists in other selves or subjects whose mentality differs from his only in degree. This belief is attacked by Dr. Bosanquet in a criticism which may be summed up essentially somewhat as follows: "[Selves] as inward centres in the popular sense [cannot] form the circumferences for each other,"⁴ and again, "Even if there were, *de facto*, a psychical something underlying matter, yet it is only as definite externality that it plays a part in our life. We have no use for it *as inwardness*."⁵

Now the true implication of these sentences is by no means evident if we inspect them as they stand. The spatial metaphor involved in the use of such words as "centre," "circumference," "inwardness," "externality," tends rather to obscure the issue, though the introduction of that metaphor may be very convenient and to a certain extent necessary.

¹ The doctrine of pre-established harmony shows, however, that evolution, as we now understand it, did not enter into Leibniz' conception of the universe.

In *The Idea of God in the Light of Recent Philosophy*.

In *The Principle of Individuality and Value*.

⁴ See, e.g., *op. cit.*, p. 75 ff.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 194, note. These quotations summarise the idea involved and explained at length.

But what does this distinction between "inwardness," and "externality" really imply? Evidently "inwardness" is something which essentially characterises the individual subject, at least *for* that subject, whereas "externality" is something which characterises (for him) the not-self. Hence the distinction between "inward" and "external" refers ultimately to the fundamental distinction within each individual experience of subject from object. Consequently, if the pluralist asserts that the object of experience of one subject consists of other subjects, Dr. Bosanquet's criticism becomes in effect, "How can a subject of experience be, in any circumstances, an object of experience?"

In this form the criticism is justified, and the pluralist is wrong *if* he asserts that to any subject other subjects are presented as objects of experience. Before considering the latter point, however, it should be noticed that in any case the criticism only applies to pluralism incidentally. At the root of it is the fact that no existent entity can be an object of experience. No entity other than myself can be given to me as an object of knowledge in such a way that I realise what it is in its actual essence.¹ We cannot in experience *know* anything else as it really is in itself.

What, then, of the sense-data which form for each individual his object of experience? They are objects of acquaintance-knowledge. Are we to say that they do not exist? Strictly, it is neither true nor false to say that they exist. It is meaningless. There is no significant sense in which existence can be asserted of the immediate data of perception. *There they are*, and that is all that can be said of the matter. Accordingly we must regard the object of experience not as one or more existent entities, but as the "appearance" to the subject of existent entities other than himself. This fact of "appearance" or "presentation," being ultimate in nature, defies satisfactory definition. It might be provisionally indicated somewhat as follows: Given a percipient subject and certain other existent entities, under suitable conditions, of which the existence of these other entities is the most necessary and important, the given subject will perceive an object which may be defined as the "appearance" to him of the other entities. It is important to notice that this "appearance" *is* neither the given subject nor the other entities, though its being is dependent on the existence both of the subject and of the other entities.

¹ I do not mean to imply here that even the self is given as an *object of immediate knowledge* in experience. I have dealt with this point more fully in an article in the *Philosophical Review*, vol. xxvii., 3 (May, 1918), p. 240 ff.

Prof. Pringle-Pattison¹ also makes a brief reference to the point under consideration. He remarks that "internality is impossible without externality". This, as we have seen, is equivalent to saying that a subject of experience is inconceivable apart from a presented object of experience. But the latter is simply the appearance to the subject of other existent entities. It is not itself to be classed as an existent entity, though it has *being* in the sense that *it is there*. A subject, however, to whom no appearance is presented is just as inconceivable as an appearance presented to nobody.

It follows, then, that Dr. Bosanquet's criticism does not apply in any special way to pluralism, but is really an expression of the fact that an existent entity cannot be an object of knowledge. In particular, an experiencing subject cannot be an object of knowledge. But pluralism is in no way bound to assert this impossibility. For pluralism, the living experience of the subject consists actually in his interaction with other subjects. This interaction is manifested in the ever-increasing differentiation of a presented indivisible whole or object of experience, namely, the *appearance* to the subject of other subjects. We are not acquainted in sense-experience with other individuals in their actuality. Selves cannot be reduced to sense-data. The latter are but what we have termed the "appearance" to us of other selves.

We may conclude our reply to this type of criticism by briefly considering another quotation from Dr. Bosanquet. In pan-psychism, he asks, "what becomes of the material incidents of our life? . . . Is it not obvious that our relation to these things is essential to finite being, and that if they are in addition subjective psychical centres their subjective psychical quality is one which so far as realised would destroy their function and character for us?"²

Now the nerve of this criticism is destroyed, as before, when it is realised that for a given subject the object of experience does not consist in a number of other "subjective psychical centres," but in the *appearance* to the given subject of these other subjects. Moreover, the function of material incidents in our life consists in the determination and limitation of our purposive activity. It is simply the manifestation of our interaction with other subjects. In fact, it is here that the fundamental ambiguity of Dr. Bosanquet's term "inwardness" as a characterisation of subjective centres becomes completely evident. For the activity of the subject is essentially "outgoing" as it were. It is not

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 178 ff.

² *Ibid.*, Lect. X., p. 363.

directed in upon itself (if that could have any definite meaning), but out towards others. How, then, is it possible that the development of this psychical quality can destroy the function of the subject with regard to other subjects? The growth of experience, in the pluralistic view, does not and cannot consist in a gradual withdrawal into itself of the subject, culminating in a complete isolation, but in continuous interaction with other subjects which, so far from leading to individual isolation, aims rather at mutual co-operation in ensuring the interests of the society as a whole.

III.—CONSCIOUSNESS.

Dr. Bosanquet's conception of consciousness is in entire conflict with the position which pluralism takes up. But his view is largely vitiated by the fact that he adopts on this point an attitude which appears to tend very strongly to that Cartesian dualism of mind and matter, which for so long clogged the progress of philosophic thought. This tendency is particularly evident in his treatment of the relation of body and mind. The pluralist, on the other hand, recognises that the fundamental fact from which the start must be made, is not a dualism of matter and mind, but the unity of the individual experience, which comprises a duality of subject and object. For the pluralist "mind" is a generic term denoting the class of subjects of experience.

According to Dr. Bosanquet "organic regulation is natural and immanent, but independent of consciousness".¹ Consciousness is a "perfection" granted by the Absolute in certain circumstances.² Such statements imply that matter is given as prior, while mind only supervenes at a certain stage of the development of matter. This seems to approach perilously near to the epiphenomenal view. Moreover, even if we grant with Dr. Bosanquet that organic regulation is "natural and immanent," what evidence have we that it is "independent of consciousness"? Apparently the reference here is to the fact that the behaviour of an organism (especially of a lower type) consists largely in reflex action. The question is then whether the establishment of reflex action presupposes mind or not.³ Now we have an abundance of

¹ *Op. cit.*, Lect. V., p. 195.

² *Ibid.*, p. 189.

³ Of course it is a well-known fact that established reflexes occur without the intervention of the *dominant* consciousness of the organism, but it by no means follows that the latter played no part in the original establishment of the reflex, nor that, even when established, the reflex is independent of *any* consciousness. On all these points see also J. Ward, *The Realm of Ends*, 2nd ed., p. 462 ff.

examples of such presuppositions—a simple case being a man learning to ride a bicycle. In fact the formation of habits is a fundamental characteristic of mind. On the other hand, there are no cases in which we observe the establishment of a reflex action where we can infallibly assert the absence of mind.

It is the essence of the pluralistic position to recognise that the start must be made from individual experience, which implies mind. It is the task of the pluralist to interpret matter from this standpoint. On the other hand, if we start from matter, how can we interpret mind? There is nothing in what Dr. Bosanquet says on the subject which provides a satisfactory answer to that question. But from the standpoint of mind there is no such difficulty in interpreting organisms, at least. The striking feature of an organism is the fact that it exhibits "behaviour" analogous in every way to our own. Hence, what the subject distinguishes within its objective experience as organisms are, for the pluralist, the appearance to the subject of other subjects differing from himself only in degree or in kind of mental development.

Speaking again of consciousness, Dr. Bosanquet says that "conscious process is meaning (or appreciation) not effect, of physical process"¹—and in another place: "Mind is the meaning of externality, which under certain conditions concentrates in a new focus of meaning, which is a new finite mind"². It is not easy to assign a definite significance to these assertions. In the first place "meaning" and "appreciation" are by no means synonymous terms. They apply respectively to the objective and the subjective aspects of the process which consists in the interpretation of an object by an individual subject. In other words, we regard the subject as "appreciating" the "meaning" of the object. It is difficult to see in what sense, if any, consciousness may be considered as "meaning". For the latter term implies both an object and a subject *for* whom the object has meaning. We cannot regard the subject as being a "meaning". If we attempt to do so, we are bound to imply a further subject,³ and are thus led into a continuous regress. Moreover, Dr. Bosanquet fails apparently to distinguish clearly between sensations and the mind of which they are the sensations. It is not clear whether the mind or the sensations constitute

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 196 ff., margin.

² *Ibid.*, App. II. to Lect. V., p. 220.

³ Even here there is a difficulty. For, as we have seen, a subject cannot be an object of knowledge, and anything which has "meaning" for anybody must in some sense be an object of knowledge.

the meaning of physical process.¹ But, at all events, we cannot suppose mind to be simply the "meaning" of something else. "Meaning," though it implies a subject, is not itself that subject. Nor does it help us to adopt the term "appreciation" instead. For the subject is not the appreciation, but the individual who appreciates.

The conception of a mind as a "focus" of externality also appears to have no valid significance. As we have seen, the only legitimate meaning that can be given to the term "externality" is "the objective side of experience". But we cannot possibly conceive the subject as consisting in the "concentration" of sense-data into a "focus". To use Dr. Bosanquet's terminology, internality can in no way be constructed out of externality. The term implies the fundamental distinction in experience between subject and object. We might perhaps speak (very loosely) of the subject as concentrating externality, by his unifying activity, into a focus. But externality thus focussed would be the product of the subject's activity and not the subject himself.

IV.—THE EVOLUTION OF LAW.

In the type of pluralism advocated by Dr. James Ward, the laws of inorganic matter, commonly called the "Laws of Nature," are regarded as having evolved in time, only reaching their present fixed and stable form after a long process of development. Prof. Pringle-Pattison raises objections to this view. According to him we cannot suppose the possibility of action without environment, nor can we conceive the interaction of monads, even in the beginning, apart from laws in accordance with which that interaction takes place.² And again: "A system of unvarying natural order is demanded, it may be pointed out, in the service of the higher conscious life itself, as the condition of reasonable action."³

Now, in the first place, it may be admitted that action is impossible without environment. But pluralism does not deny this. The environment of a monad is constituted by the other monads, with which it interacts. And, coming to the further point, Prof. Pringle-Pattison is evidently right in so far as he asserts that the monads must always have had *some* nature. But by the evolution of natural laws, the pluralist simply means that the laws of nature did not always exist in their *present* relatively fixed form. It must be remembered that such laws are not, as it were, *imposed* upon

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 197.

² *Ibid.*, p. 183 ff.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

things from without, but are merely descriptions of the way in which things behave. Consequently, if the behaviour is modified, the descriptions or laws are correspondingly modified also; though in certain cases behaviour may tend to a comparatively fixed system of habitual reactions, in which cases we may speak of a fixed law.

The attitude of pluralism on this point may, perhaps, be made clearer by an illustration. In the first place it must be noted that, for the pluralist, there is no absolute gap between organic and inorganic matter. Now if we survey the realm of organic matter, past and present, we find that whereas some species continue to develop into more and more complex types, others have, after a long period of development, eventually approached a stationary condition in which their actions have become practically entirely habitual and relatively fixed in nature. Inorganic matter may be regarded as an extreme form of such stationary species. Hence there is no difficulty in supposing that inorganic matter has evolved into its present condition, and it is in this process that the evolution of the so-called "laws" of matter consists. There is obviously no reason to suppose that a limit must be placed on the number of these laws. Hence we may consider that originally each monad, while displaying the general characteristics of mind in a low degree, was yet, in its particularity, a law unto itself. Only as interaction proceeds is there a tendency for individuals *en masse* to behave in similar ways. This tendency proceeds from the characteristic, which must be present in some degree in each individual, of learning by experience.

As to what Prof. Pringle-Pattison says of the necessity for a system of unvarying law as the condition of reasonable action in higher conscious life, it certainly seems probable that the tendency of the individuals composing inorganic matter to develop a system of habitual reactions has greatly aided the process of evolution of other individuals to higher and more complex types. Yet it must not be forgotten that each of us has to deal not only with material objects but also with persons. Although the behaviour of the latter does not admit of description to a degree of precision in any way comparable with such principles as the law of gravitation, for example, yet we do not find it impossible to live a rational social life on that account. In dealing with individuals whose behaviour is subject to continuous modification and development, the only necessary conditions of success are that the process of development should not be too rapid, and that we should have a knowledge at least of the general trend

of that process. Such knowledge would itself be embodied in a law, but of a different type from those we consider in general under the conception of the evolution of law. For it would be the description of a dynamic process and not of a static form of behaviour.

It is evident, then, that the notion of the laws of nature as evolving gradually into their present stable form is not a contradictory one. For the evolution of law means nothing more nor less than the gradual modification of behaviour. We have examples in plenty of such modifications, and we find that in many cases the process tends asymptotically, as it were, to a limit, and we have species, which, after developing through countless ages, become relatively fixed. *Relatively*, we say, for there is no guarantee that even the laws of inorganic matter will, after the lapse of future vast periods of time, remain in their present form without sensible alteration.

V.—THE 'BARE' MONAD.

All mental life of which we appear to have clear evidence, is associated in every case with an organism. The pluralist conceives the organism as a system of monads in association with a dominant monad, the latter constituting the self of which the organism is the body. But if we press the pluralistic hypothesis far enough, we seem bound to postulate, somewhere or somewhen, the existence of 'bare' monads, *i.e.*, monads unassociated with any body or organism. Prof. Pringle-Pattison points out objections to this view.¹

Leibniz endeavoured to avoid the difficulty by assuming that *every* monad was associated with an organism composed of relatively inferior monads. For him, a piece of inorganic matter was a mere collection of organisms. In this way he piled infinity on infinity. We cannot be satisfied with such an endless regress. Nor does it really clear away the obstacles in any very definite manner, for it is difficult to see how, in considering the relations of organisms external to one another, we can entirely avoid the notion of the interaction of bare monads.

But, in any case, there seems to be no intrinsic difficulty in the conception of a bare monad. There is apparently no inevitable reason why that peculiar complex of presentations² which constitutes what we call 'the body' should enter as an element in every experience. A bare monad

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 188.

² Not only of sight and touch, but also that mass of organic sensations which constitutes what is called "general sensibility".

would simply be a subject from whose object of experience this element was absent, and there is no way of showing that its absence is an impossibility. No doubt there is a difficulty of another kind, if we try to hark back to the monads as they originally were. For there is bound to be a difficulty here, but it lies, not in the notion of a bare monad, but in the inherent incompleteness of the pluralistic hypothesis. We are faced, in short, with the problem of Creation, which pluralism alone is powerless to solve. Yet one word of warning is necessary. Prof. Pringle-Pattison seems, in one place, to identify the bare monad with what lies behind the atom, or whatever the ultimate physical particle may be.¹ This is quite unjustifiable. Physical objects, whether they be common-sense objects such as chairs and tables, or entities such as atoms and electrons, are conceptual constructions based on sense-experience, and therefore have a purely formal existence.²

If the truth be told, the bare monad is not the real root of the trouble at all; the latter must be sought rather in the conception of interaction between the monads—and this applies just as much when the monads are members of one organism as when they are not. We need some concrete ground of this interaction, which shall serve as a principle of unification whereby the existence of selves forming a plurality, and yet entering into relations with one another, may be rendered intelligible. Although the start must be made from a plurality, and although the pluralistic hypothesis will carry us a long way in the understanding of the world, we must take account at the latter end of that other aspect of the world—its unity. With the further consideration of this question we are not here concerned. Suffice it to say, as in the introduction above, that such limitations of pluralism as are implied in this matter may be freely admitted.

VI.—SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.

It would appear, then, that the most important criticisms recently directed against pluralism fail of justification. We saw, in the first place, that there is no more difficulty in accounting on the pluralistic hypothesis for what Dr. Bosanquet calls "externality," than on any other hypothesis,

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 180.

² "This table" and "an atom" are alike capable of being exhibited as logical constructions of sense-data, though the latter is a more complex construction than the former. See B. Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, Lects. III. and IV.

provided that we interpret that term correctly. It can only mean the object as distinguished from the subject of experience. For pluralism, the object of experience does not consist of other subjects (as Dr. Bosanquet's criticism implies), but of the appearance of these other subjects to the individual subject considered, where "appearance" is defined in some such way as we have indicated. These "appearances" cannot be said to *exist*, for no existent thing can in itself be an object of knowledge, though they have being in the sense that they are there.

Secondly, Dr. Bosanquet's account of consciousness does not agree with the facts. We have no reason whatever to assert that organic regulation is independent of all and every kind of consciousness. On the contrary, wherever we can observe the formation of a habit culminating in reflex action, it is associated with mind. Thus, whereas we have instances of reflex action presupposing the existence of mind, we have no instances of such action where mind can be certainly asserted to be absent.

We cannot construe consciousness merely as the *meaning* of externality. Such an interpretation is inherently contradictory. For, using the term legitimately, we speak of the "meaning" of an object *for* a conscious subject. We cannot significantly regard the meaning of objects as *actually consisting in* conscious subjects. Nor can we look upon externality as gathering itself up into foci which we call conscious subjects. No such attempts to get the subjective out of what is essentially objective can possibly succeed. Externality is not the less externality because it is concentrated into a focus, if for the moment we allow such a loose and metaphorical phrase. By no manipulation in this way can we make "externality" pass over into "internality" or mind, though we may perhaps look upon the latter as the *agent which focalises* externality, provided we interpret our terms properly.

Proceeding to Prof. Pringle-Pattison's criticisms, we saw that one mistake lay in the misinterpretation of the word "laws". We cannot suppose that in Nature there existed laws and individuals as separate entities, and that these laws were then imposed on the individuals. By a natural law we can only mean the description of certain modes of behaviour. Consequently the evolution of law is nothing but the modification of behaviour, a matter of everyday occurrence. Occasionally a species becomes relatively fixed, in which case "the law" has evolved into a stable state. Inorganic matter may be regarded as providing extreme

examples of such fixed species. No doubt we must postulate that even in the beginning the behaviour of each monad conformed to very general laws, though the behaviour of each would contain unique characteristics; but that is no reason why behaviour should not be modified, with the corresponding modification of descriptive laws. In short, no one wishes to deny the subsistence of laws, but merely to assert that laws may, and do, change. We do not start with fixed species. They are the result of long periods of development. Consequently there is no difficulty in supposing that the laws of inorganic matter have arrived at their present form after a lengthy process of evolution.

Finally there remains the question of the bare monad. This brings us very close to the limits of pluralism, and hence exhibits its incompleteness. For while there seems to be no inherent contradiction in the notion of a bare monad, it leaves us unsatisfied, since it directly involves the problem of the interaction of monads. We seek further for the concrete ground of this interaction, and are thus led to realise that some all-pervading principle, if it may be so called, is necessary to explain the unity of what in another aspect is a manifest plurality. There we must leave the matter for the present. If we are to achieve anything we must start from the given plurality of individuals, and this pluralism will carry us far. As we have seen, the difficulties supposed to lie in its way are by no means so real as they seem. But when the pluralistic hypothesis has done its utmost, we are bound to supplement it by a further principle, wherein we take account of that bond, whatever it may be, which makes reality a Universe.