

# Absolute Idealism and Immortality

By

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## FOREWORD

This thesis claims to be no more than its title indicates, a discussion of the problem of immortality from the standpoint of absolute idealism. Or rather it is an attempt to evaluate the motives in absolute idealism which have a bearing upon the doctrine of immortality, whether negative or affirmative. It therefore does not aim at presenting the historical or the theological argument for immortality, but confines itself to the metaphysical.

Certain currents of recent thought, mainly naturalistic, make such a discussion timely. The trend of naturalistic science has revealed a decided tendency to cast doubt upon the persistence of personality after death if not to discredit it altogether. It is impossible to be wholly indifferent to discussions which would invalidate the most cherished beliefs of mankind. An examination of the foundation principles upon which the sciences themselves rest, reveals the fact that these display the leadership of certain regulative ideals, that science at bottom rests upon faith, although, indeed, upon the thoroughly rational belief that the world displays the activity of a Mind whose thoughts we are permitted to interpret. The belief in immortality is similarly grounded and in its influence upon mankind equally displays the ultimate Reality. Our governing ideals are among the most real things in life. Among those ideals is the historic, the universal belief in immortality.

Grateful acknowledgment is hereby made of many helpful suggestions in the preparation of this thesis from Prof. E. L. Hinman, Prof. of Logic and Metaphysics, in the University of Nebraska.

Lincoln, Neb., June 15, 1907.

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PREVIEW

## INTRODUCTION:

### ABSOLUTE IDEALISM AND THE PROBLEM OF IMMORTALITY.

#### A

##### THE STANDPOINT OF ABSOLUTE IDEALISM.

I. Its hold upon the philosophic world. Its indebtedness to Hegel and its independence of him. Its contest with naturalism and general sympathy with the historic culture concepts. Its power to discuss an idealistic concept by analyzing the implications of positive science and by thus showing the idealistic conception in question as affirmatively involved in the world as known.

II. Its logical structure. Its monism, "concrete," "spiritualistic," "concrete universal," "organic unity." Its warfare on abstractions. Its recognition of the ideality of finite consciousness. The leadership of the universal in science, art, ethics and religion. Ultimate Reality interpreted in terms of the absolute reading of our finite consciousness. Degrees of reality.

#### I. *Its hold upon the philosophic world.*

The influence of a system of thought upon any age may be due either directly to the system itself, or indirectly to its general point of view. The system itself usually bears in a marked degree the peculiarities of its founder. The general point of view, however, is apt to have wider relations to the general development of thought which the founder of the system has succeeded in bringing to a focus.

1. Absolute idealism traces its descent from the philosophy of Hegel. It would be a mistake, however, to identify it fully with the system of Hegel; for in adopting this general point of view it by no means adopted the details of his system in their entirety. It has, on the contrary, developed a considerable degree of independence of its founder. In Germany the Hegelian system took root at once. But presently it gave rise to conflicting parties. In the controversies which thus arose over the application of its principles in particular directions the special significance of the Hegelian point of view was largely lost. In England and America it has exerted a greater influence.<sup>1</sup> It was introduced into England by Dr. Hutchison

<sup>1</sup>See *The Hegelian Point of View*, by J. S. Mackenzie, *Mind*, n. s. p. 54 ff.

Stirling, who sought to propagate the system as a whole. Few of the later exponents of the Hegelian tendency followed him in this respect. Wallace did more than any other to render the works of Hegel accessible to English readers, but he dealt with him, not so much as the maker of a system, as one who brought out certain large ideas and modes of treatment. T. H. Green is justly regarded as having been a leading representative of Hegelian thought, yet he too was far from being a close adherent of the Hegelian system. The same remark holds true of Edward Caird and F. H. Bradley. Bosanquet has followed Hegel more closely. His general attitude, however, is that of one who has absorbed certain leading ideas of the Hegelian standpoint, but has used them with considerable freedom in his own way. These men have been leaders in the philosophical thought of recent times, and may all be classed as exponents of absolut idealism in one form or another. On this side of the Atlantic the name of Royce is probably more conspicuous than that of any other in the circles of philosophy. With him may be ranked Morris, Watson and Taylor, all of whom are representatives of this same school of thought.

It has commonly been assumed that an important distinction between German and English speculation has been the appeal of the latter to experience. This, it is now generally admitted, does not accurately point out the difference: for it would be difficult to find systems of philosophy that make a more emphatic appeal to experience than do those of Kant and Hegel. The point of difference lies rather in the emphasis of German thought upon the reality of the universal as expressing the element of identity in difference. In contrast with this there is to be found in English speculation what has been regarded as a disintegrating atomism, attaining a constructive result in Hobbes and a sceptical result in Hume.<sup>1</sup> It should be pointed out, likewise, that this recognition of the universal in more recent English thought, due to German influence, has brought about a remodeling of the treatment hitherto given to certain fundamental questions in logic, in psychology, in ethics and in political philosophy. In logic this result has been accomplished by Bosanquet and others, following the lead of Bradley. In psychology a similar result has followed the labors of Ward and

<sup>1</sup>Mackenzie, J. S. *The Hegelian Point of View*. *Mind*, n. s. p. 58.

Stout. In political philosophy the works of Green, Caird, Bradley and Bosanquet have been produced from the same standpoint. The same remark applies to the works of Green, Mackenzie, Muirhead and a considerable number of others in the field of ethics.

The influence of a school is, however, not confined to its direct representatives. It may be extended by other men who, while agreeing with it in the main, have been found among its sharpest critics. And this has frequently happened in the history of thought. The attitude of Lotze toward the philosophy of Hegel was precisely this. He is found in sharp antagonism to it at times, and yet his own system of metaphysics has much in common with that of Hegel. Both directly and indirectly therefore, it has come about that absolute idealism has exerted a ruling influence over a large part of the philosophic world.

2. Two features of this system are worthy of special mention here. It has, on the one hand, conducted a vigorous contest with naturalism on account of the attempt of the latter to explain all events and phenomena in terms of mechanism. No such explanation, it contends, can ever be adequate or satisfying. But while mechanism is freely recognized by idealism, it is also pointed out that mechanism is always found in the service of larger ends and purposes. In respect of these idealism also contends that naturalism has no sufficient explanation. On the other hand absolute idealism early disclosed a genuine and profound appreciation of the culture concepts that have been historic in developing civilization. It has uniformly displayed a keen interest not only in science, but also in art, ethics and religion. Its genius is that of evolution in the best sense, not of revolution.

3. From the outset the idealism of Kant and of the Kantian school recognized the mind-given elements in the grouping of phenomena and in the development of science. But for the Kantian the deeper meaning of the phenomena is unknown. We know things as they appear, we can not know them as they are in themselves. The physical world was therefore given over to the mechanical categories of the understanding, which admittedly are powerless to apprehend things in their inner meaning. In the sphere of the practical reason or morals, however, it was maintained that we come directly upon the noumenal

world as opposed to the phenomenal. For the practical reason there are directly given certain postulates which theoretical reason can neither demonstrate nor deny. These postulates are native to reason. They are grounded in the moral nature, and essential to its complete expression. These postulates are God, freedom, and immortality.

To this arbitrary breaking up of philosophy and throwing all that pertains to the natural world over into the unknown, the absolute idealist is decidedly opposed. Neither can the activities of the mind be so sharply separated and placed over against each other. The absolute idealist, therefore, seeks a closer analysis of the implications of science and aims to show that the higher and more speculative categories of idealism are directly and affirmatively involved in the world as known. They are in fact the very conditions of its being known. Therefore absolute idealism does not turn over to naturalism the whole world of intelligible experience, meanwhile seeking to conserve in some other way the higher cultural values, or to recoup itself in some transcendental world affirmed for practical reason alone. On the contrary it enters directly into the very structure of science. It aims to show that nature is in fact unintelligible until the higher categories of idealism have received their due; for these, it claims, are no less significant for natural science than for ethics, religion, or art.

## II. *Its logical structure.*

1. Attention has already been drawn to the common characteristic of German idealistic philosophy that of its recognition of the dominant influence of the universal within experience. If it is the merit of German philosophy in general to have brought out the significance of the true universal, it is the merit of Hegel in particular to have laid chief emphasis upon the concreteness of the universal, to point out its living relation to the whole, in short to bring into prominence the solidarity of experience. This, the goal of his dialectic method, rather than the method itself constitutes Hegel's chief value for present day thought.

Kant, in bringing out the importance of the thought element in experience had in effect left sensation outside the range of thought. Its office was to furnish the materials for thought

to work upon. On the other hand, things-in-themselves were even more beyond the range of thought activity and inaccessible to it. The intellectual element in experience was in this way rendered mainly formal. Its business was considered to be that of bringing the particulars, accumulated through sense-perception, into the unity of thought. Hegel, on the other hand, took an entirely different view of the matter. The manifold of sense in the meaning of Kant he did not admit. In consequence he did not regard the task of thought to bring unity into it, or to make experience one. For him it is already one. The office of thought is to bring out the systematic connection implicit in experience. From this standpoint it will readily be seen that the universals which have value for us are principles which arise out of the materials of experience, not any abstract formal principles brought to it. These principles absolute idealism seeks to discover and to bring to suitable recognition. This style of thinking has a direct connection with that of Kant. It has even been supposed that this was what Kant himself was really aiming at. But his doctrine of the structure of knowledge, namely that it is the work of thought to bring into unity, by means of categories discovered through analysis of the judgment, the various disconnected materials supplied by the senses, led to quite a different result. He was led to introduce the imagination as a mediating faculty between the contrasted elements of sense and those of thought. A closer study led Hegel to reject this whole line of treatment of the problem of knowledge. The Kantian manifold of sense seemed to him mythical. Pure sense without an admixture of thought he declared to be "for us thinking beings as good as nothing". But in rejecting the Kantian view that the sense materials are independent of thought until thought brings order and unity into them, Hegel necessarily adopted also a different conception of the office of thought itself. He therefore came to regard the work of thought as that of interpretation, rather than that of construction. For absolute idealism in general, then, "sense and thought are no longer opposed except as implicit and explicit; and so the work of thought becomes, in a sense, analytic rather than synthetic—or rather both at once".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Mackenzie, J. S. *The Hegelian Point of View*. Mind, n. s. vol. 11, p. 64.

This does not mean that the sense element has lost its significance or that it has disappeared. The Hegelian position has, it is true, sometimes been so understood, but unjustly. It means that within the elements supplied by sense, as in all others, there are involved universal determinations that can not be interpreted except in the light of thought.

This distinction between Kant and Hegel is involved also in their respective views of the world of phenomena and of the world of things-in-themselves. The ground of opposition between the world of phenomena and the world of things-in-themselves lay in the opposition between the sense element and the thought element. If, however, the universal principles of thought are traceable in the materials furnished by sense-experience it is evident that there is nothing excluded from thought's dominion. Some things may indeed be out of the present range of our thinking, so that they are not immediately grasped, but from this it does not follow that they are totally beyond the domain of thought. From the Hegelian standpoint, therefore, thought is conceived as "the real world rising to consciousness of itself, not as a more or less foreign power imposing its laws on a partially subjected territory".<sup>1</sup> Absolute idealism is, therefore, monistic in structure. The ultimately real is an organic unity, of which the most characteristic type is mind. The all-pervading thought in which the ideals and purposes, which constitute the center and truth of things, inhere and which supplies their structural basis finds its unity in the Absolute.

2. Accordingly the finite consciousness finds in itself the same ideals which it discovers in the world of physical nature and of organic life. It discovers these because of the leadership of the ideals within itself. Because of this fact also science in the first instance is possible. Even half-unconsciously men have assumed in the construction of science that the world exhibits rational order, and that the laws governing the movements of things, or promoting growth and decay, are capable of interpretation by the human mind. The successful building up of the various sciences, therefore, fully justifies our confidence in the rational order inherent in things. Nay, if this analysis be correct, it would appear to involve the admission that absolute

<sup>1</sup>Mackenzie, J. S. *The Hegelian Point of View*. *Mind*, n. s. vol. 11, p. 65.