

## DISCUSSION.

### THE NEW RATIONALISM AND OBJECTIVE IDEALISM.

IN *The New Rationalism* Professor Spaulding presents a serious, systematic and impressive formulation of 'neo-realism' as he conceives it, a pluralistic conception of the universe as a totality of 'externally' related entities, of which very many are non-mental. This conception of the universe is reached by way of a critical examination and elimination of the chief anti-realistic systems. Spaulding contends, indeed, that all philosophical systems, saving only neo-realism, must be rejected as inherently self-contradictory. "Phenomenalism," conceived after the Kantian fashion, contradicts itself since, on the one hand, it explicitly teaches that ultimate reality is unknowable while, on the other hand, it implicitly assumes that "the facts about knowing can be known as they really are."<sup>1</sup> Pragmatism claims truth as "relative and shifting" but none the less presupposes "that this claim is itself an absolute and permanent and not a relative . . . truth."<sup>2</sup> Naturalism which sets out to acknowledge empirically discovered facts wholly ignores "cognitive emotional and volitional processes." Positivism, on the other hand (and by this term Spaulding means Humian idealism), so far from ignoring mental reality, holds that only impressions and ideas exist.<sup>3</sup> But positivism contradicts itself in that it can not define these impressions and ideas except in terms of the selves and physical objects whose existence it denies.<sup>4</sup>

There remain non-Humian, or 'personal' idealism (to which Spaulding always refers as 'subjective' idealism) and numerical monism or Absolutism.<sup>5</sup> Both doctrines must successfully be eliminated if the argument for pluralistic realism is to be valid. Both are combined in the system called by Spaulding 'objective idealism,' the doctrine that the universe consists in One Being, mental or spiritual in nature. To the refutation of this doctrine the greater number of Spaulding's

<sup>1</sup> *The New Rationalism*, p. 227. (Page-references not otherwise designated are to this book, but Spaulding's self-defeating italics are, for the most part, not reproduced.)

<sup>2</sup> P. 75. Cf. pp. 297, 299, 398 f.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. p. 243<sup>3</sup> *et al.*

<sup>4</sup> P. 244<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. note on page 602, below.

critical pages are devoted. The purpose of this paper is to summarize and to comment on this attempted refutation. Non-Humian idealism holds that the world is through and through mental, but teaches (in opposition to positivism) that mental entities are ultimately personal—that the universe is made up of egos, knowers, or selves and their 'mental processes' or experiences. Spaulding objects to both parts of the doctrine. (1) Against the idealistic position that objects are mental he urges that known objects are independent of being known. To establish this position he recognizes that the realist must meet the egocentric predicament, the fact that "the only world which we can 'get at' [is] one that is related to our knowing or to our experiencing."<sup>1</sup> The realistic solution of the predicament seems to him simple. To be sure, the ego or knowing cannot be "experimentally" removed from any situation; but by analysis *in situ* (Spaulding's term for abstracting attention) knowing may be ideally eliminated.<sup>2</sup> It can be shown moreover that the knowing thus ideally eliminable makes no difference to the world that we know.<sup>3</sup> For the idealist, like every philosopher, "presupposes" that his solution of the problem of knowing is "not causally dependent upon being known either by himself or by any one else."<sup>4</sup> In other words, idealism is presupposed to be the 'genuine' state of affairs and as such "independent not only of the specific knowing and experiencing process in the knowing individuals who maintain it, but also of . . . knowing in other individuals."<sup>5</sup> And in thus presupposing an object (namely the theory of idealism) which is true independently of being known by any one in particular, idealism is virtually adopting the absolutistic theory of truth—in other words it is unwittingly admitting the realistic contention that some objects at least are independent of knowledge and accordingly non-mental.

(2) Intertwined with this, his emphasized argument against what he calls subjective idealism, is Spaulding's criticism of the non-Humian idealist's conception of the self or knower. Such a knower or self, he holds, would have to be identical with the Aristotelian "substance-like, unitary ego," conceived "after the analogy of a physical thing with only the difference that the substratum here is regarded as spiritual instead of as material."<sup>6</sup> Now a thing-like substance, what-

<sup>1</sup> P. 81<sup>1</sup>. Cf. pp. 219 ff., 322<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> P. 210<sup>2</sup> *et al.*

<sup>3</sup> P. 211<sup>2-3</sup>. Cf. p. 315.

<sup>4</sup> P. 212<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> P. 84<sup>4</sup>. Cf. pp. 211 ff., 313 ff., 367 ff.

<sup>6</sup> P. 33<sup>1</sup>. Cf. pp. 243<sup>1</sup>, 326<sup>3</sup>.

ever else it is, is causally related to other entities—in other words, it alters or modifies them. An ego, therefore, if it exists, must modify the objects related to it. But the specific relation of an ego to objects can be no other than its consciousness or knowledge of them; and the realist has argued that objects are independent of—unmodified by—being known. Obviously, therefore, the realist concludes, if knowledge does not modify its objects there can be no modifying or causal ego.

It will be convenient to comment on these arguments in reverse order and to protest at once that the argument just stated is based on an arbitrary misconception of the knower, or self. For though the self, or I, has indeed too often been confused with a 'thing-like causal entity' (the soul), this misconception is quite unwarrantably foisted on the idealist. This statement must be stressed. For by self is meant simply the conscious being, whatever one's conception of the nature of consciousness; and such a self, the idealist insists—the self as a complex, unique, persistent and yet changing conscious being—is either discovered or presupposed by every philosophic system not excepting realism.<sup>1</sup> This contention is, in truth, well borne out by Spaulding's own procedure. He sets forth, to be sure, a theory of consciousness as 'linear series' or 'dimension' of conscious processes—a conception, it may be noted, which is in essence indistinguishable from the positivism which he has so effectively criticized.<sup>2</sup> But he states the theory with hesitation<sup>3</sup> and offers no argument save a bare analogy: sensational and other sorts of conscious elements, he argues, might conceivably be related to each other as are the members of a series, without thereby losing their characteristic mental quality.<sup>4</sup> But in the face of this doctrine of the nature of consciousness Spaulding throughout assumes the existence of the concrete self—the 'I' or

<sup>1</sup> It is irrelevant to our present purpose either to discuss non-causal idealistic theories of knowledge or to point out that idealists sometimes conceive the self as 'causal' with a meaning quite foreign to that which Spaulding usually gives to the term but closely similar to that of his 'non-causal efficiencies' (pp. 442 ff.). Schaub has already suggested (*This Review*, 1919, p. 415) that by this doctrine Spaulding seems to yield all that the causal theory of consciousness has ever claimed.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. pp. 243 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. p. 471, toward the end: "It would not be surprising if consciousness were included in this class of dimensional entities." It must be admitted, however, that familiarity with the hypothesis seems to breed certainty for before long (p. 478<sup>3</sup>) we meet with the unqualified assertion that "any specific consciousness is a qualitatively distinct dimension in the universe."

<sup>4</sup> Cf. pp. 484<sup>4</sup> ff. For Spaulding's criticism of argument from analogy cf. pp. 152 ff.

the 'you'—not only by numberless more or less incidental allusions<sup>1</sup> but in passages whose meaning turns upon the assumption of such a self. Thus, he says explicitly that "there are processes of self-perception;"<sup>2</sup> he asserts that "in acts of will we discover a push . . . against our better nature or against our appetites;"<sup>3</sup> and, even more significantly, he founds his argument against positivism on the distinction, quite impossible on a dimensional theory of consciousness, between the 'I' and the 'you.'<sup>4</sup>

This criticism, however, of Spaulding's argument against the conceivableness of the ego, still leaves on our hands his more formidable argument against idealism. For to Spaulding, whatever might prove to be the nature of knower or of knowledge (of self or of consciousness), the known object still would exist, independent of both, by virtue of the realistic solution of the egocentric predicament. This solution it will be remembered first seeks to eliminate the ego by an analysis *in situ* and then argues that the user of the egocentric predicament contradicts himself by presupposing a true state of affairs. In comment on this argument, it should be observed that the analysis *in situ* is not only rather naively claimed as peculiar to "the new logic" and kindred disciplines<sup>5</sup> but is also mainly irrelevant to the reasoning. For one may 'ideally eliminate' almost any obstinately existing object or quality by an effort of abstracting attention, without thereby annihilating it. One may be said, for example, to eliminate the color of a fabric when one is examining its texture, but the fabric keeps on being green or blue as well as smooth or rough. And similarly, though one may ideally eliminate the self when discussing the thing; yet the thing may none the less keep on being an object analyzed (perhaps even constituted) by a self or selves. The only significant part, therefore, of the realistic solution of the egocentric predicament is the assertion that subjective idealism, in asseverating its own truth, presupposes a distinction between true and false and therefore a more-than-subjective reality. But it is at once evident that this argument is effective not at all against idealism in general, but against subjectivism (in the sense of relativity). From the fact that the known object is "independent of the specific knowing process" does not follow the

<sup>1</sup> Cf., for example, the following passages among many others: pp. 72<sup>4</sup>, 100<sup>1</sup>, 113<sup>3</sup>, 124<sup>3</sup>, 207<sup>3</sup>, 238<sup>1</sup>, 295<sup>1</sup>, 318<sup>3</sup>, 393, 404<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> P. 98<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> P. 336<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. p. 245<sup>3</sup> f. "I, if I am a positivist," Spaulding says, "offer the doctrine to you."

<sup>5</sup> Cf. pp. 158<sup>2</sup>, 367<sup>1</sup> *et al.*

conclusion that it is on that account non-mental. For, as Spaulding admits,<sup>1</sup> numerically monistic idealism, the doctrine of the Absolute Self, unites idealism with an absolutistic doctrine of truth, since it defines truth in terms of the Absolute's consciousness. Unless then Spaulding succeeds in his arguments—presently to be discussed—against objective, or monistic idealism, his realistic solution of the egocentric predicament, though it effectively combats relativism, does not prevail against idealism.

We are thus led at last to the consideration of Spaulding's criticism of numerically monistic idealism, that is of Absolutism in the ontological sense of the term.<sup>2</sup> For, as the preceding paragraphs have shown, the very core of his argument for realism is his solution of the egocentric predicament; and this solution consists simply in the demonstration that subjective idealism really presupposes absolute truth, becoming thus a self-contradictory system. But the objective idealist claims that absolute truth is conceivable in terms of his theory and it is therefore imperative for Spaulding, not only as pluralist but as realist, to disprove this numerically monistic doctrine. As he conceives it, objective idealism is the doctrine that an Absolute Unity, spiritual or mental in nature, "underlies" the many entities empirically known to exist and "mediates" their relationship.<sup>3</sup> Spaulding finds three main objections to this doctrine; of which the most important is the first: (1) There is, he insists, palpable self-contradiction in the conception of an underlying unity as mediating the relations of the many individuals which are its parts. "Such a unity," he says, "is really never reached, since, as mediating the relation between the terms which lie above it, it is *related* to those terms and therefore presupposes *still another* mediating unity and so on in an infinite series."<sup>4</sup> (2) The second criticism is a corollary of the first. If once it be admitted that a unitary being can not, without self-contradiction, be conceived as 'including' its parts it

<sup>1</sup> Cf. p. 351<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Spaulding makes use of the term 'The Absolute' in this ontological sense but uses 'absolutism' epistemologically to designate the non-relativistic conception of truth.

<sup>3</sup> Pp. 317 ff. esp. 322<sup>4</sup> ff.

<sup>4</sup> P. 198<sup>1</sup>. Cf. p. 180<sup>2</sup>, where Spaulding insists that the underlying unitary reality (which he designates by the symbol, *U*) "as the mediator of the original relation . . . is related not only to *a*, *b* [its terms] and *R* [the relation between them] but also to the complex *aRb*, so that again, by the original assumption, there is required still another *U* to mediate *this* relation and so on, in an infinite regress. . . . Therefore *U* is only a member of a series and not such an all-including and all-mediating *U*" as is sought." Cf. also p. 185<sup>3</sup>.

follows, as Spaulding holds, that such an entity, if it exists, must be "absolutely simple, since, if it is not, it consists of parts, and thus repeats the very problem, as regards the relation of these parts, which it is supposed to solve."<sup>1</sup> But obviously an elementally simple being is no Absolute *One*. Finally (3) Spaulding reiterates, there is no observed instance of a unitary being. "Strictly empirical procedure," he says, "discloses not a single instance of a one 'something' . . . that mediates the relation between two or more terms."<sup>2</sup>

These objections may once more best be considered in reverse order. (1) In opposition to the realist, the objective idealist insists—or may insist—that empirical procedure does disclose an instance of a "one something that mediates relations" or more accurately stated, of a "one something that relates."<sup>3</sup> This is the self (or I, or ego) of every one of us, the realist included, a unitary being which (to say the least) relates its own experiences. This relating self, the idealist continues, is as truly a directly observed, an empirically discovered fact as any one of the physical facts "such as tables and books, batteries and bombs" which, according to Spaulding "the physical sciences" and "common sense accept."<sup>4</sup> In other words, as directly as observation discloses, for example, the existence of falling bodies,<sup>5</sup> it discloses also the existence of classifying, remembering, and purposing selves, that is to say of beings who unify distinct experiences (and objects) and who unify present with past. (2) The closer study of this unitary being, the self, provides also one answer to Spaulding's second objection. He contends that a being which mediates relations must be elementally simple. But the idealist points to the empirically discovered self as instance of a relating yet complex entity, 'ideally' analyzable indeed, yet incapable of reduction to elements. Within the self it is thus possible to distinguish many aspects, attitudes, processes; but this analysis *in situ*, this *distinctio rationis*, this attentive absorption in one or other aspect of the self does not, as already argued,<sup>6</sup> imply the separate existence of any one

<sup>1</sup> P. 198<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> P. 181<sup>2</sup>. As possible instance of such a 'something,' Spaulding suggests the concept. (Cf. p. 188<sup>3</sup>.) His refutation of this possibility is so closely bound up with his treatment, here irrelevant, of the 'objective concept' that it can not expediently be considered.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the next paragraph for comment on the use of the term 'relates' in place of Spaulding's phrase: 'mediates relations.'

<sup>4</sup> P. 445<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> P. 491<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. page 601, above. On the conception of being, or entity, which is unitary without being simple cf. L. W. Stern, *Person und Sache*, pp. 78, 163<sup>1</sup> et al.

of them. Up to this point the objective idealist, in his reply to the realist, has been insisting on an ignored fact—the self. There is no instance, the realist has asserted, of a unitary being; the idealist points to the self. Every complex being must reduce to elements, the realist has argued; the idealist confutes this argued conclusion by the observed instance of an irreducible complex, the self. But these are, after all, supplementary considerations which do not affect the fundamental argument of Spaulding in opposition to numerical monism: (3) The Absolute, he has argued, would of necessity underlie its members and mediate their relation. But no being, complex or simple, can underlie its parts and mediate their relation since such mediation presupposes an infinite series of relations between mediating and mediated terms. This statement, over and over again repeated,<sup>1</sup> constitutes, it must once more be insisted, the central position of *The New Rationalism*. The argument is fundamental, as has now so often been pointed out, not only to the pluralistic but to the realistic part of the system since the realistic solution of the egocentric predicament is contingent on the disproof of objective idealism. In a word the whole argument of *The New Rationalism* pivots at precisely this crucially significant point. It is accordingly startling to discover that Spaulding's specific argument is not directed at all against objective, or monistic, idealism but against an extraordinary travesty of the theory. He conceives objective idealism as the doctrine of a One, or "extra-entity that mediates the relations between other entities;"<sup>2</sup> and he has no difficulty in showing that such an 'extra-entity,' so far from being absolute, itself turns out to be a member of an infinite series. But this conclusion is the inevitable outcome of an obvious *petitio principii*. The supposedly 'underlying one,' whose self-contradiction is so triumphantly shown up, has never really been conceived as either absolute or as underlying. For when anything is thought as an extra-entity it is not thought as absolute or all-including; and when anything is conceived as mediating relations, then the relations are thought of as existing outside it. In a word, Spaulding makes his point against objective idealism only by stating the doctrine so that it presupposes the existence of many entities externally related. The truly monistic conception, on the other hand, is that of a being which, so far from mediating the relations of entities outside itself relates, or unifies, its own members. And if it be objected that this is an arbitrarily conceived, a fictitious conception, the monistic personalist points once more to the empirically observed self, the unifier not only

<sup>1</sup> Cf. pp. 180 ff., 187 ff., 332 ff.

<sup>2</sup> P. 185<sup>3</sup>.

of its manifold experiences, of its past and its present but of the physical and social world which it systematizes and orders.

It may profitably be noted, in conclusion, that the objective idealist finds in Spaulding's illuminating doctrine of "the whole which has characteristics qualitatively different from the characteristics of the parts"<sup>1</sup> a conception readily adapted to the description of the self, whether partial or absolute. According to the personalist, *relating* is, in truth, a specific characteristic of those fundamentally real 'wholes,' or complex entities, known as selves, or egos. *Relations*, on the other hand, are cases of relating (relatings) when regarded, for practical or methodological purposes, *as if* independent of the self or selves whom they characterize.<sup>2</sup> Thus conceived, as readily as if they were 'external,' relations may in truth become subject matter of the 'new logic.'

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#### REJOINDER.

THE editor having given me the opportunity of examining Miss Calkins's manuscript, I offer the following comments and questions. In my reply I shall refer by number to Miss Calkins's successive paragraphs.

I. I do not say (*The New Rationalism*, p. 244) that "positivism contradicts itself in that it can not define impressions and ideas except in terms of the selves and physical objects whose existence it denies." The contradiction consists, rather, in denying, and yet in using, universals.

II. The justification of my recognizing only two major types of idealism, namely, subjective and objective, and of my placing Miss Calkins's peculiar type under the second of these, is to be found in her own statement, *Persistent Problems*, (pp. 418-90), that "Ultimate reality is an absolute . . . the universe is self." If there is a third type that is coördinate with these two, and not either a species or a composite of the two, I shall be pleased to have such a type defined.

2. I do not deny, as Miss Calkins seemingly would have me, personalities, but I do deny that all mental entities are personal. Personality—for me—is a specific organization of mental entities. I should say that there is empirical evidence of the presence of mental processes and the absence of personality (*a*) in many lower organisms,

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 447 ff., 501 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. L. W. Stern, *Person und Sache*, pp. 147 f., 167 f., 346 ff. Cf. also Bolzano, *Wissenschaftslehre*, Bd. I., p. 80, as paraphrased by Schweitzer, *Journal of Philosophy*, 1916, 13, p. 331.