

CHAPTER I

PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTIONS

AT the outset of our enquiry we are confronted with certain well-known philosophical theories of the universe. To review these, with a brevity sufficient to any lucid understanding of such positions, is quite essential before we can hope to make useful progress into the main subject of our thesis.

Six of the familiar philosophic doctrines will engage our attention, but these will refrain from entering upon the province of epistemology, a province which would be unprofitable to consider without further complication in an already complicated subject. In every case, the name of each position concerns the relation between God, or the ultimate reality, whatever that may prove itself to be, and the world, including all that is comprehended in that term.

It is within the realm of ontology that we shall move; for the last problem for philosophy is an ontological one.

(a) *Pantheism.*

The doctrine of Pantheism has assumed as many forms, as many shades of variety, as almost any other theory. In this coat of many colours it has flourished in a few of the Neo-Platonists, in Greece, in India, especially in Brahmanism, the Upanishads and Vedanta philosophy, and in mediaeval and modern times. Some poets have sung its praises, and it is had in honour by not a few theologians, so subtle and yet so dangerous is its pervasive influence.

A. E. Garvie points out that the multitude of conceptions which go under the name of Pantheism may vary to a very large extent. Spinoza has been called a pantheist, but Hegel was right in preferring the name 'acosmist.' The world was absorbed in the Deity; thought and extension were but two of the infinite number of attributes belonging to God. He was able to say that man's love for God was but God loving Himself in man. His was a passive and deterministic pantheism, which evoked a

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reaction in favour of the dynamic power of spirit from the person of Leibnitz. Haeckel, says Garvie, was a materialistic monist. So emphatic was he in retaining the reality of the cosmos, conceived, however, in terms of materialism, that in so doing he lost sight of the greater reality, God. Here the alternative extreme is reached, pancosmism; here *θεός* is a mere name to denote the universe in its totality.

In the metaphysics of pantheism surely man and the divine are identical. Man and everything else are absolute through the laws of their own spirit or constitution. There can be no logical advance or progress; ascent to God is an impossibility, for the simple reason that the two are but one. This is, it seems, what the true pantheist must arrive at ultimately. To refrain from using the term 'part of' is advisable, spirits or minds are not part of other minds or spirits.

Pope is a true pantheist in his lines in the *Essay on Man*:

All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
 Whose body nature is, and God the soul;
 That, chang'd thro' all, and yet in all the same;

 Lives thro' all life, extends thro' all extent,
 Spreads undivided, operates unspent;
 Breathes in our soul, informs our mortal part,
 As full, as perfect, in a hair as heart:
 As full, as perfect, in vile Man that mourns,
 As the rapt seraph that adores and burns;
 To Him no high, no low, no great, no small;
 He fills, He bounds, connects, and equals all.

This variety is clear that God can be *identified* with this and that thing, this and that person. There is no gap between the 'is' and the 'ought to be,' man has nothing to cast off, nothing to become. Degrees of reality, degrees of immanence are impossible, for this implies difference, whereas there is no difference.

But once again, there is a class of pantheist that would call this a mere travesty of their position. Only in the absolute totality is there identity. God = the all, He is the all-embracing, all-containing whole, but in no sense to be equated with any

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single part of that whole. An analogy may be the familiar one of a work of art. Although each spot of paint in a picture, each note in a harmony, each word in a poem, is not beautiful, yet the picture, the harmony, the poem is so; the complex relationships involved in organic wholes render all such problems exceedingly intricate and difficult.

The God of Pantheism may be “as full, as perfect, in a hair as heart,” and yet not *be* the hair or the heart; but, we may ask, how is this truly pantheism? If the equation is valid only in the single case of the whole; then, with reference to the parts, we have a doctrine of immanence. Contradictions would undoubtedly arise were it possible to identify God both with the whole and each of the parts. The spiritual and temporal continuum can be taken as truly symbolic of the mental, or even spiritual orders, and since parts are not equal to wholes, nor wholes to the whole, neither is the all-prevailing and comprehensive One equal to its differentiations.

The *nature* of the God of Pantheism is another matter; it may be of an idealistic or a naturalistic kind, it may resemble the absolute of Spinoza or of Haeckel; it may resemble the Absolute Self of the Vedanta. In some respects it is unfair to class the philosophy of India, that is, in its ripest fruit, where it blossoms forth in that wonderful product of human reason, the Upanishads, as pantheistic.

A. S. Geden maintains that we might as fitly call the doctrine of the *ātman* mystical, or even theistic. Certainly the Western mind is only confused as well as misled by the inappropriate title Pantheism, in this connexion.

According to the Vedanta, when we try to realise the inner essence of anything, we see nothing but God. In a very real sense this is one form of immanence, as we shall hereafter argue, rather than a pantheistic position.

The difference between the Vedanta and Pantheism may be thus summed up: the former holds that God is the one underlying essence of phenomena, which are but the results of name and form superimposed upon the essence; the latter that God is the sum total of phenomena.

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India regards all multiplicity, all manifestation and appearance as an obstruction, a veil, or *māyā*; in reality, plurality is the gigantic illusion that shrouds the one sole Brahman from mortal vision, from mortal mind. No truth is to be attributed to the many, the play of the One must not be taken seriously. In subjective mind alone can the false show arise, annihilate the same, and a pure profound and fathomless calm ensues.

Pantheism is quite other than this. Reality is predicable of the multiplicity, sometimes to the exclusion of Brahman altogether. Not only are phenomena regarded as real, but, in some instances, identified with essence. Idealistic pantheism approaches nearest to the oriental type, and in systems that have made their appearance in European thought, one might conjecture that not the least influence therein had been contributed by the Upanishads themselves.

Hegel's comment upon Indian pantheism is of value; he illustrates the aspect adopted towards God, and the consequent reason for numerous incarnations. He says that subjectivity, human existence, is only an accidental form: in God it is simply a mask which Substance adopts and changes in an accidental way. God as Spirit, however, contains in Himself the moment of subjectivity, of singleness; His manifestation, accordingly, can only be a single one, can only take place once.¹ If the final truth about God is Substance rather than Spirit, if personality and existence for selfness is one of the many illusions, it is not difficult to see the logic of India's deifications. Hegel maintains that this is the most developed form of pantheism, denying that the identifying of the totality with God is pantheism at all, except to the opponents of the doctrine. To deny the reality of the finite as finite, to perceive its reality to consist entirely in the infinite, this is true pantheism. The divinity of the all must give way to the allness of the divine, a very different proposition, and one, so he would declare, that demanded higher categories of thought to comprehend its truth.

In spite of Hegel, numerous witnesses may be produced to

¹ See Hegel, *Philosophy of Religion*.

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demonstrate that there are other forms of pantheism than those to which he would alone assign the title, a title, moreover, to which he takes objection as inevitably leading to ambiguities.

What is the view that pantheism takes of the Christian Trinity? A confusion arises at the outset that must eternally differentiate it from the Christian standpoint.

The Logos, or Divine Reason, is God in operation, God as present and working, not necessarily in creation, but as opposed to Himself. The Son is God as He distinguishes Himself from Himself, and proceeds from Himself, though we are not at liberty to say that this procession is the cause of the created world. According to pantheism, God *in operation* is identified with God as He is in Himself, or in terms of Christian theology, 'the Spirit' is identified with 'the Father.'

While acosmism denies the manifestation of God, and admits the Father only; pancosmism denies the Father, and retains the manifestation, with the important modification that 'manifestation' conveys a false impression.

Creation always avoids pantheism, but it has its own insuperable difficulties. If it is impossible to add the 'godness of all to the Allness of God,' it is equally impossible for the creationist to arrive at any satisfactory solution of the origination of the $\epsilon\lambda\eta$, the not-being that yet is, out of which all things are made.

Dr Matthews is able to say that as respects Incarnation, pantheism has one of two alternatives, either to reject such an act as absurd, or reject all other theories which maintain its absurdity. There is either no Incarnation or nothing but an incarnation; perhaps it would not be a grievous error to account the choice of either alternative as a matter of indifference.

To discuss all the implications in the direction of ethics and free-will, although by no means unimportant, would lead us too far astray. Strictly construed it is difficult to see what the difference is for pantheism between existential propositions and those asserting worth or value. Each species of the conception that shelters behind the word might require different treatment, and this is but a brief survey of ontological attitudes.

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(b) *Deism*.

The error of pantheism is that in confusing the world with God, any reality that should be predicated of God apart from the world is lost to sight. Deism goes astray in the opposite direction by interposing such a rigid and impenetrable barrier between God and the world that all connexion which ought to unite the two is forfeited. The Deistic notion of God prevailed in Confucianism, Mahommedanism, the Leibnitz-Wolffian school in Germany, in England during the eighteenth century, amongst the Socinians and in the rationalism of Kant and Herbart.

The cardinal and initial mistake in deism is to lay too great an emphasis upon the *will*. Whenever and wherever ethical attributes are put in the forefront, whenever God is regarded as *fully* revealed by “Holy, Holy, Holy,” a form of deism is unavoidable. While pantheism delighted to say that God was “closer to us than breathing, nearer than hands and feet,” deism is only happy when it can declare that He is “higher than the heavens: what can thou do?” The high and lofty One that inhabiteth Eternity deigns but seldom to meddle with creatures so infinitely His inferior, but when such visitations from the exalted One do occur, the incomprehensibility, following in their train, rightly renders them worthy of the name of miracle.

The attributes associated with the deity are: omnipotence, eternity, self-containedness, majesty. Through an arbitrary act of will, a mere fiat, was the world created, and henceforth allowed to run its course under the superintendency of laws, resembling those of the Medes and Persians. Pantheism forgets the absolute subject in its zeal for the absolute substance, deism knows only of the absolute subject. It is difficult to determine whether this latter belief is logically committed to a dualism. Pfleiderer maintains that, as a matter of history, the result of deism has been either pancosmism or atheism. He cites the instances of the Kantian deism passing through Fichtean idealism to the anthropologism of Feuerbach, and English deism through French naturalism to the present day (1885) positivism.¹

Connected with dualism arise the inherent difficulties of the

¹ See Hegel, *Philosophy of Religion*, vol. III.

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system of deism. Any doctrine that holds to the validity of the conception of *creation* has always to face the problem that must be asked of it, yet can never admit of an answer: Whence the created, and its relation to the Creator? Ascribing the world to the might of will, how does will produce matter? What is the relation between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*? Analogies and metaphors drawn from the world of sense are misleading, chiefly because of the objection raised by Kant; human constructors are not *creators* of the material with which they work, their skill consists in adapting and informing the medium in accordance with the expression desired to be conveyed.

Pantheism and deism, being antithetic positions, are excellently suited to balance each other. Where one is strong the other is weak, and according to Hegel, the truth of both is found in a higher third, their synthesis, which unites without annulling both complementary truths.

The harmony of the abstract monistic substance of pantheism with the unconditioned subject of deism was the task set for the great German idealists from Schelling to Hegel. Their success or failure to accomplish the task must be left to the reader to determine. Neither pure immanence nor pure transcendence is a possible theory of the universe in its relation to God. The unity must not be recognised without the universe, nor the universe without the unity, says B. Bosanquet.

As against the omission of the transcendent, arguments are not lacking to show how contradictory are the conclusions at which we must arrive in such a case.

The process itself cannot explain past events and future events: they persist in the present, but what if they are forgotten? What is the relation of any term in the process to the whole of reality? "Nothing pre-existent nothing transcendent" is the watchword of the neo-idealist. Reality is historic through and through and the whole progression is moved by the dialectic of finite spirit according to the ultimate structure of spirit. Nothing outside is real.

Ideal eternal history becomes historical progress. The Absolute is finite experience at its *both* fullest *and* most intelligible

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pitch; there are eternal recurrences not repetitions. The eternal history is the realisation of the “immanent and eternal victory of man over nature.”¹ God becomes purely immanent in man. “The Spirit, infinite possibility overflowing into infinite actuality, has drawn, and is drawing at every moment, the cosmos out of chaos—has effected the passage from animal to human life.”²

Bosanquet points out the fatal fallacy in all this reasoning. He says that possibilities are rooted in reality. They can derive from nowhere else; there is nothing else from which anything else can derive. The infinite whole, it seems to us, must live out alike to all its sides and aspects, must expand into and live itself out in all values, but constrict itself into history in respect of none.

In our thinking we do not look for knowledge in the psychical process but in the transcendent completion. Croce’s and Gentile’s repudiation of the Universe as thought (*pensato*) in favour of thinking (*pensiero pensante*) is simply a loss of vital connexion.

Transcendence, it must be remembered, is the law of the world, and as there is a sense in which every conclusion contradicts its own premisses, so there is a sense in which thought’s own inherent demand can only be fulfilled beyond it.³

All this is as true in the realm of being as it is in the realm of knowledge, the latter is but the corollary of the former. In his *Ethical Studies* Dr Bradley says: “If humanity is adorable, it is so only because it is *not* merely the last product of terrestrial development, but because the idea of the identity of God and man is the absolute truth, because finite rational mind is not *merely* such, but, in another sense than physical or animal nature, is the self-realisation of the spirit in which all moves and lives, and so is an organic whole in that unity.” Striving which constitutes the reconciliation between attainment and non-attainment, and an essential mark of finitude, whereby the spirit of man attempts to grasp perfection, cannot be so inter-

¹ Gentile, *Spirito*.

² Croce, *Practica*, p. 179.

³ See B. Bosanquet, *The Meeting of Extremes in Contemporary Philosophy*.

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puted as to make that perfection lie within the fact of striving itself, for this is just what can never have any attainment. As the goal urges to the flight, so does perfection prompt the pursuit.

In our next section, Panentheism, both immanence and transcendence will come to their fruition and consummation. How they do so these brief remarks upon pantheism and deism may have illustrated to some extent.

(c) *Panentheism.*

This doctrine is akin to some forms of Absolutism which will engage our attention in the following section. Perhaps it will subsequently transpire that, in our present stage of evolution, it is unsafe to pass beyond panentheism into some more definitely mystical position. As far as possible this discussion will take place on the intellectual plane, rather than on the mystical. The spirit's final relation to the Absolute, to God, is surely a mystical one, not expressible in terms of the intellect at all; yet we reserve the treatment of this most difficult problem to a later section.

Krause and Baader, who made use of the word 'panentheism,' employed it to denote the synthesis of transcendence and immanence. God, they felt, was greater than all, yet all derived its entire dependence from Him. Both the theories of pure immanence and pure transcendence revealed themselves as abstractions; it became impossible to think either alternative through without contradiction; a refuge from such a dilemma was imperative, and the asylum was found in panentheism. "In Him we live and move and have our being"; this is the religious side of our philosophical doctrine; it admits God to be both the context and the content of our life, He is the ever-present atmosphere, the ever-active life and energy of our being. God is *over* us as well as *in* us, and these are complementary. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-Begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." Here again there is no confusion between God as He appears in the Logos, and God in His transcendence as Father. There is an increasing immanence of God in the world yet no identity

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therewith. Never is there any union of the 'Word' with the world, the perfect with the imperfect expression of God. As Dr Martineau has said: "the Eternal is greater than all He has done." Therefore God, as He, "of Whom are all things," must be distinguished from God, "through Whom are all things."¹

"The apprehension of God as Transcendent is, however, indirect and implicit, immensely operative in the dynamism of man's multiform deepest life—for it is this apprehension that ever leaves in man, at his best moments, the poignant sense of inadequacy and that dwarfs him before that most real sense or touch of the Infinite."²

Here the true relationship appears between God and man. The high and holy One inhabiting Eternity, He Whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, condescends to dwell with those of a humble heart. Holiness and humility have met together, goodness and graciousness have kissed each other. The voice of the Eternal re-echoes the voice within the heart, the divine in the all beats in harmony with the divine within the all. Nature and man, history and religion, philosophy and science become the luminous dwelling-place of God, the Absolute One.

From an intellectual standpoint panentheism may appear to be but another variation of the multitude of philosophical positions capable of being held with regard to God's relation to His world. From time to time the philosophic spirit, urged by an innate dialectic, the aspiration to grasp the True, may rehabilitate all these outworn garments, long ago discarded, and thereby endow them for the period with a temporary life; but as a lasting and satisfying tabernacle wherein the spirit of man, ever harassed by a noble discontent, can rest, this they can never be.

Whether any theory of the Absolute has yet made its appearance that can claim to have at all adequately synthesised Immanence and Transcendence, it will be our duty to ask later. Ambition is often the foe of truth, and to strive after the greater, that which we may be necessitated to pronounce as impossible

¹ See W. L. Walker, *The Spirit and the Incarnation*. ² Baron von Hügel.