CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

SINCE the time when the antagonism between the school known in England as "Hegelian" and the traditional English philosophy called Empirical or Experiential died down, there seems to have been no definite attempt to sum up the result. Yet one school has not simply vanquished the other and left no more to be said. A very fair-minded view was expressed by Bosanquet, one of the chiefs of the opposition to the typically "English" philosophy. That phase of thought, he declared, does not rank second to any philosophy except that of the ancient Greeks: but, as a drawback, he finds that it had always an insurgent character in relation to other expressions of the national life. It was a non-academical philosophy. Yet he did not deny that the experiential character of English thought is that by which it has impressed the world. As Croom Robertson, from the other side, has said,[1] thinkers who have held opposing theories—theories of *a priori* type, as they are called—on the foundations of human knowledge, have passed relatively into the shade. This, it must be admitted on all sides, is still true. The Hegelian doctrine in England, for a time academically triumphant, has never succeeded on the Continent in getting its claim to be called "the English Idealism" recognised. That name has been reserved for the empirical idealism which descended from Berkeley through Hume and Mill. And outside their own country the chiefs of the Hegelian school are little known. Mill and Spencer remain still for the world at large the last great English thinkers.

In England itself, however, those names have not retained their pre-eminence. The criticisms adapted for English use from Kant and Hegel made it evident that the principles with which the native empirical philosophy tried to work had shown

[1] See "The English Mind" in *Philosophical Remains*.

themselves inadequate to actual knowledge. And, in turning back historically, it is now easily seen that experience as they understood it never made up the whole content of knowledge for the experiential thinkers themselves. Many *a priori* positions that had come down from antiquity through scholasticism remained part of the form of thought of Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, and Berkeley; and Hume, who with the most conscious purpose aimed at reducing all knowledge to experience, found that he could not rationally explain something so apparently obvious as causation without importing from the human mind elements not, in his view, to be counted among the given facts.[1] Hence Green showed real insight when he devoted himself to minute examination of Hume's most radical work, the *Treatise of Human Nature*, in order to expose the failure of the experiential philosophy traditional in England.

In my own view, set forth in the essay that gives its title to the present volume, the effectiveness of the criticism, within certain limits, is acknowledged: but it is treated as a correction, not as comparable to the revolution by which the great experiential thinkers themselves had at once enlarged and restricted our conceptions of the method of seeking truth. The Greeks had established for ever the appeal to reasoning; but, in spite of some attempts of their own, had failed to give its due place to experience. Many moderns in the new European nations put forth the thought of direct appeal to nature and fact as against dogmatic deductions from principles supposed rational; but English thinkers first, by continuity of effort, had carried the thought as far as it could go. No reversal of this has been possible; but it had to be seen also that, however dominant the element of given fact, or, in psychological language, sensation may be; and however "thin", as compared with what was assumed in the ages of all-embracing deduction, may be the irreducible *a priori* elements in thinking; these nevertheless exist. Induction itself implies deduction behind it; as was easily shown out of Mill's *System of Logic*; and this in the end rests on indispensable principles of know-

[1] See the chapter on "Reason" below.

ledge, not on generalisation from experience. We may then frankly recognise that we owe a very important critical re-examination of the traditional experiential assumptions to what no doubt seemed to many at the time an obscurantist reaction. For on the Continent, as in England, "Experience" and "Enlightenment" had in the end made common cause. Everywhere "the *a priori*" was in name at least banned.

An element both of strength and of weakness in English philosophy has been its special regard for physical or natural science. Apart from continuous pressure, there have been two great periods of the intensive influence of science on philosophy: that of the pre-Socratic schools of Greece, and that of the movement in modern Europe from the Renaissance onward. Yet it cannot be said with truth that at any time philosophy sprang purely and simply out of scientific consideration of nature. It arose at a certain stage in the search of man, from the time when he became man and passed beyond what has been called "animal faith", for a total imaginative interpretation of his own life, conscious as well as active, and of the nature of his dependence on the world which surrounds him. Science, on the other hand, began with the search into particulars of causation aroused by the interests of active life. Even at first, anything that we can call by anticipation science required in its votaries a certain removal from immediate practical preoccupations; but it remained attached to the vaguely discriminated facts of the world of perception, while the effort to imagine the whole proceeded rather from the mythical element in religion. This in its turn proceeded from the animism of the primeval or early thought of man when he was passing to the distinctively human stage and beginning to have words to mark off his internal life from the movements of things around. Yet philosophy, though derived from it, tended to oppose religion by bringing under intellectual and moral criticism the authority of the traditional stories taught by its representatives, the priesthoods. In its intellectual criticism it received the most tangible aid from science; which, in the meantime, had furnished much accurate knowledge of detail

that was discordant with the sacred stories elaborated by religion and subservient to its cult of invisible powers. Science, however, dealing primarily with external nature, had no account to give of man as a conscious being. Therefore philosophy, which (as Bacon said of himself) took all knowledge for its province, after turning its criticism, with the aid of science, on religious tradition, turned it at the next stage on current scientific dogmatism, which, in the absence of a criterion either of consistency or of methodical verification, was running more and more into incoherence precisely as it tried to become more general. In virtue of this "subjective" criticism, we get the transition from what has been called Naturalism in philosophy to what has been called Idealism. While science has been successful in exploring details of nature, philosophy has been successful in showing that mere accumulation of these gives no insight into the whole; especially because the "objective" view of all this detail is merely dispersive and leaves out of account what most of all interests feeling and imagination. Again and again the process has repeated itself; and now we are in a marked phase of the conflict—often disguised in its essence by relations to historical religion; which, so far as it concerns empirical fact, is an affair of science and not of philosophy.

To the Hegelian school in England must be conceded, besides what has been already said, the merit of bringing back English thought from a too exclusive belief in the sciences as a preparation for philosophy—viewed sometimes as finding its culmination in a "creed of science"—to a more adequate understanding of its synoptic aim. The Hegelians helped to make it clear that science itself cannot go on effectively without reference to philosophical principles. And, to some extent, the study of Kant and Hegel has given deeper insight. English philosophers have seen the necessity of a revision either in the light of foreign points of view or by going back to the great Greek thinkers who were the ultimate source of philosophical Rationalism in modern times. There is no longer any fear that European thought should forget the lesson of "English Em-

piricism" and return to unexamined *a priori* maxims. The danger is rather that the ultimate necessity of trusting Reason should be forgotten and that haphazard trial and error under no guide but volition should take its place.

What Hegel has contributed to philosophy is above all the supreme position he assigns to Thought. In Thought he claims to find all the Being of the world; not by conjectures going beyond experience, but by a dialectical process within experience that always carries on the thought without limit. This does not mean that he is an "intellectualist" in any exclusive sense. One of his profound sayings is that nothing great is achieved without passion. "It is only a dead, indeed too often a hypocritical, morality, that inveighs against passion as such."[1] In his mind there was no doubt a hard intellectuality to which the sentimental "appeal to feeling" in religion or ethics was abhorrent; but this does not seem an unfortunate temperament for a philosopher. His own later anti-liberal prejudices, which perhaps had some basis in a sentimental reaction against "sentiment", were easily set aside by a considerable portion of his own school, which in its "left wing" even went to revolutionary extremes. And the "dialectic" in which his system was expressed was for the most part ignored by his English disciples. Here, I am inclined to think, the depreciation went too far. It may be allowed that Hegel's Logic did not mark a stage in the theory of deductive or inductive proof, like the logical doctrines of Aristotle and Mill. It did, however, give a clear conception of the actual process in the development of thought; and the way of writing the histories of art, of religion and of philosophy would not have been the same if Hegel had never elaborated his dialectical method. He himself claims for it that it takes account for the first time of the element of negativity in the movement of mind. Progress is to be explained not by a straightforward following of deduction from one accomplished result to the next, but by a gradual revelation of contradic-

[1] *Encyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*, § 474, p. 406 (ed. Karl Rosenkranz, Berlin, 1870).

tions in the first position taken, till contradiction is again contradicted and what was true in the primal thought is restored with due qualifications. But this is not achieved once for all. Each new synthesis breaks up in turn, and the restoration through the series of negations is again repeated. Such a generalising notion, I think, though it cannot be made to conform to any preconception of strict syllogistic proof, has shown itself very powerful in grasping the action and reaction by which the everlasting movement of thought goes on.

Here, however, there comes in a correction from the empirical side. Hegel's German disciples and their imitators have been apt, when writing the history of philosophy, to treat his dialectic as determining in advance the position of every thinker in the series. Everything comes at its time; and so, if any philosopher has shown insight not belonging to his assigned phase in terms of a "law of progress", his individual advance must be treated as unjustifiable! And, in spite of Hegel's logical admission that in his view nothing is final, finality is sometimes asserted for his own philosophy of dialectical evolution.

The correction may be made by a term borrowed from biology. Evolution once signified purely inward development from a germ; and it is this sense of evolution that Hegel must have had in his mind when he employed it to expound his philosophy. Biology, however, went on to recognise in the process of development in the embryo not simply an inward unfolding all prefigured, but "epigenesis", or addition of organic determinations that could not have been predicted. So also there have been, and there may be again, developments in thought and experience that could not have been foreseen by the deepest meditation. To give an example: in the early nineteenth century thinkers who were not specialists in physics or biology could foresee as about to establish themselves something like the theories of conservation of energy and transmutation of species. So far there was a kind of applicable dialectic. No one from outside, however, by "taking thought", could have foreseen the new discoveries in radiation or the rise

of the modern scientific theory of relativity. For the new doctrine in mathematical physics, whatever points of contact may be found in the terms, did not spring out of the philosophical "relativity" familiar since the time of the Greek sceptics. It is really novel, and has arrived off the line of the expected.

That philosophical thoughts resembling one another can emerge on different lines of reflection is, I think, obvious in the chapters that follow. Comte and Hegel, for example, in spite of the highly synthetic character of the minds of both, are often treated as antitheses. Yet in their classification of the sciences there is a fundamentally important agreement. Here I am able to recognise a distinct value in a portion of Hegel's doctrine—namely, the Philosophy of Nature—about which his own disciples are inclined to say as little as possible. It was always indeed largely unintelligible to readers not living in the atmosphere of the German *Naturphilosophie*; but Comte also shares in the obscurity that comes from allusions to obsolete controversies of the past in rapidly growing sciences. In compensation, it is still noticeable that Hegel was strikingly lucky in some particular hits. His statement on heat might pass now as exactly "up to date",[1] and no one could have pointed out with more clearness that in the case of electricity no intuition as distinguished from abstraction is attainable, so that the reproach often made by scientific specialists against philosophy here completely fails.

To leave questions of detail, however, it needs to be emphasised that the representative of Positivism spontaneously coincided with the supposed representative of Transcendentalism in separating himself from those who regard nature as in its essence mechanical through and through. Hegel and Comte find, quite independently, that chemistry can never be constructed purely and simply from physical principles, nor

[1] See *Encyklopädie*, ed. Rosenkranz, §303, p. 261: "Die Wärme ist das sich Wiederherstellen der Materie in ihre Formlosigkeit, ihre Flüssigkeit, der Triumph ihrer abstrakten Homogeneität über die specifischen Bestimmtheiten".

biology from physics and chemistry. That is, to whatever extent the details of the sciences later in the series can be explained from the earlier, the principles of these can never enable us to understand how the objects of the later sciences came to exist at all. Both philosophers also agree in recognition of "final causes" as characteristic of organisms. Hegel declares[1] that the Aristotelian conception of the inner teleology of organic life had been almost lost till Kant in his manner re-awakened it. This he sets as the right view against external teleology. And Comte, expressly against the mechanicist preconceptions held scientific in his day, asserted teleology as irreducible law manifested in the empirical order of nature known to us phenomenally.

Going beyond the series of what are commonly called natural sciences, and entering upon the study of man, Comte and Hegel agree with their predecessor Vico in recognising teleology in history. With Vico and Hegel this might seem to follow from their Platonic principle that mind or spirit is supreme in the universe. Yet Comte also, carrying forward his empirical method into the most original part of his system, for which he invented the term Sociology, proclaims a thoroughgoing belief in a "human providence". So far did his confidence reach that he claimed to predict the future, at least in the abstract outline which is not incompatible with science. Here it was the empiricist who had most faith in the applicability of his doctrine. His weakness seems to me to lie in his formula "progress the end"; as if we knew what progress is without a philosophical criterion to distinguish between end and means. Vico's cyclical view theoretically excludes indefinite progress, though he makes none but hypothetical predictions. It is sufficient for his teleological doctrine if the causal order in the universe does not permit Humanity to perish. Hegel here in general, though not with particularly happy political applications, reaches the highest point, making freedom the ultimate expression of the spirit immanent in man. For the present, however, the main result is that the

[1] *Encyklopädie*, §360, p. 315.

three great modern founders in the science of man as a social being were all in their different ways teleologists.

Comte and Hegel may both be called in a sense optimists, though certainly not optimists who avert their eyes from the elements of pain and evil in the world; while Schopenhauer was an ostensible pessimist whose "dearest foe" was Hegel. Yet he too has a place for "final cause" in the Aristotelian sense. And it has been said with truth that the universe as conceived by Schopenhauer is by no means "the worst of all possible worlds". Let us remember also that the teleology of organisms was inexpugnable for Voltaire, in spite of his treatment in *Candide* of the optimism of Leibniz. That optimism, besides, furnished to Voltaire little more than a formula that lent itself to ridicule. "The best of all possible worlds" is not necessarily "very good". Leibniz, like Voltaire himself, allowed that there are in the world limiting necessities with which its "final causes" have to contend. Not that his *Théodicée*, which contains little of his distinctive philosophy, goes very deep. His most discerning philosophic admirers, such as Renouvier and Croom Robertson, did not think highly of it. By accepting points from the popular theology of the time, it might seem, in an impartial view, more pessimistic than Schopenhauer's account of the way to deliverance. For Leibniz, while admitting that there is a case for a view like that of Origen, undertakes to reconcile his optimism with the dogma of everlasting punishment. Schopenhauer, on the other hand, has no place for irreparable evil.

As exceptional great men who completely rejected final causes, Schopenhauer names Lucretius and Spinoza. Here, I think, we have a good example of the coming in of individual genius not explicable by the dialectical process of the ages. There remains for historians of philosophy an irreducible empirical element. For some disciples of Hegel, Spinoza became simply a phase in the logical development of the Cartesian philosophy: it was "bound to come" and then bound to give place to the next phase in the history of thought. Spinoza's metaphysical doctrine can, of course, be traced to sources; no

known thinker is simply without precursors; but he was, to a certain extent, out of the current of his age. In tendency, his direction was that of Nicholas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno, neither of whom he probably knew. And so he had to undergo a long period of neglect, till his fame was revived after more than a century by those German successors of Kant who were in search of new inspiration.

It may be said of him—perhaps with a touch of paradox—that while his rejection of final causes leaves a gap in his science, he had carried philosophy to a level of contemplation that goes beyond even the most refined reasoning about means and ends. At the height, he passes from volition to acquiescence. This was not due simply to his logical development of the mechanicism imperfectly formulated by Descartes; though the model of grasping all under a mathematical intuition allured him. There were earlier sources of his thought; as I have shown in chapter vi of the present volume. But, with all his synthetic power, his developments from these sources leave an incoherence in his system. In what manner exactly they are to be resolved remains a problem for the future. Hegel may give us some help when he says, in his own technical terms, that Spinoza's Absolute must be conceived no longer as Substance but as Subject.

There is the same latent incoherence in Lucretius, different as was his science. With Lucretius the incongruity is at the beginning; with Spinoza at the end. The invocation of Venus as the symbol of a vital principle in the life of nature can find no explanation in the sweep of atoms through the infinite void; and to explain the "intellectual love of God" from the pleasure evoked by natural knowledge always seemed to me inadequate to such an impassioned emotion. Although Spinoza nominally excludes "passion", the feeling evoked by philosophy both in himself and in Lucretius seems much more akin to religion than to the mere satisfaction of scientific curiosity —which, however, was an element in both their minds. And this to me indicates a true "law of progress". Hegel, it seems to me, rightly places conscious philosophising beyond religious