



Philosophical Review

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Studies in the Hegelian Dialectic* by John Ellis McTaggart

Review by: Josiah Royce

Source: *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Jan., 1897), pp. 69-76

Published by: Duke University Press on behalf of Philosophical Review

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2175591>

Accessed: 09-09-2018 16:43 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Philosophical Review, *Duke University Press* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Philosophical Review*

REVIEWS OF BOOKS.

Studies in the Hegelian Dialectic. By JOHN ELLIS McTAGGART, M.A., Fellow of Trinity College in Cambridge. Cambridge, at the University Press. New York, Macmillan and Co., 1896. — pp. xvi, 259.

The essays of Mr. McTaggart, which form the fourth and fifth chapters of this volume, are already known to readers of *Mind*. The first four chapters of the work, as the author explains in his preface, formed a dissertation submitted, in an earlier form, at the fellowship examination of Trinity College, Cambridge, 1891. The completed work is, in its earlier part, on the whole, an apology for the Hegelian dialectic method. The later chapters introduce some negative criticism, directed against certain aspects of the Hegelian system, rather than against the dialectic method itself. The philosophical basis for the exposition of the Hegelian method is furnished almost altogether by the text of the *Logic* and of the *Encyclopaedia*. The resulting work is certainly an ingenious, and, within its chosen limits, a scholarly production, which cannot fail to be of service, not merely to expositors of Hegel, but to students of fundamental problems in general.

So much by way of general preliminary. Considered more in detail, chapter I introduces us to "The General Nature of the Dialectic." From the outset Mr. McTaggart lays stress upon the fact that the dialectic method itself appears, in Hegel's *Logic*, subject to a progressive modification. It is not a uniform or absolutely stereotyped method. "It is only natural," says Mr. McTaggart, "in a system in which matter and form are so closely connected, that the gradual changes of the matter, which forms the content of the system, should react on the nature of the movement by which the changes take place" (p. 2). Moreover, the dialectic "must be looked on as a process, not of construction, but of reconstruction" (p. 3). This latter consideration is used by our author as the basis for an argument against von Hartmann's criticism of the method of advance from one category to another in the Hegelian exposition. The dialectic process is no mere analysis of the lower categories, for the sake of discovering *in* them the higher, as some-

thing deducible from the mere abstract definition of the lower. The lower categories lead on to the highest merely because they themselves are already abstractions from the higher categories, and the logical method merely reconstructs that relation to the higher which the lower category already implicitly involves. In close relation to this contention, is the assertion made by Mr. McTaggart later in the first chapter, and frequently emphasized from then on throughout his discussion, that the dialectic, and in general, the processes of pure thought, are not independent of experience. Even the deduction of Nature from the Logic, and of Spirit from Nature is defended by our author from the charge of implying that the worlds of Nature and Spirit "can be reduced to or explained away by Pure Thought" (pp. 27-29). Chapter II, "On the Different Interpretations of the Dialectic," is directed partly against Trendelenburg's criticism of the Dialectic, and partly against Professor Andrew Seth. Chapter III, "On the Validity of the Dialectic," rises to the consideration of more purely metaphysical aspects of the system. The right of the dialectic method to deal with the conception of the Absolute, the possibility of 'transcendental arguments' in general, the ontological validity of thought, and the much-discussed 'identity of Thought and Being,' are considered with reference to various critics and criticisms.

Chapter IV, "On the Development of the Method," introduces us, before its completion, to a somewhat unexpected turn of the argument. The early portion of the chapter is, to be sure, devoted to an extension of the view, asserted at the outset, that the dialectic method is subject to a progressive modification as it passes from the lower to the higher stages, only now the process is considered in closer relation to the various sorts of categories involved in the successive stages. As Mr. McTaggart observes, "the further the dialectic goes from its starting-point, the less prominent becomes the apparent stability of the individual finite categories, and the less do they seem to be self-centred and independent" (p. 123). And again, "The process always seeks for that idea which is logically required as the completion of the idea from which it starts. At first," that is, in the earlier stages of the *Logic*, "the complementary idea presents itself as incompatible with the starting-points, and has to be independently harmonized with it. Afterwards, the complementary idea is at once presented as in harmony with the original idea in which it is implied. All the change lies in the fact that two operations, at first distinct, are fused into one. . . . As we

approximate to the end of the process, we are able to see implied, in the idea before us, not merely a complementary and contradictory idea on the same level, but an idea which at once complements and transcends the starting-point. The second idea is here from the first in harmony with the idea which it complements" (p. 133). Mr. McTaggart first draws from these considerations (p. 134), the conclusion, already indicated, but not developed, in his first chapter, "that the importance of negation in the dialectic is by no means primary." In fact (p. 135), "the presence of negation is not only a mere accident of the dialectic, but an accident whose importance continuously decreases as the dialectic progresses, and as its subject-matter becomes more fully understood." He then passes on to observe that if the relation of the various ideas to one another in different stages of the dialectic process is not the same, the relation of all the finite stages to the Absolute Idea need not be the same as the relation which they bear to one another as finite categories in the dialectic process (p. 136). "The very existence of the dialectic thus tends to prove that it is not in every sense objectively correct," for no transition in the dialectic takes place "exactly according to the type belonging to the highest point of view." On Hegel's own premises, then, we are forced, according to Mr. McTaggart, to dissent from the view that "the procession of the categories, with its advance through oppositions and reconciliations" expresses the deepest nature of pure thought. In fine, Mr. McTaggart thus asserts substantially that negation, the constant instrument in the earlier stages of the dialectic, not only becomes progressively less significant as we advance, but pretty completely vanishes from the internal constitution of the Absolute Idea, when that final goal of the whole process is reached. This conclusion is one which, coming from a critic who has so skilfully defended the dialectic method in his earlier chapters, is surprising enough; and it suggests the wonder whether Hegel may not turn in his grave on finding himself thus treated, by an apologist, in regard to what was unquestionably one of the most favorite of all his theses. For, whatever may be said as to the merits of Mr. McTaggart's own contention concerning what is the most consistent reading of the Hegelian premises, certain it is that if the Hegelian Absolute Idea is obliged to abandon its property in negations, it might as well at once go into the receiver's hands.

Chapter V, "On the Relation of the Dialectic to Time," is welcome, whatever its other features, as a thoughtful contribution to one of the most neglected problems of the system and of Metaphysics in

general. But Mr. McTaggart here develops only the more plainly, and now as his own metaphysical theses, the same considerations that in the foregoing chapter determined his rejection of negation as a feature of essential importance to the system as a whole. He first rightly points out what the conventional critics and expositors of Hegel have very blindly failed to recognize, that the dialectic process cannot be viewed as expressing a reality that in its ultimate nature exists merely in time. The conventional tradition declares that Hegel's Absolute exists only as the result of a temporal process of evolution. This is, on occasion, expressly denied by Hegel; and Mr. McTaggart quite accurately rejects the interpretation. But if the time process is not ultimately real, the question of course remains, what relation the existing time process has to ultimate reality. The Absolute, as such, is not in time; but, on the other hand, in what sense does time exist in the Absolute? Here Mr. McTaggart speaks rather in his own person as metaphysician, and finds serious difficulties in the way of any solution that can be definitely suggested for the problem. Any time process, especially a time process of the dialectic type, involves in each of its stages imperfection. This imperfection now occupies the same position that negation occupied in the previous chapter. In any stage of the process the imperfection has an existence that, as Mr. McTaggart shows, cannot be supposed to be purely negative or illusory. On the other hand, Mr. McTaggart finds it impossible to regard these imperfections as existing in the Absolute unreduced, or in the same form in which they appear in the time process. The result is an antinomy between the perfection of the Absolute, and the imperfection of the stages of the temporal dialectic process, which Mr. McTaggart professes himself unable to solve, although he very ingeniously reasons, in a fashion somewhat similar to the one recently so freely employed by Mr. Bradley, that our inability to discover the positive solution of this particular problem does not forbid us to accept the dialectic method as sufficiently showing that, from the nature of the Absolute Idea, there must be a solution.

Chapter VI, "On the Final Result of the Dialectic" is, in its main section, a discussion of the problem, whether, from Hegel's point of view, as well as from a true point of view, Cognition can be regarded as a complete expression of Spirit. The conclusions reached are closely analogous to those of Mr. Bradley, but are independently expressed, and are brought into a pretty close relation with the text of Hegel. Chapter VII, "On the Application of the Dialectic," is

a critical study of the relation of the Hegelian Logic to its various applications in the philosophy of Nature and of Spirit.

So much for an inadequate summary of the volume before us. Any extended criticism of the numerous problems involved would lead us, indeed, very far afield. A few observations are, however, in order. The present critic firmly believes: first, that a complete exposition of the Hegelian dialectic can only be given upon a genetic basis; and, secondly, that the principal document for such a genetic treatment must necessarily be the *Phänomenologie*, apart from which the expositor is almost inevitably led astray as to some of the principal points of the doctrine. One can only regret that Mr. McTaggart, following the traditions of the old Hegelian School, and of Dr. Hutchison Stirling, has neglected the *Phänomenologie* in obtaining and illustrating his own view as to the essential nature of the dialectic method. I must believe that, in the light of a study of that document, Mr. McTaggart would have been led to different results as to the place which negation, and the negative element in general, not only do occupy, but logically must occupy in the Hegelian system.

As to the main results of Mr. McTaggart, he seems to be in the main correct in his view of the relation of pure thought to experience; only I myself should state these relations with a slightly different emphasis. In the world in which Hegel was at home, namely, in the world of human history, as known in his age, in the world of literary and political movements, such as attracted his attention, in the world of religion, — in the world, in brief, of the ethical relations of mankind, his interest in the facts of experience was keen, and this interest unquestionably determined in a large measure the very essentials of his doctrine. He was fond of appealing to experience, in these known regions, very explicitly. His attitude was always that of a critic rather than of a reporter; at his best, he loved a sort of allegorical and, in his earlier work, distinctly romantic reconstruction of what he took to be the spirit of the facts of experience. And as soon as his reconstruction was made, he proceeded too readily to very broad generalizations, which he pronounced with an air of infallibility that easily became offensive to his opponents; but he was not unaware of his dependence on experience. His condemnation of mere empiricism was, like Carlyle's familiar assaults upon the methods of the Dry-as-dust students, a protest against one-sidedness, quite consistent, in his own case, with an extended and often minute erudition. That, in developing his philosophy, he should wholly

ignore this relation to experience was impossible; and to attribute such ignoring to him is simply a slander of his critics. His popular reputation for *a priori* indifference to fact was most nearly justified by his undertakings in the Philosophy of Nature; but the Philosophy of Nature, in Hegel's day, was the wilderness of philosophy, full of swamps and mirages, where anybody was certain to lose his head who ventured there. And Hegel happened to dislike physical science, and yet to be forced, like many another German professor of his day, to talk of its problems as if he had mastered them. As a fact, however, the actual experiences of Hegel were, as just said, experiences of certain aspects of human life. And of these his philosophy is an interpretation, guided by an extraordinary power in dealing with ultimate problems, and in generalizing from life to universal truth.

But now, as to the relation of pure thought to the study of such a range of experience as this: To think, as Mr. McTaggart well says, is for Hegel, as for any other philosopher, to reconstruct the meaning of experience in ideal terms. But the experience whose meaning Hegel reconstructs, is primarily an experience of Life, of ethically significant Life, in all the complexity of its conflicts. On the other hand, to reconstruct this Life in ideal terms is to make use of abstractions, which as such appear essentially inadequate to the wealth of the world that they are to depict. What Hegel calls the Understanding tries to meet this natural defect of our ideas by merely multiplying abstractions and omitting connections, in the way that Mephistopheles classically described to the student. But the inevitable result of multiplying abstractions is that, because of the one-sidedness of the abstractions, you multiply contradictions amongst the various one-sided accounts that you give of your object. Now Hegel's method of escape from the labyrinth of the Understanding depends, for himself, essentially, upon the reflective observation, to which, in the *Phänomenologie*, he constantly invites attention, and which in the more technically veiled processes of the *Logic* is still always present, that Thought itself is after all, even its most abstract form, a kind of living, and a kind of living that, in its higher and more conscious development, will, in his opinion, prove to be the very essence and fulfilment of the true Life itself. When you think, you act. In other words, you live. The Understanding watches only the dead results of the thinking process, and thus gets the barren, disconnected abstractions. The Reason it is that observes reflectively, not merely the results of the thinking process,

the *totte Gedanken*, but the vital, conscious, and, if you will, essentially practical process that constructs the thoughts. Thought for Hegel is thus, as Mr. McTaggart well points out in chapter VI, a process not merely theoretical, but essentially practical. Hegel's thesis thus is that there is no process of life, however practical, however complex, however passionate, which has not its precise equivalent, on a higher level, in an explicit thinking process; the difference being merely that, while the life process, in the confusedness of passing feeling, may be to any extent unaware of its own content and meaning, the corresponding process on the level of thought, when this thought is rational, is clearly conscious of its own meaning. In brief, Hegel's thesis is that thinking is conscious living; and he feels justified in asserting, in consequence, that living is more or less unconscious thinking. And as, for him, the Universe as Spirit comes to be identified with the Whole of Life, one has before one, at a stroke, all the essential theses of the system. The identity of Thought and Being, the thesis that the rational is real and the real rational, — these follow at once if the essential consideration is granted: namely, that when you think, you are still living in essentially the same sense in which you were living before you began to think, with the sole difference that, in case you turn from the mere abstractions to a reflection upon the process of your new life, you are able (and that is the sole advantage and *differentia* of your new life) to know what you are doing.

Closely related to this central thesis is that other matter which has caused Mr. McTaggart so much difficulty. The place of negation, and consequently of imperfection in life and in thought, is more clearly indicated by Hegel in his earlier work, than it is in the much more subdivided, and consequently scattered, technical discussions of the *Logic*, although ever and anon in the latter work he returns to the essential point. From experience, first, Hegel derived his thesis as to this aspect, namely, the doctrine that Perfection exists only in and by virtue of Imperfection. The thesis, in an intensely empirical expression, has been made familiar to our own literary public by the poetry of Browning. Browning, presumably, knew nothing of Hegel; but Hegel, who grew up in the period of the French Revolution, and of the Romantic School, and who viewed all this world of tragedy with an appreciative but optimistic interest, made precisely the induction that Browning has in our days expressed. His philosophy is to justify this induction. How? As before, when the philosopher thinks, his thinking process, from Hegel's point of view, is itself a

Life, as well as a brief abstract and epitome of the World Life. What appears in the world as conflict of motives, appears to the Understanding as a hopeless contradiction amongst its abstractions, and to the Reason as the moving principle of human life, unconscious in the everyday world, or only half conscious, but fully conscious as the guiding principle in the movement of thought. Contradictory propositions are never both equally true. On the other hand, the consciousness of contradiction is not only the principle that guides thought towards truth, but it is an aspect of the essence of that life of thought which for Hegel is the Truth itself. To suppose that this aspect vanishes 'in the Absolute Idea,' as Mr. McTaggart does, is to miss absolutely (one feels, under the circumstances, almost disposed to say hopelessly) one of the most characteristic features of Hegel's system. The problem of time in its relation to imperfection is a matter of much finer consideration and belongs not here, in view of our limits.

Despite such differences, however, one welcomes Mr. McTaggart's book as an independent and instructive contribution both to the study of Hegel and to Philosophy in general. JOSIAH ROYCE.

Grundriss der Psychologie, von WILHELM WUNDT, Leipzig. Wilhelm Engelmann, 1896. — pp. v, 392.

The founder of experimental psychology has at last yielded to the demand for a short, systematic outline of the Leipzig lectures, from which his numerous courses and voluminous works have proceeded. While the university lectures have always been elementary, they have served, not only as an introduction to the new psychology, but also to the system of philosophy, which rises above this foundation. The present book is not merely an outline of the lectures, but is also an important supplement to them. It is, in fact, an admirable presentation of Wundt's method of thinking, and of his most recent conclusions on many of the deeper problems of philosophy. It is, moreover, the only work of moderate compass which Professor Wundt has had time to prepare. The *Lectures on Human and Animal Psychology*, originally published thirty-three years ago, contained nearly one thousand pages, while their late revision can hardly be said to represent the mature thoughts of the author, and gives scarcely a suggestion of his systematic method of thinking.

The *Grundriss* will doubtless be the means of popularizing the ideas of the master among the educated of all lands, and of all departments