



Studies in Hegelian Cosmology

John McTaggart Ellis McTaggart

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...If we inquire the actual value of this philosophy as a solution of the problem of the universe, we fear that it demonstrates little more than that man cannot by searching find out God. Hegelianism has resemblances to Christianity to which we attach higher worth than Mr. McTaggart does, and than Hegel himself probably did. Human intellect at its loftiest levels, in its strongest efforts, attains to shadows the substance whereof is enshrined in Christianity. Yet the shadows are strangely distorted. We are offered an immortality involving eternal pre-existence, and both morally useless and spiritually unattractive; a substitute for God to which the only pronoun applicable is "it"; a theory of the Supreme Good and of Morality, less unworkable indeed than most of its atheistic rivals, but destructive of holiness; a curiously inept but withal dangerous conception of Punishment, startlingly clever and logical, but emptying it of nearly all justice; a presentation of love from which the love of God — both His to man and man's to Him — evanishes.

With a closely reasoned chapter on "The Conception of Society as an Organism " we are in nearly complete agreement. The author shows that society can be regarded as an organism only by depriving the latter term of all true content. In some respects the chapter on " Hegelianism and Christianity" is the most important in the book. It displays plainly and forcibly the resemblances (not quite sufficiently) and differences between Hegel's philosophy and Christianity. The necessary verdict is that despite Hegel's formal adherence to Christianity his system is utterly irreconcilable with it. The last chapter manifests the tendency—to use no stronger word—of Hegelianism towards mysticism. It is enough to notice that idealistic philosophy, which is clearly the victorious system at the present day, inevitably brings men face to face with demands of the human mind before which "reason fails, with all her powers." Mr. McTaggart scarcely perceives whither the homage paid to emotion must in the long run lead.

We question if anyone has ever read completely the secret of Hegel. As an intellectual system, several scholars seem to have apprehended it, more or less fully and accurately. But the spirit of Hegel somehow evaporates in his commentators. For Hegel, philosophy was the expression of a real, if erroneous, religion. One is well-nigh inclined to say that Hegel came into touch with reality in a way analogous, *exceptis excipiendis*, with the experimental element in Christianity. For his commentators philosophy is chiefly dry dialectic. However this may be, Mr. McTaggart's *Studies* are not only a help to the understanding and appreciation of Hegel, an extension and application of his principles, but an intrinsic contribution to the progress of philosophy. The Christian idealist sees in their excellences no less than their defects the imperative need of interpreting and guiding idealism by revelation, unless the claims of a great part of human nature must remain unsatisfied.

—*The London Quarterly Review*, Vol. 8

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