

DR. MERCIER AND THE LOGICIANS.

SOME of Dr. Mercier's remarks on logic and logicians call for a brief reply. Comments and criticisms which have small significance in themselves, and which receive no added authority from the philosophical reputation of the author, become of some importance when published in the pages of this journal. For my own part, I should not have undertaken the duty of reply were it not for the irrelevant and uncalled-for attack on Dr. Bosanquet. Such an attack, which is merely abuse without substantial criticism, Dr. Bosanquet could not be expected to notice, and a reply which comes from one who has had occasion more than once to disagree with Dr. Bosanquet may be more effective than praise from a pupil or a follower. As I am replying to the remarks on Dr. Bosanquet, I shall say something about the other matters under discussion.

On the subject of inversion, Dr. Mercier's remarks are not very relevant. If Dr. Mercier had read the discussion in which he takes part, he might have noted that Dr. Rieber,¹ on behalf of the inversionists, disclaims such "inversion silliness" as Dr. Mercier attributes to the logicians. Indeed, he might have inferred that, in Dr. Rieber's opinion, the inverse of the proposition "Every truthful man is mortal" would be "if there are any immortals, they will be amongst those who are not truthful men". Dr. Rieber might well say, in the words of Mr. Bradley, what I have written may be valueless, but my critic has no right to treat it as having no existence. So Dr. Mercier has not stuck the point of the needle into the table after all. As against the writer of the text-book (if only references were given and we knew who he was), Dr. Mercier may have scored a point, but he has added nothing to the discussion on the validity of inversion.

Once again, Dr. Mercier's remarks on logic as a game, coming from him, are foolish and meaningless. The phrase is borrowed from Dr. Schiller. In the setting of Dr. Schiller's book and from his philosophical standpoint, it is intelligible. Dr. Schiller, in calling formal logic a game, has a definite meaning and knows what he means. He is attacking the ideal of formal validity, the inferring of conclusions formally implicit in the premises. And it is immaterial to him whether the reasoning is syllogistic or otherwise. Dr. Schiller does not call formal logic a silly game and then

¹ *MIND*, No. 86, p. 259.

attempt to put forward an alternative formal logic which is, from his own standpoint, equally a game and equally silly. Let us note the following sentences from Dr. Mercier's table of contents: "Immediate inference is the explication of what is implied in simple propositions," "Mediate inference is the explication of what is implied in compound propositions". "An implication of a proposition is the result of contemplating from a different point of view the relation expressed in a proposition." The only way in which the game indicated by these quotations differs from traditional formal logic is that it is not played so well. Dr. Mercier's ignorance of contemporary logic and current controversy is thus not confined to inability to understand Dr. Bosanquet.

A depreciation of formal logic on pragmatist grounds as a false ideal and a meaningless futility is an arguable position. But it is not consistent, or even sensible, from one who attempts, however inadequately, to formulate new methods of the explication of what is implied in propositions. Every word of abuse of traditional logic is much more applicable to Dr. Mercier's own work. The hostile critic could well describe the style and manner of advertisement of Dr. Mercier's logic, in a phrase that will appeal to him, as quackery. But it is interesting and instructive to find Dr. Mercier, in effect, telling us himself that it is so. One might indeed go a step farther and inquire whether his book was intended as a skit on ordinary formal logic. The probability is, however, that the humour is of the unconscious variety, and that Dr. Mercier did not know, when he published the attack on logicians, the manner in which he was reflecting on his own work.

With this introduction, it will not be necessary to say much about the attack on Dr. Bosanquet. There is an element of spoof about most things, and again the most natural reply is a counter-attack. It would be easy to inform him, in similar language, with a greater show of reason, that his profession, in many capacities, are spoofing the public with a show of learning which will not bear investigation, and, moreover, are thereby increasing their own power and putting public money in their pockets. There is very little that is not open to a similar form of attack, and many people will be indebted to Dr. Mercier for pointing the way. The *source* of Dr. Mercier's remarks, I think we may assume, lies in the fact that he comes into philosophy from outside, and thinks that the philosophical world has attempted to depreciate and ignore his work by the usual conspiracy of silence. But it only renders it more difficult to discover real cases if such a tone is adopted without due and sufficient cause. Dr. Mercier has, however, chosen for attack the very last quarter where such attack is justified. It has been my lot to disagree with many prominent men, and, in published work, to point out (whether correctly or incorrectly it is not my wish to argue here), that a large number of philosophers and men of science have blundered badly on certain specific sub-

jects of which I have made a special study. The result has been, in nearly every case, no reply and the abandoning by them of the subject in dispute. Dr. Bosanquet alone, with regard to one small matter, has publicly and clearly discussed the points of difference. Had Dr. Mercier anything of substance to say in criticism of Dr. Bosanquet's logic he would probably have found Dr. Bosanquet willing to discuss. But the present outburst, abuse without substance, could only be ignored.

This is not the place nor the time to attempt to assess the value of Dr. Bosanquet's work or to explain the reasons for the deservedly high position he occupies in the philosophical world. The history and meaning of present-day metaphysical logic, of which Dr. Bosanquet is so prominent an exponent, again is not quite relevant. Nor do I propose to defend Dr. Bosanquet from the suggestion of occasional obscurity. But the charge of deliberate obscurity, and especially that of posing as a mental millionaire with a show of learning with the object of spoofing the public is one that recoils on the author. That Dr. Mercier does not understand Dr. Bosanquet is a statement we can readily accept. But Dr. Mercier would have been well-advised to have tried to treat Dr. Bosanquet in the manner in which opponents usually are treated, namely to say that he did not agree and state his reasons. Unless he can either do so or convince himself that Dr. Bosanquet's work is irrelevant, he would do well to leave logic alone, and to acknowledge that he has written on a subject he does not understand.

No subject and no branch of learning can be described as spoof the exponents of which are open to fresh ideas and treat fairly and honourably those who attempt to advance it, who are willing to criticise, and, if valid, to accept new ideas from whatever source they may come. I am not, however, disposed to deny that there is, in logic and in philosophy, a considerable element of spoof. But in so far as such is the case, the last man whom it is possible to blame, or to whom it is possible to impute such an intention, is Dr. Bosanquet. Moreover this same element of spoof is found in present-day science more than in philosophy.

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