

Review

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by James Hervey Hyslop

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BOOK REVIEWS.

PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY; or Principles of Epistemology and Metaphysics. By James Hervey Hyslop, Ph.D., LL.D., Formerly Professor of Logic and Ethics, Columbia University, New York. New York: The Macmillan Company. London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd. 1905. pp. xiv, 647.

This large volume, containing nearly 650 closely printed pages of text, is addressed to readers of general philosophy, rather than to students of ethics, but contains much which defines the author's position regarding practical as well as theoretical issues. The questions discussed are fundamental ones. The spirit is that of an unassuming, modest, but extremely patient, minute, and laborious inquirer, who spares neither his own pains, nor, upon some occasions, his reader's powers of attention. The result of reading the book must therefore be for a properly advanced student, a very useful training, not only in developing his own powers of philosophical thinking, but in the general spirit of free, courageous, and devoted truth-seeking. So much one can say at once, without thereby expressing any substantial agreement whatever with the author's point of view. For so far one speaks solely of the author's spirit and personality. The present reviewer, indeed, is very far from agreement with Dr. Hyslop's most characteristic teachings, and reads his text with a pretty constant sense of opposition which can only be welcome to the author; since the latter, in his turn, spends so much of his space in assailing what he views as the position of philosophical "idealism." But the author's spirit of personal fidelity and of critical inquiry is of more value to the reader of such a book, than are the results reached. For the results, however important or questionable in themselves, can have meaning only to a man who already possesses the philosophical spirit; while the purpose to teach that spirit is the main business of any teacher of philosophy. And our author's personal quality is such as to make him a wholesome and stimulating teacher. Nobody can doubt our author's long-since proven and serious devotion to the truth as he sees it, nor can anyone call in question his chivalrous willingness to defend investigations and results in regions which, like those of "psychical research," are often regarded as lying beyond the pale of scientific orthodoxy. His present book, to be sure, mentions psychical researches only in conclusion, and as one means of pro-

ceeding further upon the road which he regards as that of a sound application of the "scientific method" to philosophy. But this book has everywhere an admirable individuality and an unconventionality of procedure which are obvious and wholesome, even when the views themselves which are defended, appear to be less original, or even when, to the present reviewer's mind, they are least valuable as results.

There is here no space to go into details regarding the minute and extended study of epistemological and metaphysical problems which this volume contains. In thirteen chapters Dr. Hyslop discusses, first introductory questions (chapters I and II), then (chapters III-VIII) the problems of the theory of knowledge, thereafter (chapters IX-XII) metaphysical theories, with special reference to "materialism" and "spiritualism;" and, finally, (chapter XIII), he sums up his results in a general discussion of the office, the duties, the prospects, and the ethical significance of philosophy. This final chapter, very readable by itself, even apart from the rest of the book, is probably the one which the student of social and of ethical problems will find the most interesting.

Dr. Hyslop is of the opinion, as his preface states, that "Idealism has done so much to emphasize introspective and anthropocentric methods that, since Kant, it is almost impossible to induce philosophers to make any concessions to physical science and its results. Philosophy, where it was not phenomenalism in disguise, has run off into the blue empyrean of transcendentalism while protesting against the possibility of it." One of our author's purposes is therefore the reconciliation of philosophical study with the spirit and the results of physical science. His own study of the theory of knowledge is guided by this purpose. By methods which, as Dr. Hyslop tells us (in his preface; cf. also p. 183 of his text), have been decidedly influenced by Sir William Hamilton, our author undertakes an analysis of the problem of knowledge. This analysis is throughout influenced by the author's view of "the relation between epistemological and metaphysical theories" (p. 72). "Idealism," and "Realism," as our author defines them, are, in the strictest sense, epistemological theories, and are not properly to be regarded as "ontological" theories at all. That is, a realist might hold any metaphysical theory whatever—materialistic or spiritualistic. Realism is, for our author, simply the doctrine "that the mind can transcend

its state in its 'knowledge,' that it can 'know' something else than its own states, that it can 'perceive' or posit an external reality as the cause of its sensations" (p. 73). Therefore, if idealism is to oppose realism, idealism also must be a doctrine about knowledge, and "must represent a denial of the possibility of 'knowing' any 'reality' beyond the subject's own states." Dr. Hyslop hereupon finds it easy to maintain (p. 75), that a perfectly clear opposition, in theories of knowledge, can exist only between "subjective Idealism or Solipsism, and intuitive Realism." Unless one is a solipsist, namely, he must admit that the knowing subject does or can transcend his own subjective states; and thus, in one's theory of knowledge, one must be *either* "solipsist" or else in some form "realist." Dr. Hyslop nevertheless regards the question as to how far, and in what sense, one is a realist, as a topic for a detailed study, and actually devotes many pages to a consideration of the range of our knowledge, of its forms, its categories, and its methods.

In any case, however, Dr. Hyslop's "idealist" remains, by definition, a sort of man without a country. If he were indeed what our author calls a "solipsist," our author knows "no way to refute solipsism" (p. 174), which, in Dr. Hyslop's opinion, "is logical." But no idealist, says our author, has ever admitted himself to be a solipsist. Hence, in practice, idealists profess a belief "which is an acceptance of the fundamental postulate of Realism, and makes Idealism identical with it in all essential characteristics" (p. 175). If this be the result, one would suppose that Dr. Hyslop would take delight (as being, on the whole, himself, in his epistemology, what he defines as a realist), in this easy reconciliation with his supposed opponents. For if the only idealists who could be in any genuine opposition to realism would be solipsists, and if there are no solipsists, it would seem that there must be no opponents of realism. And then one might wonder why our author devotes himself to so elaborate an attack upon such opponents. Despite the fact, however, that the only idealism which is not, "in all essential characteristics," "identical" with realism, is that solipsism which nobody holds, our author apparently regards actual live idealists with a decided aversion; and this sentiment turns out to be based upon grounds partly historical and partly moral. Idealists, historically viewed, that is, considered with reference to the place which they have occupied in controversy, are persons responsible, in Dr. Hyslop's

opinion, for a certain stubborn confusing of the epistemological with the metaphysical issues; and, in the present day, Dr. Hyslop finds the idealist to be (p. 637) persons devoted to "equivocations which few detect," since they systematically conceal their "gospel of agnosticism," behind reflections that "appear to have a meaning because the language in which they are couched seems to favor the religious view." Thus, an idealist may apparently be defined as a person who ought to be a solipsist, but who, in fact, is a hypocrite. Such an one is fond of Kant and Hegel, speaks unintelligible jargon, and is a weariness to our author's flesh.

From the contemplation of so uninviting a person, one turns, with some relief, to that issue which our author finds, in the main, so much more attractive than is the epistemological problem. This other issue as he holds, cannot be decided upon any purely epistemological grounds, or, in fact, upon any grounds except those of the "scientific method." An elaborate historical discussion of the opposition between "materialism" and "spiritualism" in chapters IX, X and XI, leads to the result that, so far as the natural facts which are at present in sight can carry us, there is no way of deciding, with certainty, whether reality is or is not predominantly determined by the interests, purposes, and ideals, of minds, or of a mind, with which our own human moral interests and ideals stand in a definite relation of effective agreement. Further light, however, and, in our author's opinion, a very significant light, would be thrown upon this question by a discovery of positive evidence of the actual survival of human individuals after death. But such evidence would have to be tested by the "scientific method." And thus the ultimate issue between spiritualism and materialism becomes a scientific rather than a philosophical question (p. 508). The author leaves to the future the decision of this "scientific" question. Its discussion, so far as his own views about the empirical evidence for such survival, are concerned, he does not pursue in this book. But the philosophical treatment clears the way.

The discussion of the older stages of the controversy between spiritualism and materialism is extensive and minute. The balancing of what the author takes to be the evidence for the various forms of doctrine that are here at issue, is a process to which Dr. Hyslop devotes the most painstaking analysis. The light thrown upon the subject does not seem to me to be such as fully

to compensate for our author's very patient and ingenious labors; but that is a matter for personal estimate. In any case, here is the part of the book where the most originality of treatment appears; as the closing chapter is the part of the book where the author gives the finest expression to his own position regarding the ethical motives of the pursuit of truth.

This latter position is, to my mind, substantially sound in its ethics. Free inquiry, the disguising of no difficulty, the avoidance of no issue because of its unpopularity, the willingness to combine scepticism in investigation with a hearty love for positive truth, the readiness to wait for light, the determination to make life worth living by our work, however much or however little we know—these are common ideals of serious students of such problems. Dr. Hyslop states them well; and his chapter is often inspiring, and always wholesome in its spirit, even if one disagrees with some of its polemic.

So much for a mere indication of the plan and range of this book. It is of course impossible, in a brief space, to criticise Dr. Hyslop's main doctrines. I doubt whether, in the present position of philosophical discussion, any detailed consideration of his effort to put asunder what the nature of things has joined in indissoluble bonds, namely, the epistemological and the metaphysical problems, is at all required. The evidence regarding this most general matter is long since in hand. Dr. Hyslop's own discussion repeatedly, although somewhat unconsciously, employs the methods of ratiocination which he condemns in his supposed opponents, so that, when he discusses the being of God, or the nature of substance, or of cause, he frequently uses fashions of reasoning to which, as I view the case, only the interpretations of the "idealists" could give any meaning whatever. But, in any case, let that matter rest, so far as this inadequate notice is concerned.

One does not wish to be captious. It is impossible, however, to avoid saying that Dr. Hyslop's English is often unnecessarily hard to follow, not by reason of mere technicalities, but by reason of imperfectly constructed sentences. "I regard universal scepticism as impossible as universal dogmatism," says our author, on page 106. In speaking of possible various ways of defining the term "knowledge," on p. 194, Dr. Hyslop says: "Besides the history of philosophy shows that there is no monopoly of the conception of knowledge. I have already shown that one of its

fundamental ideas is certitude. This is the conception of it as applied to certain doctrines which scepticism takes of it in these supposed cases." The context of these sentences does not appear to me to make any clearer than does this quotation, the problem as to the antecedent of *its* in the second sentence quoted. And the third sentence quoted is an example of a type of construction which is only too frequent in our author's very laborious pages. In longer sentences, where the subject matter is especially difficult, such constructions are often a heavy burden to the reader; and occasionally they leave one in deep doubt as to how to decipher our author's meaning. Essential clearness and essential obscurity of construction are surely matters that are independent of whether the subject-matter is technical or not.

On p. 433 our author mentions Plato's "Apology," where he surely must mean to name instead the "Phaedo." On p. 185 in defining the general nature and use of formal logical reasoning, our author proceeds to state "the following accepted facts in logic," regarding the relations of premises and conclusions. Of these "accepted facts" the first one is that, in any case of formal reasoning: "If the premises are false and the reasoning correct the conclusion will be false." It seems almost incredible that any teacher of logic should have written these words and permitted them to stand; since the topic in question is one of the favorite "catches" used in examination papers in logic. A materially true conclusion, following, by perfectly correct reasoning, from entirely absurd premises, is a phenomenon too familiar to escape notice, if one looks at formal reasoning at all. And I do not doubt that this was a chance oversight to our author—a mere slip of the pen.

More serious, if there were time to develop them here, would be my objections to our author's interpretations of Kant, in chapter VIII. These interpretations seem to me widely astray. Dr. Hyslop's position regarding the Platonic conception of immortality has more ground to stand upon, at least so far as the critics of Plato are concerned. But Plato himself seems to have viewed his own doctrine in a different light.

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