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978-1-107-60494-0 - Evolution, Knowledge and Revelation: Being the Hulsean
Lectures Delivered Before the University of Cambridge, 1923–24

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Evolution, Knowledge and Revelation

Being the Hulsean Lectures delivered before
the University of Cambridge, 1923–24

By STEWART A. MCDOWALL, B.D.

Trinity College, Cambridge; Chaplain and Senior
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AD MAIOREM DEI GLORIAM

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PREFACE

SINCE writing these lectures I have read Giovanni Gentile's work on *The Theory of Mind as Pure Act*. Had I done so earlier they might never have been written.

To arrive at the essentials of a metaphysic after many years of rather blundering search, and then, a month after laying down the pen, to find that another, far better equipped and with far greater mastery, has presented already a closely parallel system worked out in detail, is at once an encouragement and a disappointment.

Yet I do not regret what I have written, nor intend to suppress it. Though the conclusions are often similar or identical, the thought is totally different, and totally uninfluenced by Gentile. It is perhaps permissible to dwell a little on this, for the plain reason that to arrive at the same result by different roads is to strengthen the conclusion, even though the method of one approach depends on high technical excellence, of the other on a rough approximation. Professor Gentile's work needs no bush; but I cannot hope the same of my own: therefore a brief statement of it may be pardoned.

A main conclusion of the present work is that you cannot find Reality in Being, neither can you find it in Becoming. The only thing that *is* is Personality, yet personality never simply *is*, but always *is becoming*. And pure Becoming is as unreal as pure Being. Being is substantiated in Becoming:

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Becoming is substantiated in Being. Reality is thus the process of a Being which without process would not be. You cannot conceive of Personality, either of God or man, as transcendent or as immanent: the two are inseparable correlatives, which together make up Reality. Thus an essential factor of Reality is relation, without which neither Being nor Becoming could exist.

So stated, *mutatis mutandis* this is almost exactly the theory of Gentile, as I understand it. In his own words “An idealistic conception aims at conceiving the absolute, the whole, as an idea, and is therefore intrinsically absolute idealism. But absolute it cannot be unless the idea coincides with the act of knowing it, because...were the idea not the act itself through which it is known, it would leave something outside itself, and the idealism would then no longer be absolute” (*op. cit.* trs. Wildon Carr, p. 254). But, to my shame, I had read no word of Gentile; knew no more than the existence of his work; until I had completed these lectures a month ago.

The germ of my own theory will be found in *Evolution and the Need of Atonement* (1912), in the doctrine there stated of the freedom of Personality and its identity in God and man, making interpenetration possible. The problems of Immanence and Transcendence, and of the nature of Personality, are considerably developed in *Evolution and Spiritual Life* and *Evolution and the Doctrine of the Trinity* (1915, 1918), stress being there laid upon the experience of inter-

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penetration as determining the Reality of Personal Being. In *Beauty and the Beast* (1920), a book mainly concerned with Aesthetic, the connection of relation as essential to Reality is set forth, and a distinction drawn between the one-sided, or purely subject-object relation, and the reciprocal or subject-subject relation. In the latter the otherness or objectiveness of the second subject is eliminated in interpenetration, though the self-identity is retained. Finally in the present lectures¹ Reality, substantiated in reciprocal relationship, is examined, for the purpose of constructing a Theory of Knowledge; which theory suggests that Knowledge is essentially the process of experiencing by an ego which cannot be isolated from its experience: we cannot abstract, eliminating the ego, and the unique individuality of its every experience, and yet arrive at Reality.

The Theory of Knowledge as Pure Act was published in 1916, and only translated in 1922, so that the earlier parts of my work, which determined the later, were necessarily independent of it; and even the latest, these lectures, were so in fact. This is said with no wish to claim priority or merit: to do so would be both untrue and absurd. But to emphasise the independence seems to me justified, since it gives force to the conclusions, if not to the reasoning.

Professor Gentile's method is severely technical and exact, my own lacks these qualities;

¹ Jotted down as notes in 1920–21, written in 1922, and re-written in the present form in August 1923.

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while he starts from pure Mind, I start from Mind's undeveloped beginnings in the creature; while he writes as a student of Philosophy, I write as a student of Evolution; he appeals for hearing to the expert in philosophy, I to some who, with no technical training, are interested in the philosophy of Christianity and in the concept of Progress. From this difference of standpoint results a frequent variance in detail, even though the conclusions may bear a close family resemblance, in spite of not unimportant differences. It seemed best, however, to leave my argument as it stood, recognising that in places it may prove unable to bear the stricter scrutiny of so critical a mind as that of Professor Gentile; yet at the same time to add an Appendix in which some of the arguments could be examined in the light of his work.

I cannot hope that this last is adequately done. *The Theory of Mind as Pure Act* is not easily grasped in detail, and my acquaintance with it is of so short standing that I dare not expect to escape the risk of misrepresentations, and even positive blunders. If there are such, I can only crave the writer's pardon.

I wish gratefully to acknowledge my indebtedness to my wife for preparing the Synopsis, and for other help.

S. A. McD.

WINTON.

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LIVING AND THINKING

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These lectures aim at establishing a Theory of Knowledge based on the facts of Evolution and in sympathy with the spiritual interpretation of Nature by the best metaphysical systems	I
<i>Inquiry into the Biblical conception of the meaning of Knowledge</i>	
(a) Isaiah, Hosea and Psalmist all identify knowledge with "the fear of the Lord" or with "righteousness"	2
(b) Later writers, e.g. the author of Job, speak with a less certain voice	3
(c) But, when Jewish thought had recovered from the shock of the impact of Greek ideas, the old Jewish identification of knowledge with "the fear of the Lord" emerged triumphant	5
(d) The conception of the Immanence of God is latent in the Book of Wisdom, and also the corollary that all knowledge is of value	5
(e) Christ preached the doctrine that the knowledge of God is an immediate knowledge of the spirit, not an intellectual knowledge of the mind	6
And that knowledge is the living of a life	6
Essentially a life lived in relation with other lives, with God and with men	7
Christ also showed the inadequacy of the old Jewish belief in a merely Transcendent God, and emphasised the fact of His Immanence	7
(f) St Paul laid stress on the difference between "wisdom which is foolishness" by which he meant abstract intellectual knowledge, and "wisdom unto salvation," direct immediate knowledge of God and His Will, gained by living a life in fellowship with Him	8

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The teaching of the Bible leads to the truths that <i>ultimate Reality is God and man in relation</i> , and that <i>Knowledge is the living of a life</i> , and can be summed up in the Revelation "God is Love"	10
<i>Inquiry into the conception of the meaning of knowledge based on study of the facts of Evolution</i>	
Evolution signifies the triumph of the living organism over its determined environment and the emergence of an increasing freedom in successful organisms,	12
In short, progress from the lower to the higher,	16
Till self-conscious man is evolved, able to control his individual destiny in considerable measure,	18
And to re-act in a greater degree to the Whole Environment than any other creature as his activities become more spiritual,	19
Till at last he becomes conscious of Beauty, which urges him to create;	19
But different men give a very different account of Reality, when asked to explain what they mean when they say "I know"	20
There are two distinct meanings of <i>to know</i> :	
(1) Knowing about things, a one-sided activity; and	
(2) The mutual knowledge and understanding obtaining between two people who know each other	23
And similarly two distinct meanings in which <i>to love</i> is used:	
(1) To describe a one-sided activity, akin to the apprehension of beauty, and	
(2) To describe mutual love	23
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It is the aim of these lectures to suggest a line of thought that may point towards the solution of some of the famous antinomies: for we shall find that Freedom expresses itself by Self-limitation, that Unity is saved from nothingness by Multiplicity, that Transcendence establishes itself perpetually in Immanence, and that Good is only good where Evil is possible	26
--	----

II

KNOWING AND LOVING

To formulate a successful theory of knowledge it is necessary clearly to define the equivocal expressions "to know" and "to love"	29
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In saying "I know" nothing definite is postulated about the thing known except that it has been in some way or other experienced by a subject	32
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The scientific method seems to lead to a dilemma: <i>either</i> we must describe all reactions to environment on the part of living creatures as "response to stimulus," from the reactions of the humblest forms of life, to the complex activities of a man's thought, <i>or</i> we must say that there is "knowledge" all the way down	33
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III

THE KNOWN AND THE LOVED

We have shown how unsatisfactory an instrument is Logic for the attempt to approach Reality, from its very nature and purpose, since the generalisations of Logic remove us from the individual and concrete; and we must now try to show that there is a second type of knowledge, differing fundamentally from intellectual knowledge, which yet may condition man's approach to Reality	56
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