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A PHILOSOPHY OF THEISM.

By the Rev. A. R. WHATELY, D.D.

The Philosophical Bases of Theism, by G. Dawes Hicks, M.A., Ph.D., Litt.D., *Fellow of the British Academy and Emeritus Professor of Philosophy in the University of London.*

DR. DAWES HICKS was the Hibbert Lecturer for 1931. Prevented by various causes from publishing these lectures earlier, he has now given, to the large circle that will welcome its appearance, the summarized results of a long life of intellectual activity, so far as concentrated upon the essential truth and meaning of belief in God. The more special teachings of Christianity do not come within the scope of this book. It does not, as a whole, strike out any quite new line of thought, but is a vigorous discussion of the standard arguments, and a presentation of them in the form which he accepts as the most inexpugnable.

He is an epistemological Realist, drawing a sharp—and surely a sound and important—distinction between experience as that which is experienced and the same term as applied to the process of experiencing, thus rejecting the doctrine of Bradley and others that "everything is experience" (p. 50). The distinction of subject and object is maintained throughout, though not altogether, as will be suggested presently, in a form above criticism even by those who accept this starting-point.

A second characteristic of his philosophy is its rationalistic, or, as now commonly called, intellectualistic, trend. These words are in no way disparaging, but merely serve for the indication of its type. Feeling and intuition are certainly not discarded, very far from it. Poetic and religious *Ahnungen* do really make contact with Reality. But reason seems to have the last word (e.g. pp. 45-60).

Thirdly, the tendency of his thought is empirical. That is to say, reason, while critical of the *primâ facie* deliverances of experience, does not here embody itself in a metaphysical system. The empirical spirit of the enquiry may be noted, for instance, in his appeal to "the striking adaptation of physical nature, in our corner of the universe, at least, to the needs and requirements of living organisms—an adaptation so intricate and so far-reaching as to render well-nigh incredible the notion that it has come about through the play of merely mechanical processes" (p. 215).

To come now to closer quarters. We can only notice a few outstanding points. Even apparently pure feeling has more than feeling behind it. The cry of the heart "I have felt" (as in the well-known passage in *In Memoriam*) is not mere emotion, but has knowledge as its basis, "the complex experience of a lifetime" (p. 131). Dr. Hicks discusses the argument of Cook Wilson, wherein he seeks to show that the mental attitude of reverence involves in itself an im-

mediate apprehension of the reality of God. He accepts the importance of the psychological fact, but refuses to admit that it is a guarantee of truth: "A person may be absolutely convinced of the reality of what he conceives has been revealed to him, but the irresistibility of his private conviction does not in itself suffice to establish its truth" (p. 135). Here it may be remarked that after all, conviction is conviction none the less, and that such an argument as that of Cook Wilson has a defensive value for those who have such intuitions at the start, and are disturbed in the possession of them by misgivings as to their validity, and a value also for those who are capable, with the help of a little introspection, of discovering the germs of assurance that their spiritual experience contains.

Otto's *Das Heilige* naturally also comes in for criticism. The main objection to it is that "having persisted in regarding the 'numinous' as a specific experience *per se*, occurring originally in independence of any rational and moral experience, he is yet constrained to acknowledge that there is an *a priori* connection between these in the developed consciousness" (p. 139). He indicates the parallel, drawn out by Otto himself, between this relation and Kant's "schematization," which connects the categories with sense-data; and considers that in both cases two quite disparate factors are brought together, which do not admit the consistent application of any middle term to unite them. Otto indeed affirms an *a priori* connection, but this Dr. Hicks regards as inconsistent with the affirmation of the purely non-rational character of the numinous in itself. Many readers of Otto's book probably feel that the parallel he draws between his own theory and the Kantian schematization might have been better omitted, but we do not think that any essential unsoundness in the argument is made out. The middle term—would not Otto say?—is the reference to a common Object. The Numinous is certainly not, in his teaching, *mere* feeling, with no qualitative objective reference. At its lower stages, and in the absence of rational and moral guidance, it fastens upon wrong objects,—e.g. an oddly shaped stone. but the question remains: is there not, even so, an infinitesimally thin thread of connection that joins this with the highest religious experiences?

What makes us feel that somehow Dr. Hicks has not penetrated into the inwardness of *Das Heilige* is the following passage: "Would any theist in a cultured community admit for a moment that the 'uncanniness' which the primitive mind discerns therein"—i.e. in the odd stone—"is a veritable revelation to that mind of the supernatural? Is there any ground for assuming that the appearance of 'uncanniness' is other than a delusion incited in a way which is psychologically explicable, or that it differs in any essential respect from the child's dread of being left alone in the dark?" (p. 138). But it is precisely the element of uncanniness present—if it is present—in the child's fear of the dark that is *not*, in the ordinary sense, psychologically explicable. If it is not present, the instance is irrelevant. Otto's psychological treatment of this subject is in fact a "phenomenological" study: that is to say, he is trying by means of analysis

to direct our minds to an essential something that overtops all analysis. If we cannot *see* the thread of connection, he can do no more for us.

In short, one cannot be quite satisfied with the place accorded to experience, in spite of the author's sympathetic attitude towards it. Obviously his distinction between "objective" and "subjective" certainty is a real distinction; but to be subjectively certain is to be certain that the certainty is also objective. We cannot get beyond the *feeling* of certainty, whether this feeling emerges from a process of reasoning or fastens directly upon a mental vision. Philosophy has to consider why, and under what conditions, this feeling can form a resting place for belief. Reason can only move from experience to experience. But, on the other hand, as against any tendency to treat feeling as if it could in any way take the place of reason, or claim rights against it on the same ground, we must definitely take the side of the author. The heart's "I have felt" is not so much a fact that we can assert against doubt as the revival of an experience that has in it a core that doubt cannot reach.

Dr. Hicks deals with the Cosmological, Teleological, Moral, and Ontological Arguments, with which all students of Religious Philosophy are familiar. The first he accepts in quite a simple form. There is no conceivable Nature-as-a-whole, giving coherence to all the relativities and mutual dependences within it. "The existence of nature being contingent existence is dependent upon a mode of Being that is not contingent but necessary" (p. 187). But this, he thinks, only prepares the way for Theism.

The Teleological Argument is of course not taken in its old form which Paley illustrated by the watch. It rests on the conception of the whole evolutionary plan (in the light of the "emergence" theory), with its "upward *nisus*," as indicating a "single and indivisible spiritual agency" (p. 210).

The Moral Argument rests on the objectivity of Duty, as Kant insisted upon it, but without the abstractness and austerity of Kant's conception. "It is only through the conjunction of the thought of the ideal with feeling and impulse that morality becomes a real fact and ceases to be a mere abstraction" (p. 244).

When we come to the Ontological Argument, we find, as might have been expected, less concurrence. But he avoids one common and crude misunderstanding of Anselm's position. The "perfect island" of Gaunilo, like the "hundred thalers" of Kant, is not the greatest conceivable being, and therefore the argument, whether sound or unsound, is unaffected. But the author thinks it may still be said that "'the greatest of beings' is simply a phrase to which no intelligible meaning can be ascribed,—that is to say, there may be in the mind no 'idea' of it at all" (p. 247). It may be on a par, in this respect, with "round squares" and "unicorns." Unicorns, surely, are not inconceivable in this sense; but can we either affirm or deny the existence of round squares, absurd as the idea is, if the words have absolutely *no* meaning to which even a denial could be attached? Indeed, would it not be more correct to say that the idea of them is nonsense than to say that as a fact they do not exist? The Atheist then would

have to say the same about the idea of God. But then he is entirely cut off from argument with one to whom this denial of meaning is itself meaningless. In fact, as has been pointed out, Anselm does virtually presuppose throughout an actual and living belief as having had the first word.

The author goes on to deal with the Pantheism of Spinoza and with Hegel's Absolute—the Absolute as Substance in the one case and as Subject in the other. He demurs even to the "eternal consciousness," with its "timeless activity," of T. H. Green's philosophy, and to the Thomasian doctrine, accepted by Prof. A. E. Taylor, of the identity of essence and existence in God, and that God is identical with His attributes—that in Him, for instance, *to be* is identical with *to be good*. "God, so conceived, is no longer a living, operative self-conscious mind; He is then pictured as just that timeless whole of thought-contents of which I have already spoken" (259). We cannot here go into these questions: it may be that there is a truth between these two conflicting sets of opinions. But Dr. Hicks is certainly right, as a true Theist, in rejecting the conception, to which he thinks these ideas tend, of finite minds as included in the absolute or universal Mind (p. 259). As he truly says, "The essential characteristic of a self-conscious individual is that it exists not simply for others, but for itself. Its true being is not merely what it is for another mind that knows it, but what it is for itself" (p. 261). Surely no true Theism can dispense with this truth or afford to modify it; and it is certainly fully maintained in this volume.

If we had to point out any kink in Dr. Hicks' philosophy, we should be inclined to indicate it in his treatment of causality (pp. 165-168). A completed doctrine of creation must in the end take account of this and include in itself the results of a sound critical re-examination of this essential but elusive conception. We must ask how and in what sense God, if He is indeed Creator, is the Cause—the First Cause, to use the long-established term—that underlies or embraces the whole system of causes in the world as we know it. We must rise from the idea of secondary causation, as known to science, to that of true causation, the meaning of which secondary causation fails to carry through. And most certainly it is wrong to regard the whole system of causes as answering to all that is required of a First Cause and as rendering the latter idea superfluous. This of course, Dr. Hicks does not do. On the contrary, he says: "Every cause is at the same time an effect; and, although we practically incline to regard the cause as indeterminate in contrast to the determinateness of the effect, it is evident that the cause is just as indeterminate as the effect assumed to depend upon it." But still we are obliged to ask whether we have not here a *relative* causation; and whether it is quite sufficient to say that here "there is involved in the thought of causal connection the view of natural events as forming parts of a complete system, each part being determined by the way in which it stands to other parts of the system." Of course we can regard all causation as simply observed sequence,—that is, as our way of understanding and arranging the phenomena that present themselves to us. But then we have

abstracted from causation altogether. Dr. Hicks himself questions whether we are entitled to treat nature as a true " whole " at all, and not rather as an incomplete and not a self-contained whole (p. 183). Now, applying this to the causative side of nature, we might say that secondary causation—if we do not exclude the idea of causation altogether—presents an " irrationalism " : it is cause yet not cause ; and the way to escape this arrest of thought is to apply that conception of nature as *not* a complete intelligible system which he himself brings forward in the passage last quoted.

But this is not all. Dr. Hicks is not inclined to accept Martineau's plea that true causation is to be understood in relation to the will. He says that the conception of energy or force is really applicable only to physical events or occurrences : " energy or force is explicable only in terms of mass and velocity " (p. 174). We cannot enter into the great question of mind and body here : we can only submit that this antithesis of mental and physical action is a mistake, and one that lies further back in the argument of the book (p. 65). The antithesis of subject and object seems to the author, as to others of a different type of thought, to involve a contradiction if we speak of " subjects " as a particular type of object, and give them their place in the object-world. But surely persons—the entities in which subjectivity resides—*are* objects too,—objects of knowledge and contemplation. We are even objects to ourselves : that is, the Ego of one moment—its thoughts and feelings—may become an object to the Ego of the next moment. Where is the contradiction here ? And it seems worth while to refer to this point, because it is just this severance of the object and the subject worlds that raises a barrier when we come to explain how the supreme Mind can act upon the world of objects.

As to the creation of minds, or souls, the following conclusion seems hardly adequate : " If not only at the level of life or of mind, there is manifested a directive Source or purposive activity (understanding, that is, by ' Activity ' not physical energy but mental activity), then it is not inconceivable that in some way which we, indeed, can only dimly fathom, finite minds should emanate from a Mind that is supreme " (p. 213).

We hope that we have fairly indicated what is really in the author's mind in respect of all the points that we alluded to with some disposition to criticize. That there are certain points that need a little straightening out on the part of the author himself most of those who are in cordial general sympathy with him will agree. It is such points that we have principally discussed, but none the less we are glad to commend this able and well-balanced treatise to those who find more support in a sound philosophical defence of their belief in God than in any speculative philosophy from which the idea of God, probably in an imperfect form, emerges at last.