

V.—DISCUSSIONS.

PHILOSOPHIC PRE-COPERNICANISM.¹

THE aim of this paper is not to review Mr. Prichard's book as a whole, but simply to examine his treatment (in chapters iv. and vi., headed respectively 'Phenomena and Things in Themselves' and 'Knowledge and Reality') of certain aspects of the problem of the *Critique*. Again attention will be directed more to the question of how far Mr. Prichard's reasoning helps to solve the difficulties raised by Kant, than to the question how far his criticisms of Kant are justified, or how far Kant may be said in spite of these criticisms to have supplied a satisfactory theory on the debated points. Mr. Prichard's attitude rather than Kant's is the central interest of this discussion.

At the opening of chapter iv. (Phenomena and Things in Themselves) Mr. Prichard quotes Kant's view that time and space are determinations or relations of things as they are perceived. Such a statement he condemns as absurd because determinations or relations can only apply to things as they are independently of perception. Recalling an example of Plato's he reminds us that if the assertion "a stick is bent in the water" proves to be the record of a delusion, we can no longer say the stick is bent, we say the stick looks bent, not it "is bent to us or as perceived".² Hence the rational statement of Kant's position would be that things "are spatial for our perception though not in themselves".³ Yet Kant inconsistently denies that space is an illusion. He is able to affirm this by the help "of a transition which at first sight seems harmless. In stating the fact of perception he substitutes for the assertion that things *appear so and so to us*, the assertion that things *produce appearances in us*."⁴ He thus "introduces a second reality distinct from the thing, *viz.* an appearance or phenomenon, and thereby he gains something other than the thing to which space can be attached as a real predicate".⁵ But this cannot stave off final breakdown, for phenomena are after all appearances, and it is absurd to predicate spatiality of appearance: for "an appearance being necessarily something mental, cannot possibly be said to be extended".⁶

¹ *Kant's Theory of Knowledge*. By H. A. Prichard, Fellow of Trinity College, Oxford. Clarendon Press, 1909.

² P. 72.

³ P. 73.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ P. 76.

The argument is conclusive if Mr. Prichard's underlying assumptions be granted, viz. that in genuine knowing the mind grasps reality 'as it is,' an erroneous belief being just 'appearance,' a subjective mist which rises (how?) between the mind and its object. But does Kant concede this theory of the purpose and nature of knowledge? Does he not hold by the view that in the act of knowing the mind transforms the bare 'reality' given to it, causing the thing in itself to become phenomenal? Mr. Prichard would probably reply that such a process is not knowing. We seek to know 'the thing': if in knowing we alter it, we fail of our aim. And he would perhaps urge that Kant admitted this. For he gives to the reality before known the honourable name of the thing as it is, and to the reality as known the slighting appellation of 'appearance'. And in ordinary terminology the object of the inquirer is to know the 'thing' not 'the appearance'. But which is the 'thing' we wish to know? The thing as it is apart from us or as it is in interaction with us? Let us revise our vocabulary. Let us call the reality as apprehended (and possibly transformed) by appropriate mental process, the 'thing' or the object of knowledge. And let us dub the thing-in-itself of Kant, which is reality anterior to being known (Mr. Prichard's things as they are "whether perceived or not"¹), $\bar{\mathfrak{A}}\eta$, the raw material of knowledge. By this transvaluation we blunt the edge of Mr. Prichard's criticism. And on this hypothesis we can read an intelligible meaning into the Kantian statement, since phenomena are no longer purely mental existences of which it is nonsense to predicate spatiality. They are on the contrary the transformed $\bar{\mathfrak{A}}\eta$ of reality, of which transformed objects spatiality may be a true attribute. Whether Kant can be made consistent with this position is of course a far more difficult problem, but it is an explanation which does not make Kant's position self-evident nonsense and allows the importance of his distinction between the first gropings and final elaborations of the cognitive process, between what is given to and what comes out of the knowledge-process. But Mr. Prichard might ask: apart from the merits or demerits of the theory thus propounded, is there any need for formulating a theory to transcend the naïvely realistic standpoint at all? It may be answered, that such a theory is imperatively called for, both to meet the fact of error with an intelligible explanation and to answer the central question raised in the *Critique*, respecting *a priori* synthetic judgments—a question which is re-stated by Mr. Prichard but nowhere in his book finds an adequate reply. That the position of the naïve realist is not free from difficulties seems to be implied by Mr. Prichard's subsequent procedure which devotes the remainder of the chapter to meeting such difficulties. "We do," Mr. Prichard admits, it may be urged, "distinguish in ordinary consciousness between

¹ P. 72.

appearance and reality."¹ This distinction he sets himself to analyse as applied by us to the qualities of matter which he sharply distinguishes as primary and secondary. That there is something wrong in his position will appear more clearly if we reverse his order, and consider his treatment of secondary qualities first. On examination he finds that "these supposed real qualities do presuppose a perceiver, and therefore cannot be qualities of things, since the qualities of a thing must exist independently of the perception of a thing".² The conclusion appears to be that secondary qualities are within the realm of 'appearance' not of 'reality'. But the clear line of distinction is blurred when we come to colour. For if colour is 'relative to a sensitive subject'³ the primary qualities would seem infected with subjectivity too, 'on the ground that shape is inseparable from colour'.⁴ That colour is thus relative Mr. Prichard thinks undeniable, but he is conscious of the difficulty that (even if shape is separable from colour) things look or appear coloured. Now in treating primary qualities (we shall see his argument in full directly) he concluded that the term 'look' presupposes the possibility of cases in which things are what they look. Yet since things are not coloured, they look what they are not. The resulting difficulty is that "just as things only look coloured, so things may only look spatial".⁵

The possibility of this, viz., the subjectivity of 'extension,' was considered to be disproved by the discussion of primary qualities. There it was argued that the fact of being able to brand certain impressions as 'appearance' implied the possibility of getting at the 'reality' wherewith to contrast them. The truth that things sometimes 'look' what they are not, can only be established on the basis that they sometimes 'look' what they are. Yet the colour-difficulty surely destroys this certainty. A thing may 'look' its 'true' colour, or a 'false' colour—while all the time it is not coloured. Similarly may we not make true and false statements about the spatial qualities of things—while all the time spatiality is not (in Mr. Prichard's sense) 'real'. To throw overboard as he does the 'reality' of secondary qualities is to destroy the common-sense criticism on which he has laid so much stress. We have been told that it is preposterous to say "the stick is bent to me". We should say boldly with the man of common sense "it is bent". But then the man of common sense equally boldly affirms "it is hot," or "it is red"—'propositions' which are anathema to Mr. Prichard. What again of cases in which we predicate 'is' of the worlds of dream or fiction? Clearly then when we say 'is' we do not invariably assume that rigid demarcation between objective things and subjective appearance upon which Mr. Prichard builds his theory of knowledge, and this suggests that the naively realistic standpoint has no absolute validity after all. Nor is Mr.

¹ P. 76.² P. 86.³ P. 87.⁴ *Ibid.*⁵ P. 89.

Prichard's theory really strengthened by the passages¹ in which he apparently reduces apprehension of 'reality' to apprehension of the mathematical qualities of space and its objects, 'appearance' being due to the shortcomings of particular visual standpoints. For knowledge of spatial properties is after all compounded partly of visual and tactual sensations and hence the relativity of primary qualities to the subject is not destroyed. The common idealistic arguments such as are marshalled in chapter i. of *Appearance and Reality* have not been refuted. For the only contention advanced against them by Mr. Prichard was the axiomatic character of his view that reality is independent of the percipient. This was claimed as a deduction from common-sense thinking, but Mr. Prichard's own concessions in regard to secondary quality and colour rob the common-sense attitude of its validity. Since by 'is' we do not make such a reference to reality as would satisfy Mr. Prichard, in cases of secondary qualities and colours, it is possible that we do not do so in regard to primary qualities—that we are willing in fact to admit the percipient to a share in their constitution without surrendering belief in the reality of the object thus constituted. Mr. Prichard it seems can only deny that it is worth while to raise such a question. But surely the genuine pressure of the pivotal question of the *Critique* (How are *a priori* synthetic judgments possible?), the difficulty of the 'colour'-problem, the very existence of secondary qualities, and the hosts of reasons brought up by idealists in the course of the long controversy, demand a more explicit reply from the side of naïve realism. In face of these facts there does seem an unconscious irony in Mr. Prichard's conclusion. "It is a pre-supposition of thinking that things are in themselves what we think them to be: and from the nature of the case a pre-supposition of thinking, not only cannot be rightly questioned but cannot be questioned at all."² If by things in themselves is meant 'reality' prior to apprehension the presupposition that the aim of knowledge is to grasp them unchanged begs the question; for it is precisely what the critics of realism have always disputed. Mr. Prichard makes only a single attempt to meet criticism when he appeals to a common-sense theory of knowledge; but as we have seen common language distinctly rejects his interpretation. If the unphilosophic consciousness is entitled to doubt the independence of secondary qualities, the philosopher is entitled to extend this doubt to primary qualities as well.

In chapter vi. ('Knowledge and Reality') Mr. Prichard proceeds to a general criticism of the idealist position with the object of showing³ (a) that it issues in pure subjectivism, and (b) that it obscures the directness of contact between the knower and his object, and makes an impossible transference of elements belonging to one side of the relation to the other.

¹ P. 84.² P. 100.³ P. 115.

After a brilliant summary tinged with satiric humour of the Idealist theory as generally stated,¹ he considers himself to refute it with the one axiomatic sentence: 'Knowledge unconditionally presupposes that the reality known exists independently of the knowledge of it, and that we know it as it exists in this independence'.² Assuredly if this is axiomatic, there never was any need of argument. But is it not to beg the question? Is this not precisely what the Idealists dispute? Is it not the goal rather than the starting-point of realistic effort? However, the interesting point is that not even Mr. Prichard seems to occupy this impregnable position with complete consistency. For we read a page or two further on that "We might of course find difficulty in deciding whether a reality of some particular kind (*e.g.* a colour) is dependent on a mind".³ On Mr. Prichard's principles we should in that case have to deny that we can "know" colour. But further, since Mr. Prichard allows our right to doubt "Whether a colour as a colour involves a mind which sees"⁴ (the phrase is a little unusual), may we not extend our doubts to a similar question with regard to primary qualities, "Whether an extended object as such does not involve a mind which feels"? If we can even put the question, Mr. Prichard's fundamental epistemological axiom loses its self-evidence and cries aloud for vindication. Here again there is no need to cite the well-known arguments: but it is remarkable that Mr. Prichard takes no step to meet them.

The further argument whereby it is shown that if Kant *had* admitted that reality exists independently of knowledge, he would have been driven to subjective idealism, *viz.*, the notion that the mind is confined to its own states, clearly hangs in the air, until it is proved that Kant (and other Idealists) do concede the existence of such 'independent' reality, which they do not, or need not do. We may however draw attention to two assertions which occur in the course of this demonstration. "To say of a reality that it is essentially an object of knowledge is merely to add to the particular nature already attributed to the existent in question the further characteristic that it must be known."⁵ But is not the 'mere' addition of this characteristic just the important thing—for how can Mr. Prichard or any one talk of 'reality' at all without it? Again, Mr. Prichard says "any reality exists independently of the knowledge of it"⁶—perhaps, but in what sense? As initial *ἰλη*? or as a finished product of a successful effort to know? It makes an enormous difference whether the object of knowledge spoken of is as it appears at the beginning or at the end of a cognitive process, and until Mr. Prichard explains how and by what means it passes from the one condition to the other, his theory has no very relevant relation to the facts either of science or of common life. So far therefore from successfully superseding the fundamental position which philosophy owes to

¹ Pp. 115-118.⁴ *Ibid.*² P. 118.⁵ P. 122.³ P. 120.⁶ *Ibid.*

Kant, *viz.* that the nature of objects cannot be rendered intelligible without reference to the process of mental activity in which they grow up, Mr. Prichard does nothing but reiterate a *non possumus* which is nothing but a *non volumus*. This can hardly impress those who demand of philosophy criticism of presuppositions. They will hardly be satisfied by a theory of knowledge and reality which first claims to be based on a careless everyday use of language, and then proceeds to repudiate this very basis. For we cannot cease to press the point that if the deliverances of naive consciousness on the nature of knowledge prove anything, they prove the equal reality of primary and secondary qualities, while if they prove the latter illusory (and especially in the case of colour), then they cast an equal doubt on the authenticity of primary qualities. In neither case can they escape scrutiny nor do they merit blind acceptance. Such a scrutiny is what Kant has attempted and his critic has avoided. Consequently Kant's problem has not been solved; he has not been refuted, but refused a hearing. Mr. Prichard no doubt has laid bare the well-known difficulties of a particular theory of knowledge, *viz.* that which, whether it calls itself idealistic (with Plato) or realistic (with Locke), makes knowledge 'representational,' or imitative of the Real which somehow stimulates from without a mind it transcends. But then he realises himself that there is an alternative theory, *viz.* (to quote his own description of it) that "knower and known form an inseparable unity".¹ And this theory in its various developments meets with no refutation from him. It is dogmatically denied. Surely whether or not Kant can be convicted of "representationism," this form of epistemological hypothesis demanded treatment.

Mr. Prichard says on page 124 that on his own view "knowledge is *sui generis* and as such cannot be explained". If so it is surely a pity that books should continue to be written on the theory of knowledge. But if Mr. Prichard is right and the other philosophers are wrong, it follows that, on Mr. Prichard's own showing, one thing needs to be explained, *viz.* how their error, and indeed error in general, is possible. And when he has solved this, Mr. Prichard will perhaps find leisure to tackle next the problem of the *Critique* and the question how are *a priori* synthetic judgments possible?

I may sum up this criticism in the contention that Mr. Prichard has really only brought up a single argument against Kant and Idealism in the whole course of these chapters. It consists of the assertion that if knowledge is to be knowledge it must not affect or alter the reality it deals with. Mr. Prichard treats this position as self-evident, but does not tell us what he means by 'reality' and 'alter'.

But once a 'self-evident' truth has been challenged (as this was by Kant), does it not require defence?—if only by the method of pointing out the disastrous consequences of its denial.

¹ P. 116.

The conclusion this difficulty points to is that the only thing self-evident about Mr. Prichard's epistemology is its incompleteness. Since we have it on his own admission¹ that when we say (e.g.) 'the rose is red' we do not mean what the naïve consciousness supposes we do (*viz.* that the rose is red), it is legitimate and indeed necessary to transcend the naïve theory of what we mean in asserting the reality of primary qualities. In particular it would be instructive to hear whether Mr. Prichard after denying the synthetic function of the mind would equally reject the analytic function which seems to be involved in all judging and is called by Mr. Bradley "mutilation," by Dr. Schiller and Prof. Dewey "selection".² The latter two epistemologists do not apparently come under Mr. Prichard's types of Idealism. They would decline to call themselves idealists and contend that their theory of knowledge fully accepted the real objects of science and common life. But as they insist on the presence of a 'subjective' (i.e. human) element in the human knowing of Reality, and only differ from Kant in conceiving its contributions in biological instead of purely rational terms, too, they must be regarded as critical of Mr. Prichard's assumptions. The close agreement between e.g. "Axioms as Postulates" and the *Critique*, as to the importance of mental activity, would have made an effective criticism of their view highly relevant in a book which so strenuously denies the existence of such activity.

The upshot of our criticism however is not that Mr. Prichard's Realism is necessarily incapable of consistent statement, but that it is regrettable that it has made no genuine attempt to complete itself.

D. L. MURRAY.

¹ In the discussion of colour : see p. 87.

² Cf. *Studies in Humanism*, pp. 228 n., 453, *Journ. of Phil.*, v., p. ., vi., 1, 20.