

KANT'S METAPHYSIC.

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Kant's Metaphysic of Experience. A Commentary on the First Half of the Kritik der Reinen Vernunft. Two Volumes. By H. J. Paton, M.A., D.Litt. (Oxon).

THIS latest addition to the Library of Philosophy will prove, one can hardly doubt, almost epoch-making within the sphere of English Kantian literature. It is essentially a book for really close students of the great writer to whom Prof. Paton has himself devoted such intense and thorough-going examination. His aim is the excellent one of trying to understand and to estimate the author as and where he stands, not from some point of view outside the range of his thought; to do justice primarily to the insight and coherence of his system, rather than to defend or criticize his total position in its relation to alien schools of thought. He thinks it would have been better if Edward Caird and Prof. Pritchard, two well-known expositors of Kant, had each written two books instead of one, the first dealing with Kant in himself and the second with their own views in these matters—Hegelian in the one case, Realistic in the other.

It may, of course, be said that, if one is to criticize an author at all, one wants to know if his fundamental assumptions are sound, and that a finely constructed edifice resting on an unsound foundation is not of much value or interest. But we think this is a mistake, and that Prof. Paton has taken a wise course. A comprehensive and at the same time well-compacted body of thought must be valuable; and even if it seems to rest upon an insecure basis, that is only relative to the critic's own ideas, which, however excellent, are, after all, only part of the whole truth of the matter. Truth is wider than our horizons, and there is surely more in what a serious thinker sees than his critics can touch.

It may be admitted that this method is the easier to carry out for Prof. Paton than for the writers mentioned, since he is himself, broadly speaking, a Kantian—not even, in the ordinary sense, a Neo-Kantian. He regards Kant's teaching as nearer and more relevant to the thought of the present time than is that of his immediate successors. Much of it, inevitably, is cast into the moulds of a past generation; for instance, his attachment to the old Formal Logic. But Dr. Paton believes that important and essential truth, from which we still can learn, remains, even when we have eliminated what is obsolete or otherwise unconvincing.

One prevalent estimate of Kant's philosophy he strongly contests—that is, what he calls the "patchwork theory," of which Adickes and Vaihinger, especially the latter, are the leading exponents. "The essence of criticism," he says, "and the only way in which we can penetrate into the mind of an author, is to check our interpretation of one passage in the light of another, until gradually the whole becomes

clear. If our interpretation is contradicted by other passages, we are compelled to reconsider it, and so we may come nearer the truth. On the patchwork theory there is no such compulsion, and the way is open for purely subjective impressions." There may still be baffling obscurity of language and even confusion of thought, but the philosopher will have been given a chance to be judged by what he really means.

Kant himself did not want to be too apparently lucid, and so lead people into thinking they understood him when they did not. This does not accord with the modern demand for untechnical philosophy comprehensible by that plumb-line of all wisdom "the man in the street." But, after all, to say the least, there must be *some* philosophy that presupposes a degree of philosophical training and capacity. Kant, is, no doubt, sometimes unnecessarily difficult, and a commentary that, like this one, devotes itself to guiding us *out of* the mazes is bound to be difficult too, except to minds accustomed to such studies.

But Dr. Paton refuses to believe that a writer who has taken the immensely influential place that Kant holds in the history of thought is a mere mass of confusion and artificial "architectonic." "I believe myself," he says, "that Kant stands out among the greatest thinkers by all the tests which can reasonably be applied to men who share the common weaknesses of humanity."

It might be said that, since it was a great object of Kant's work to establish the philosophical basis of mathematics and the physical sciences, the relevance of much of it to modern thought may be challenged. The categories of cause and effect, especially, and of substance, are now said by some to be superfluous to Science. As to this, the author thinks that the discontinuity of modern with earlier thought, in the philosophy of physics, is sometimes too one-sidedly stressed, and that Kant's views on these matters should not be altogether set aside because they may require revision. Similarly with regard to his satisfaction with Euclidean space: "It is our task to estimate the value of his argument as it stands" (II. pp. 106, 107).

One mode of interpreting Kant's teaching on experience, namely, what he calls the psychological, he emphatically rejects; that is to say, "any interpretation which supposes Kant to explain how we begin by knowing space and time and the categories, and then begin to build up experience by their means. Sense impressions, space and time, and the categories are at work in experience from the start, but it is only gradually that we disentangle them from one another." It is unfair, he protests, to import psychological interpretations into Kant and then to condemn him for the resultant absurdities (I. p. 318).

This is one important point to bear in mind as we work through the mass of exposition and criticism, which, for those who are accustomed only to the broad issues of philosophy, is like a wood hidden by the trees.

It may well be asked, by anyone generally interested in the subject, "What is the author's attitude towards the doctrine of 'Things-in-themselves'?" That Kant believed in them is clear; but are those empirical Kantists right who regard this merely as an unfortunate

appendage, a relic of a type of thought that Kant had discarded? Prof. Paton holds that it is essential to his position as a whole. "Kant's doctrine asserts that the matter of experience is given to mind by an independent reality, while the form of experience is imposed by the mind itself"—as against the idea that "thought must either determine its object through and through, or else it must do nothing but apprehend what is given" (I. p. 581).

Dr. Paton himself considers that the conception of things-in-themselves, known to us only as they appear to us, and *not* as they are in themselves, is defensible. He uses the analogy, admittedly imperfect, of blue spectacles. We shall not all find him convincing on this point. That this distinction is applicable, in a relative sense, within the sphere of experience, is obvious. Surely, however, all true appearance gives us *something* of what the thing really *is*. However fully we allow for the subjective side of appearance, a residuum of ultimate reality remains. But we cannot go into these questions here, and can only be thankful for a thorough exposition of Kant by one whose own sympathies are with him.

We must not quite pass over what his commentator calls "the most central, the most important, and yet in some ways the most elusive of Kant's doctrines,"—that is, the theory of apperception—of the "I think" that necessarily accompanies all our ideas of objects. Just how this primary act of thought differentiates itself into Kant's twelve forms of judgment involves further questions, but there is no doubt that Dr. Paton is right in holding that his too uncritical adherence to the finality of the formal logic that held sway in his day does not invalidate his great contribution to the understanding of self-consciousness in its relation to experience and thought. Pure or transcendental apperception has been regarded by some commentators as essentially the same as self-identity; but Dr. Paton holds it to be quite certain that Kant regarded self-consciousness (not merely self-identity) as necessary for all knowledge of objects, and considered apperception to be equivalent to self-consciousness (I. p. 399). Pure apperception is the consciousness of what the mind *does* (its thinking), as distinguished from the empirical consciousness of its states, which change continually. At any rate, we have here a great advance upon the *cogito, ergo sum* of Descartes, and perhaps it is not far from the truth to say that the understanding of the relation of thinking to thoughts and of self to mind is the highway of philosophy as such. This part of Kant's teaching, surely we may say, offers the best justification—or would if any were needed—of Dr. Paton's arduous studies. And assuredly it cannot be said that modern thinkers have fully assimilated and superseded him here.

It will of course be asked by those interested specially in the religious aspect of Kant's philosophy what this commentary has to say respecting his attitude towards theistic belief. Its scope, however (which does not include the whole *Kritik*), stops short of this. Still, the essential principle has already emerged before it closes. The noumenon (that is, the thing-in-itself), though we have seen, a necessary feature of his system, is only a "limiting concept." But just this

limiting function is necessary. For it shows us what experience can and what it cannot give us. And experience, or intuition, for Kant, is entirely sensuous. Nor can our understanding assert anything beyond the limit of the sensuous (II. § 5, pp. 456-458). The only positive answer is that given by the "practical reason," which is not the opposite of "pure reason," but of reason combined with sensibility, and which does not seek to form *conceptions* outside it. Of course many of us will deny at once that experience is merely sensuous.

Perhaps some day Prof. Paton will give us a continuation of his monumental study of the *Kritik*, and perhaps also a much smaller work setting forth the outline of its results, in such a manner that we shall all know how much we can know of the great philosopher, and use this knowledge without the fear of falling into those pitfalls that beset partial knowledge. The essential thing for those who read philosophy in a general way, and make use of what they read in writing, is to be careful always, where there is the least doubt, to allude to this or that opinion of Kant as held to be his by *some* commentators, or by some particular commentator. In most cases it will not much matter for their purpose whether the particular interpretation is right or wrong. But this is in no way a disparagement of the great duty to enter, in the interests of the history of thought, and of the possible discovery of important truth still unassimilated, as deeply as possible into his meaning. And we can only honour those who have traversed this "long and difficult road."

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