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THE
IRISH CHURCH QUARTERLY.

JULY, 1916.

IDEALISM AND REALISM—A REPLY.

MAY I say at once that I feel profoundly grateful to Mr. Rogers for his review of my second series of Donnellan Lectures, on *God and Freedom in Human Experience*, which appeared in the last number of the IRISH CHURCH QUARTERLY. Frank and enlightened criticism is the best appreciation which any book that is a real effort in the struggle for truth can receive. Most of his criticisms are really valuable as contributions to the study of a great subject, and to me particularly, as means whereby I may make my meaning clearer to myself and to others. No thinker can properly define his position, even to himself, until he has been thoroughly well criticized.

When, with the kind permission of the Editor, I undertook to examine some of the questions raised in Mr. Rogers' review, I entered into a contract with myself that I would not make any effort to score points in debate or to present an appearance of greater conviction or security than I am truly aware of. It is not easy for any man to keep a resolution of the kind, but it is well worth while to make an effort to do so.

There is only one of Mr. Rogers' criticisms which seems to me unfair, though I have no doubt the unfairness is intellectual not moral. I refer to his use of the

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fact that, in an old book of mine, *Idealism and Theology*, written seventeen years ago, I adopted a certain line of thought in order to present, in a way which seemed to me to be not without value, the great Christian doctrine of the Blessed Trinity. It appears to my critic, if I understand him aright, that the philosophical view which I present has assumed its shape in order to provide a justification for that doctrine. Mr. Rogers distinctly states that "it is the doctrine of the Trinity—and I think this alone—that prevents the Bishop from concluding that everything that exists is a state of consciousness." That statement seems to me to involve the charge that my whole scheme of thought has been constructed in order to lead up to a certain conclusion. The conclusion, in fact, has brought about the premisses and not the premisses the conclusion. This is, of course, a charge that every lay critic is apt to bring against the theologian, and sometimes with real reason. But I do not think I am open to it. In fact, I can honestly say that when, about a quarter of a century ago, the line of thought in question first dawned upon me as an inevitable outcome of all I had learned from Berkeley, Kant, Hegel, Lotze and Green, it was with astonishment that I discovered that it opened a new way of approach to the old orthodox creed. So uncertain was I, however, and so fearful of the very blunder into which Mr. Rogers thinks I have fallen, that I went to my friend, the late Frederick Purser, the sincerest and most careful thinker that I ever knew, and the most thoroughly well-informed, and with his help threshed the subject out on purely philosophical grounds. I am very glad to have this opportunity of expressing my gratitude to that wonderful mind and noble heart; and I can assure Mr. Rogers that when Mr. Purser told me that he not only followed the argument, but agreed with it, and accepted the conclusion, I felt that I had reason to be quite certain that I had not fallen into the mistake of constructing a philosophical scheme of thought in order to reach an orthodox conclusion. I

shall not here repeat the argument. It is to be found in print, easily accessible; and I feel sure that if Mr. Rogers will take the trouble to look into it a little more carefully he will see that he is mistaken.

In those days what troubled me most was to find a means of grasping experience concretely. The psychology of that time was a most miserable affair. It was not that it was inadequate. Its vice was that it put the student's face in the wrong direction. It never let him get a glimpse of the truth. Its whole method consisted in tearing the soul to fragments, ignoring the fact that such a process can yield no results but such as are utterly worthless for those who want to know anything about the soul. To this day, psychology suffers from the same vice. But a new era dawned with M. Bergson. He has taught us how we may discern the soul as a living reality, concrete, creative, free. It was the apprehension of this fact that supplied a new means of working out the old problem. And, in the working out, it appeared that the main lines remained the same, but that new vistas opened up on every side.

Having said so much, I am in a position to examine the more vital criticisms in Mr. Rogers' review. Mr. Rogers appears to be a Realist of the new school. How far he goes with such writers as Russell and Alexander I do not know. But it is quite clear that he belongs to their school, and his main criticism is not so much aimed at my views as at the whole idealistic mode of thought. This is very satisfactory, because it makes for clearness, and also delivers us both from anything of the nature of a personal controversy.

The old Realists regarded material things as collections of accidents or qualities inhering in a substance or substratum. But as no one could ever get at this substratum, or know anything at all about it except that certain qualities inhered in it, it seemed reasonable to abolish it. Idealism remained. The new Realists adopt a very different method. For them, the real world

which stands in antithesis to the mind is a world of sensibles and universals. These thinkers do not trouble about a substratum. What the old Realists called qualities or accidents are for the new school real existing things which may come into relation with the human consciousness or may not. A pain, for example, is like a crab lying in wait in the ocean of reality. If any incautious bather puts his toe too near he may get caught.

Whether this is a fair description of Mr. Rogers' particular view of Realism, or not, I do not know. He does not develop his theory sufficiently. But the principles which lead to this doctrine are certainly stated by him. He believes, for example, in *unperceived perceptions*. He also believes in *unconceived conceptions*. That is, he thinks there can be sense-data without any sensing, and thoughts without any thinker. It is easy to point out that these are contradictions. But it is perhaps even more important to observe that there can be no instance in experience of either an unperceived perception or an unconceived conception. Point to any instance of a perception and it is one which is perceived. Point to any instance of a conception and it is one which is conceived. To assume, therefore, that they exist any otherwise than we know them in every instance of our knowledge is strange indeed.

Put generally, the case is thus: all the real that we know stands as object in relation to our subjectivity. It is impossible to find an object without a subject or a subject without an object. What right have we to assume that the things we know as objects in relation to subjects, and in no other way, exist, independently of us, apart from any knowing subject?

But Mr. Rogers builds on the statement that, to quote Bergson, "images outrun perception on every side." That is, reality is infinitely richer than our perception of it. What we grasp of the world is, in fact, but a small part of the fulness of the whole as it exists independently of us. With these statements I agree most heartily.

The evidence for them seems to me to be overwhelming. But Mr. Rogers does not seem to understand that, holding as I do, that reality is essentially experience—since all that I know of it is experience—these statements simply affirm the great pre-supposition of all human knowledge, that our limited life is a share in the great universal life. The truth which is thus affirmed is the existence of God as the subject of universal experience. Admit this and all the difficulties about unperceived perceptions and unconceived conceptions vanish in a moment.

What M. Bergson's belief on this question is I do not know. But I think Mr. Rogers is mistaken in arguing as he does from the reasonings of *Matière et Mémoire*. That profound work is not, as I understand it, an exposition of a philosophy based on a doctrine of perception. It is rather an investigation of the relation between mind and brain; and, from this point of view, its conclusions are most valuable, especially when we consider their remarkable coincidence with the independent researches of Mr. McDougall.

Mr. Rogers criticizes in a peculiarly interesting way my starting with experience as a "living moving continuum." But he seems to think that, when I thus emphasize the continuity of experience, I am referring to M. Bergson's brilliant account of certain wonderful moments of intuition when the self seems to gather up past, present and future into a single apprehension, and becomes almost fully aware of its own super-intellectual life. And Mr. Rogers quotes in this connexion a remarkable passage from *L'Evolution Créatrice*. I can assure him that my meaning was much simpler and humbler. I was referring to what I took to be the most important deliverance of recent psychology, that the stream of consciousness is a stream and not a collection of separate ideas or impressions. I was rash enough to think that this had now almost passed into a commonplace and that all that it needed was a certain amount of

exhibition and illustration. From this I passed on to prove the peculiar concreteness of this stream of consciousness, making use of what I regard as M. Bergson's greatest discovery, the inter-penetration of physical elements. As regards this profoundly important principle, it seemed to me that philosophers had not yet become aware of its extraordinary value; and that even M. Bergson himself had to some degree failed to realize its revolutionary character.

This is the principle which enables us to grasp experience concretely, and to show that the material world is a world of lower reality. It opens up a new way of approach to the difficult question of *Degrees of Reality*: a conception which has been steadily gaining ground ever since the publication of Mr. Bradley's remarkable work, *Appearance and Reality*. My own conviction is that it provides a clue of superlative value, if not to the solution of the age-long problems, at least to the explanation of their existence.

I hope Mr. Rogers will pardon me if I say that he, in common with all our new Realists, so far as I have been able to judge, seems to reverse the due order of philosophical explanation. It is a question of the psychological method or the philosophical. The former proceeds by analysis and abstraction. The latter seeks the concrete. Modern psychology has indeed been able to exhibit the continuity of experience, but only because it has been driven back to it by the trouble in which its former methods involved it. Psychology ever sets its face towards the abstract process or element. Philosophy must ever face the other way.¹

Now Mr. Rogers makes the astonishing assertion that "normal experience is essentially discontinuous in relation to time;" and goes on to express surprise that he has read "no work on psychology in which this truth is

¹This distinction is admirably set forth in M. Bergson's short *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 21ff. (English Translation).

openly recognized." Also he declares that "it is useless to dispute the fact that every state of consciousness is *in*, though not *of*, a single indivisible instant of time;" and that "it is equally self-evident that in a second of time we have only a finite distinct number of experiences." And he appeals to the well-tested methods of the mathematicians and "exact scientists." As I read all this I cannot but wonder whether Mr. Rogers has ever read Bergson's *Essai sur les données*. It was the first of that philosopher's greater works, and the one that made the world of thought realize the greatness of the new thinker. The theme of it is the absolute denial of all these assertions which Mr. Rogers makes with so much confidence.

Mr. Rogers is confusing phenomenal and real time. He is trying to measure the duration of concrete experience by means of abstract symbols. Time, as he conceives it, is duration measured out into lengths by reference to spatial standards. When he appeals to "exact science," he appeals to branches of knowledge which deal only with abstractions; and the more exact the science the thinner the abstractions with which it deals.

But, quite apart from M. Bergson's philosophy, Mr. Rogers' statements must strike the instructed reader as somewhat amazing. With all the emphasis of italics, he asserts that "normal experience is essentially discontinuous in relation to time." When he had made this assertion, Mr. Rogers was seized by a doubt. He began to reflect, and the result of his reflection appears in the sentence, "I have read no work on psychology in which this truth is openly recognized." To be quite candid, neither have I. But I have read a great many in which it is, by implication, most emphatically denied. The continuity of all that can be called experience is involved in the fact that memory is an essential element in experience, and memory is the carrying on of the past into the present. This is but one indication. Has Mr.

Rogers ever looked into the psychology of purpose, or of meaning, or of dreaming? Has he ever considered the fact that a knock on his bedroom door which rouses him from sleep will often give occasion for a long dream-history obviously constructed to account for it. The instant of time which the knock occupies, somehow or other also contains a story which would take a very long time in the telling, and, most remarkable of all, the knock is the *dénouement* of the story. Or, can Mr. Rogers account for the fact that in a single mental glance he can take in the whole argument of a long philosophical treatise which takes many days to read and many months, or perhaps years, to write?

Dr. Wildon Carr in his presidential address to the Aristotelian Society last November, dealt in an interesting manner with this question. His argument is mainly directed against those Realists who hold that sense-data are constant objective reals. As he points out, the facts of attention are enough to overthrow this doctrine. "The mind can be attentive or inattentive to its sensations in any degree. . . . I can turn my attention off and on, I can concentrate it on one minute sensation or expand it to take in the whole range of my senses at once, and all within the moment of experience. How am I to express all this if I take the standpoint of objective sense-data to which the relation of the mind is acquaintance?" And this leads Dr. Wildon Carr to his principal point. The Realist doctrine fails to explain the perception of change. "We must suppose that what we perceive and call change is not what we conceive change to be, but an illusion produced in us by the succession of sense-data. What we suppose to be change must really be the simultaneous sensing of sense-data which are themselves successive."² In fact, to use M. Bergson's famous illustration, the new Realist thinks that experience is a succession of snap-shots, for-

² Wildon Carr, *The Moment of Experience*, pp. 23, 24.

getting that, if the cinematograph were nothing more than such a succession, it could not even mimic reality. Mr. Rogers' claim then that "experience is essentially discontinuous in time" is not only, as he admits, not recognized by psychology, but it is also incapable of philosophical justification.

The new Realism is an intensely interesting phenomenon. It marks, as I believe, the end of a long struggle; for the new Realism is but the ghost of a dead doctrine. The material substratum, the world of primary qualities, the thing-in-itself, have all been abandoned. There remain only the sensible elements and the thought elements and all the other elements that together make the world that we know. These, it seems, must be real things, able to stand by themselves, whether we sense, or think, or know them or not. But how are all these separate real things combined into a single experience? It is surely clear that unless the New Realism be interpreted as a form of Idealism, it can supply no answer to that question.

Apart from the controversy between Idealism and Realism, there are many questions raised in Mr. Rogers' article that I should like to discuss, had I space for such an undertaking. One of these I may venture to touch upon. Mr. Rogers sums up, with a high degree of conciseness and accuracy, "the leading theme of the lectures." In one important matter he is, however, mistaken. As regards the relation of the human soul to God, he describes the view which I set forth in the following terms: "Our nature, existence and reality consist in the fact that we are elements in His (God's) conscious experience." This I do not hold; nor do I think there is any passage in the Lectures which could reasonably be held to assert it. In two ways I ventured to approach the great question. First, I pointed out that the world as we know it exists only as involved in conscious experience; and that, therefore, believing, as we must, that the world exists independently of each par-

particular human thinker, we are forced to postulate the existence of a great Universal Experience. Thus, the fact of the Personality of God is established. He is the subject of the Universal Experience. Secondly, each finite human experience involves a **partial apprehension** of the Universal Experience; that is, each human individual has a share in the Universal Life. In some sense therefore God is all-inclusive in relation to the whole multitude of finite persons. Since the world of His Experience includes all our partial experiences, He must, in some sense, include us. The question is, in what sense? That is a question, I hold, which cannot be fully answered. Only a partial answer can be given. And the reason is clear. It is because God, in His ultimate Nature, is higher in the scale of reality than we are.

Thus we reach the strange conclusion that God is both Personal in the highest sense and Super-personal. This appears to be contradictory, but it is not so; because we are dealing with a reality higher than ourselves. The final step is beyond us. The dialectic of our thought has reached its limit.

And here I may point out an inference which is not fully worked out in the Lectures. It follows that, in relation to God, we are not to be regarded as either objects or as parts of His subjectivity. Every human view of the world is a partial apprehension of God's world; but the human subjectivity is not an element in this objective system: on the contrary, it stands opposed to it. Therefore the man is not to be described as an element in God's conscious experience. Again, man's subjectivity is not to be described as a portion of the Divine subjectivity, because when we come to consider God as all-inclusive in relation to finite spirits, we have to think of Him as, in some sense, super-personal. The meaning of these puzzles is, after all, quite a simple one. It is that God is higher than we are, and that, though we can truly and rightly think of Him in the terms which we apply to Personal beings, He is yet, in His ultimate

Nature, inexpressible in any terms that we possess. We have neither thoughts nor language which are good enough. Our best thoughts of Him are true, so far as they go, but they are not adequate—a conclusion which is altogether in accordance with common-sense.

CHARLES F. DOWN.