

## IV.—DISCUSSIONS.

### SPINOZA IN RECENT ENGLISH THOUGHT.

At a meeting in honour of a great thinker<sup>1</sup> it is proper to consider his significance for posterity, and, with so many representatives assembled from so many different countries, each may be excused speaking for his own. I propose therefore in this paper to touch on some points in connexion with the influence of Spinoza on recent English speculation.

I must first cast my net wide.

The empirical trend in English philosophy, the characteristic for which it is famous, or notorious, in the history of general thought, reached its acme in the Lockian tradition which culminated in John Stuart Mill. The revulsion against it expressed itself, as is well known, in three ways, each deriving from a different source: first, the minute examination of the logical basis of the traditional outlook; second, the constant re-study of ancient Greek texts; and third, the turning to German idealism. Typical products of the movement are Green's *Introduction to Hume* (with which may be compared Ward's examination of Spencer in his *Naturalism and Agnosticism*), Jowett's translation of Plato, and Caird's *Critical Philosophy of Kant*. It is easy to criticise them from the point of view of the exacter scholarship, yet they rendered inestimable service. They introduced subtlety into English thought, and while not abandoning the empirical method, yet brought under it factors which, so far, it had either not reckoned with at all or reckoned with inadequately. The three sources indicated soon concentrated themselves around the third, the study of the German Idealists, particularly Hegel, and it was expressly in the spirit of Hegel that this influential school, the so-called 'Neo-Hegelian,' did its work. The first point I desire to make is that that aspect of Hegel which seems to have exercised a permanent impression on English thought was that part which derives from Spinoza.

#### § 1.

The story of the movement from Kant to Hegel has often been told. The members of the trilogy of Self, Knowledge and the World declared by Kant to be one under the organisation of the categories,

<sup>1</sup> This paper was read to the Spinoza congress at the Hague in the newly-inaugurated DOMUS SPINOZANA, February, 1927.

received each its special emphasis, and primacy over the others, at the hands of his successors. If Fichte stressed the Self in his philosophy of ethical self-assertion and Schelling the World in his self-identical absolute of Nature, Hegel singled out Knowledge and showed that the categories are the instruments, not of interpretation by individual understanding of individual experience, but of creation by universal reason of universal experience. The ultimate science therefore is the science not of conduct nor of nature but of thought, and of thought as it 'thinks itself'. It is a trite observation that Hegel's central idea was that of the complete rationality of things. The philosophy of history is one application of the logic; the philosophy of religion, another; the philosophy of nature, another. But whether in history or religion or nature it is one and the same logic. Whatever view be taken of any of the vexed questions of Hegelian interpretation, one conception stands out clear: what is real is rational, and the rational is eternal. 'In this conviction,' he writes, 'stands every plain man, as well as the philosopher; and from it philosophy starts in the study both of the spiritual and of the natural universe. The great thing, however, is, in the show of the temporal and the transient, to recognise the substance which is immanent and the eternal which is present.'

The problem arises of what Hegel means by 'rational'. What is this 'substance which is immanent,' this 'eternal which is present'? The answer is clear. Rationality is system. 'The truth is the whole.' Truth is not the agreement of an object with our conception of it; it is the agreement of a thought with itself. In truth, notion and reality coincide, but such coincidence is only in the whole.

To solve the difficulties involved in this position, recognisedly Spinozistic and already clearly set out in Spinoza's early treatise *On the Improvement of the Understanding*, Hegel employed the equally Spinozistic device of degrees of reality. Although every finite thing involves an untruth, yet in finiteness, and hence in untruth, there are degrees. The particular is incomplete, but the less complete is not less existent. It is less real. That is to say, it is farther removed in the logical scale from the necessarily self-existent which is the ground of all.

At the very foundation of Hegelianism therefore there stands the Spinozistic logic. The doctrines of evil and error, of imagination and pictorial truth, of the true and false infinite, of degrees in thought and reality—all these characteristically Spinozistic theories reappear in their full force in Hegel. This fact may possibly explain the singularly perverse character of Hegel's criticisms of Spinoza. These centre round two points. The first is what he stigmatises as the inflexibility and deadness of the Spinozistic substance. The second is the invalidity of the mathematical method in philosophy. Both these counts are based on a misunderstanding, a misunderstanding, it may be remarked, which has lasted down to this day. The first criticism is precisely that

levelled by Spinoza himself against Descartes, and that too not on physical, but on metaphysical grounds akin to Hegel's own. As for the second, again it is Spinoza himself who laid such stress on the distinction between 'linear' and 'implicatory' logic, while the 'method' of the Ethics is an 'order' only, and its tediousness was expressly recognised by its author.

However, we are not concerned here with the detailed antecedents of the philosophy of Hegel. It is of little importance that Hegel explicitly identified the 'indwelling Notion' with the 'adequate idea' of Spinoza, or the supreme independence of man, achieved with the recognition of his own determination by the Absolute Idea, with the phase of mind and conduct called by Spinoza the intellectual love of God. What is of importance is to note that in Spinoza as in Hegel it is the idea of rational system which holds the central place. That 'the Absolute is spirit' is the very heart of Spinoza's philosophy, if we understand this oracle to mean, as Hegel explained it himself,<sup>1</sup> that 'truth is only realised in the form of system'. No wonder that the English Neo-Hegelians found it so easy to go from Hegel to Spinoza. It was precisely this great and fruitful doctrine that they took over from Hegel; the very doctrine, that is, which Hegel himself had taken over from Spinoza.

## § 2.

The great critical solvent in English thought during the past half-century has been the work of Mr. F. H. Bradley. His central book, half-way between the *Ethical Studies* and *Appearance and Reality*, is the *Principles of Logic*. This great study of the fundamental nature of thought, which became so rare and which its author only re-issued in the last years of his life, appears to many, as they read it in its second edition, a little thin-spun and out-of-date. It is thin-spun, and it is out-of-date, but that for a special reason. Bradley's *Logic* is one of those masterly books which do their work so effectively that its positions become the property of all. One wonders how any one could ever have believed the doctrines which Bradley dispatched with such shrewd blows and pungent humour. He set out like a knight errant of old, but the dragons which he slew have passed into mythology.

The dragons slain by our metaphysical St. George were those of atomism and its allies in all their various forms. One famous chapter destroys associationism in logic and psychology; another, the mechanical doctrine of the formal syllogism; another, the logic of a classification which is of fixed immobile particulars. Truth and reality are not to be looked for in any separate thing. 'The truth is the whole.' In every judgment the subject, implicitly if not explicitly, is the whole of reality. The enemy is 'dogmatic individualism'.

<sup>1</sup> *Phänomenologie*, Vorrede, xxviii (ed. Weiss, 1908, p. 19).

Bradley of set purpose never mentioned his sources. His occasional references to Hegel are therefore doubly significant. So far as I know he made no special study of Spinoza, although one shrewd critic has marked him down as a 'Spinozistic nature'. But whether he made a special study of Spinoza or not, one point is abundantly clear. The central principle of his thought, however much derived from Hegel, is derived from the Spinozistic side of Hegel. The mouth of Bradley; the voice of Hegel; the message of Spinoza.

That this is really so is shown by the case of Bradley's fellow, and in a sense follower, the late Bernard Bosanquet. Whatever may be said of the master, the follower was undoubtedly a great and constant student of Spinoza. All his life long he seems to have kept Spinoza by him, and in all his books down to the very last there are to be found discussions not only of Spinozistic conceptions but even of Spinozistic texts. He was not in the narrow sense a Spinozist. I do not believe that there are any such. But he was a Spinozist in the wider sense, a man convinced that in the profound and patient thought of Spinoza there is a well of honest seeking for truth from which all can derive profit. Again and again Bosanquet starts his discussions and illustrates his conclusions from the writings of Spinoza. He is the crown of English 'Neo-Hegelianism,' but the Hegel in him was Spinoza. One may suspect indeed that the increase of his attention to Spinoza in his later years (if I am right in detecting it) is evidence of his own recognition of the fact that the good which he had received from Hegel he could have derived, in a more simple and concrete (and perhaps in a less dubious) form, directly from Spinoza himself.

### § 3.

Höfding<sup>1</sup> writes of Bradley as a 'Spinozistic nature,' but adds: 'only he lacks Spinoza's realistic eye for psychological and social phenomena'. Idealism, whether in the hands of Hegel or of his English followers, is a double-edged weapon. Hegel had protested that thought is not a screen which shuts us off from things; it shuts us in with things. Yet his own language often suggests that thought is creative of reality. The victory of intellectualism leads it to over-state its triumph, and an empirical revulsion begins. We are now in the reaction towards Realism, but it is an enriched Realism, a Realism 'with a difference'; some would say it is not, in the old sense of the word, Realism at all.

There are, I take it, two distinct sorts of doctrine which go by the name of Idealism. One is the doctrine that there is nothing in the universe but mind, the Berkeleian 'immaterialism'. The other, the doctrine that nature is one self-contained whole from inherence in which the so-called parts derive their characters. I have insisted already on the fact that it is this latter doctrine

<sup>1</sup> In *Modern Philosophers* (E. T., Macmillan, 1916), p. 58.

which formed the main platform of the English *Idealists*. The second point I wish to make is that it is this same doctrine which permeates the thought of the most influential English *Realists*. The point is not mine. It is adequately argued by Bosanquet himself. In his last complete book he remarks at length, and in a somewhat amusing manner, that whenever he wants a real discussion from the point of view of 'the whole,' the essentially philosophic position, he has to go to the arch-Realist, Prof. Alexander. It is curious indeed, as he observes, how the 'extremes' have 'met'. But it is understandable when we realise the nature of the meeting place. That Bosanquet drew much of his inspiration from Spinoza we have already seen; while it is no secret that Prof. Alexander, to a 'Spinozistic nature,' adds a 'realistic eye' sharpened by the study of Spinoza's text.

#### § 4.

The principal subject of discussion in recent English speculation is that of the nature and status of Mind. The 'extremes' of Idealism and Realism may 'meet' and on certain fundamental points be, with differences of emphasis, in accord. But on this all-important issue they differ, and violently. To the realist 'minds' (in the plural) 'are but the most gifted members known to us in a democracy of things'.<sup>1</sup> To the idealist, Mind (in the singular) is the organisation of the cosmos. To the former the unity of the universe is ultimately physical, and mind appears automatically when any part arrives at a certain complication. To the latter the unity of the universe is ultimately spiritual, and 'where there is no universal mind there is no unity of the universe',<sup>2</sup> at all. The cleavage is clear. It revolves round the great historic problem of Spinozistic interpretation, the place of the attribute of thought. Is the attribute of thought only one among many attributes, or does it swallow up all the other attributes in itself? Prof. Alexander has himself shown how, if time be substituted for thought in Spinoza's system, something very like his own philosophy would result.<sup>3</sup> Bosanquet, fighting till the end for the ultimate unreality of time, took the other horn of the dilemma and saw reality in thought. To Spinoza of course thought is in any case co-extensive with the whole of the real; to Alexander it is confined to a portion of it. Yet on an all-important point both Spinoza and his modern English students are firm and stand together. Thought, whether conceived of as the whole of reality, or as co-extensive with the whole of reality, or as covering only a part of reality, is not mere understanding. Bradley's well-known condemnation of intellectualism would, I think, be accepted of them all: "Unless thought stands for something that falls beyond mere intelligence, if 'thinking' is not used with some strange implication that never

<sup>1</sup> *Space, Time, and Deity*, I, 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Meeting of Extremes*, 170.

<sup>3</sup> *Spinoza and Time* (Allen and Unwin, 1921).

was part of the meaning of the word, a lingering scruple forbids us to believe that reality can ever be purely rational". Rationalists, in fact, though they all are, they would yet one and all deny that reason in the narrow sense is 'sole possessor of the world'.

§ 5.

The position of Spinoza in English thought is typical of the English cast of mind. There is no adoration, not even discipleship. No English Lessing has said that 'there is no philosophy but the philosophy of Spinoza'; no Goethe has related how his mind was formed in the study of his philosophy; no Hegel declared that he is the very portal to thought. Yet to English thinkers of the widest circle he has been from the very first, in Toland's phrase, a 'great and a good man'; and right from the times of Hobbes himself who, when shown the *Opera Posthuma*, said: "*Ne judicate, ne judicemini*,"<sup>1</sup> he has been studied with sympathy and appreciated. Spinoza in English thought has not been a dead system, learned and taught as a matter of history. The great English thinkers have *used* him, and used him in true Spinozistic fashion, 'not for death but for life'. When the *Societas Spinozana* was first founded, the impression was abroad that to be a member one had to be a narrow specialist, pledged to the propagation of one particular doctrine. That of course is not the case, and the assemblage in the *Domus Spinozana* of thinkers of so many varying opinions is the proof. The characteristic of Spinozism is its truth to fact, and students of Spinoza are ranged, as they have been and still are in England, on all sides of interpretation. On the threshold without our conference room is inset the word VITAE, for life and use. Our ideal within is that of the HOMO LIBER, the free man.

<sup>1</sup> *ap. Tönnies, Thomas Hobbes*, ed. 2, p. 230, n. 48 (= ed. 3, p. 286). Hobbes remarked to Aubrey, with reference to Spinoza: 'he had cut through him a barre's length'. Can any reader throw light on this curious phrase?

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