

A DEFENCE OF IDEALISM. SOME QUESTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS. MAY SINCLAIR. The Macmillan Co. 1917. Pp. xxii, 355. \$2.00.

Plato's philosopher among kings plays no more unusual rôle than this novelist among philosophers. But disappointment is in store for any reader who takes up Miss Sinclair's book in the hope of finding a "metaphysics made easy." He will discover no simplified, superficial re-wording of other people's conclusions but rather an independent and critical study of fundamental doctrines. Miss Sinclair reaches her own position by way of a criticism of "the panpsychism of Samuel Butler," of "vitalism" as emphasized in the teaching of Bergson, of "pragmatism and humanism," of "neo-realism," and of "the new mysticism."

She starts out with the statement (p. 1) that "the plain man is supposed . . . to be sure that whatever else he is or isn't, he is himself," and is thus led to inquire "what we mean by Individuality, by Personal Identity, and by a Self." There follows a long exposition of Butler's doctrine, largely irrelevant to the main purpose of the book and somewhat uncritical in its adoption of Butler's conception of heredity, but abounding in valuable comment and comparison. One may note, in particular, Miss Sinclair's comparison of Butler to the psychoanalysts in their common emphasis on the "Will-to-live and to-make-live," and her suggestive re-statements of the results of psychoanalysis, which she precedes by the observation (p. 4): "Granting . . . that we know what we mean by the Unconscious . . . I see no reason why it should overflow with things hideous and repulsive any more than with beautiful and attractive things." Her enumeration of the significant conceptions of psychoanalysis follows: "Only three conceptions more or less coherent: a conception of the Will-to-live, valid as far as it goes but vague, and bound up with a conception of the Unconscious worse than vague, . . . a conception of Sublimation, by which this Will-to-live perpetually transcends itself and is made manifest in higher and higher and more and more complex forms of life, . . . a conception of the Individual as a being of immense importance, seeing that just those forces within and without him which arrest and retard his individuality are backward forces" (p. 9). In spite, however, of Miss Sinclair's interest in Butler, her conclusion (p. 13) that "the Unconscious resolves itself into a negative abstraction" of course involves her in strong opposition to him in his denial of personal identity to the individual. She argues (p. 33) that "not the simplest fact of consciousness, not the simplest operation of building up a primordial germ-cell, is possible without the presupposition of personal identity."

There is room to question Miss Sinclair's confident classification (p. 56) of Bergson as a metaphysical dualist—in truth, she herself later questions it. But her criticism of him is keen and in the main discriminating. It culminates in the assertion (p. 63) that Bergson has gone wrong in that “he has put Pure Time before the Self. He has given to Time that special form of continuity, the duration that belongs only to a self.”

At this point, led by these introductory studies to the discovery of self as basal fact, Miss Sinclair devotes a chapter to the consideration, under McDougall's guidance, of “some ultimate questions of psychology.” This chapter is mainly concerned with the issue between parallelism and interactionism, and the author concludes that McDougall “has justified the hypothesis of a self or soul” and that he has vindicated interactionism. But this, Miss Sinclair points out, leaves the metaphysician with the problem on his hands of explaining interaction. In her fourth chapter she proceeds to consider the rival explanations of the philosophers. She argues briefly against materialism on the ground (p. 113) that the materialist “must either admit that consciousness does not come altogether into his net, or he must break his own sacred law of the conservation of energy”; against the doctrine of the “underlying Unknown and Unknowable” on the ground (p. 115) that its upholders “have to assume it to be knowable and indeed known in order to prove that it is there at all”; and finally, against the very different theory of “objective idealism,” by which apparently she means a pluralistic, intellectualistic, and relatively impersonal form of idealism, a theory which conceives the universe as a system of percepts and ideas. The teaching of the objective idealist is thus summarized (p. 121): “He has cut the Thing-in-itself very cleverly out of the problem, and packed all Reality into states of consciousness; not my states or your states, but all the states of all the consciousness there is; so that the sum of Reality will be simply the sum of the states. . . . But Totality, the sum of all states, must be more real than any one state or any number of states; so that his Reality is purely quantitative, and every lapse of consciousness, no matter whose or what — and these lapses are constantly occurring — will be a *dead loss of reality to the Universe.*”

All this is, however, in a way preliminary to Miss Sinclair's main purpose. The vital philosophical issue is, she believes, that which divides pluralistic neo-realism from idealism of the monistic and personalistic type. For a brief chapter's length she pauses to brush aside pragmatism and humanism with decisive though with regretful

hand. For though she abhors "William James's way of thinking," she "adores his way of writing" (p. vii). "To be just to pragmatism and humanism," she concludes (p. 148), "they have deserved well of philosophy in reminding it of things it is apt to forget; little things like Will and action and moral conduct." But she concludes that pragmatism "is a method and not a philosophy," and might well have argued the point even had she not confined her attention to one group only of the pragmatists.

Incomparably the most important part of the book, in the mind not only of the present reviewer but of the author, is the long and critical discussion of neo-realism. Miss Sinclair is profoundly, perhaps inordinately, impressed with the importance of this youngest and most vociferous claimant to metaphysical honor. She agrees (p. 153) with those who concede to the new realism a "deadly force." And she attributes this force mainly to the "method of Mr. Bertrand Russell's 'atomistic logic'" as applied "to the universe without and to the universe within." To the neo-realists she yields two points: first, that by their conception of space and time as continuous they cut out the ground from under Kant's old idealistic argument from the antinomies; second, that "all the qualities of matter are in the same boat; there is no difference between primary and secondary qualities" (p. 175). But she elaborates her suspicion (pp. 225 ff.) that the doctrine of space as absolute continuity involves its own antinomies; and against neo-realism she urges with great skill and vigor the following considerations:

First, in flat opposition to its own pretensions, it flies in the face of science and common sense (p. 216 *et al.*). "It divides what for science and the plain man's sense were never yet divided. It joins what for them were never yet joined. It talks about irreducibles and undefinables where science and the plain man see palpable unities and relations. It gives to the abstractions of its own logic a reality as august and far more permanent than the solar system." In other words, neo-realism is palpably untrue to experience in its attempt to reduce perceived objects to mathematical or logical reals. "Mind is not more different from matter than mathematical points are from a point perceived in an extended surface" (p. 214).

The realist, in the second place, undermines his own theory by his treatment of hallucination and image as real in the sense in which perceived objects are real. "Take hallucinations of the lesser sort, the temporary distortions . . . of perception . . . of a real outside object. These . . . are due to some . . . maladjustment of the apparatus (the medium) — easily corrected, the new realist says,

by . . . reference to the real object" (p. 219). But "if the distortion of the medium can make one perceive the real object as if it were distorted . . . it is clear that his perception of objects . . . is not precisely . . . immediate. How can he then be sure — as cock-sure as the realist is — that he is perceiving a reality and not an appearance?" (p. 220).

Neo-realism, furthermore, discloses an inherent inconsistency (pp. 220 ff.) in admitting the subjectivity of certain "tertiary qualities . . . the æsthetic feelings . . . the passions and emotions." For we do not find "the tertiary qualities, which it admits to be subjective, divided off from the secondary or objective ones as sharply as we should expect."

Finally and impressively Miss Sinclair argues that "universals" which the neo-realist reinstates "are a priceless haul for the idealist. . . . If realists *will* revive Plato," she adds, "they must abide by the consequences of the resurrection" (p. 231). "What, in Heaven's name," she cries, "are realities defined as independent of any and every thought, of any and every consciousness, doing in a process of thinking which is nothing if not conscious?" Another difficulty for the neo-realist is found in the fact that "there is a universal of every actual . . . and of every possible proposition." For since "the number of propositions is infinite," and since "for every true proposition there is a false proposition that denies its truth . . . therefore there will be an . . . infinite number of universals standing for an infinite number of lies" (p. 234). Miss Sinclair does "not see how reality can be claimed for these objects of conception if reality has any meaning" (p. 235).

The multiplied proofs of the inner inconsistency of neo-realism, its most formidable rival, leaves monism, or the doctrine of the "real Absolute," in possession of the field. Miss Sinclair unequivocally sets forth this form of monism — the conclusion "that the ultimate reality of things and the ultimate reality of consciousness is one; and that this one reality is Spirit" (p. 295) — as the hypothesis most in keeping with the facts. She devotes a chapter, full of interesting but largely irrelevant detail, to the distinction of this reasoned monism from mysticism in its varied forms. In her concluding pages she re-states and re-emphasizes the main features of her conception of the "infinite Spirit" or "Self" which "*is* all relations and all terms and is more than the sum of all terms and relations" (p. 210). This doctrine, she insists, though it meets the realist's dilemma by providing a distinction between true and false, does not rob a single fact of "its own peculiar and relative reality"

(p. 305). "Existence remains as full-blooded and gorgeously colored, as variegated and multitudinous, as everlastingly . . . surprising" as ever (p. 309). The "multiplicity and change" which realism finds in the universe, monism also finds (p. 306); but it argues (p. 306 f.) that there cannot be "multiplicity without something that multiplies itself, or change without something that persists throughout change." Finally, this doctrine of "one infinite Spirit" conceives a plurality of finite selves "held together by one Real Self . . . without loss to the integrity of one finite item of the finite complex, without rupture to the unity of the one Self" (p. 338). The psychological possibility that "the selfhood of the finite selves" can be maintained "in and through their fusion with the infinite Self" is shown, Miss Sinclair believes, in certain "forms of dream-consciousness" (pp. 335 ff.).

The readers of this notice will already have realized that the writer of it closely agrees with Miss Sinclair in her essential position and cordially respects the strength and the skill of her argument. This agreement and respect do not however blind the reviewer to certain defects in the book. Some of these are purely formal: the staccato movement of the paragraphs, the wearisome vivacity of style and phraseology, and the unaccountable lack of an index. Other criticisms concern Miss Sinclair's choice and neglect of authorities. When she says simply that where she has "touched on General Psychology" she has "invariably followed Mr. McDougall as the best available authority," the sincerest admirer of Mr. McDougall may be pardoned not only for smiling a little at her insularity but for remembering that she need not have left the sanctuary of British psychology to consult also Stout and (more to her special advantage) Ward. When she disavows (p. 202 *et al.*) Bradley's argument to the Absolute from the impossibility of the infinite regress, one wishes that she had cited the Supplementary Essay of Royce's "The World and the Individual," First Series. And one wishes even more eagerly that her brilliant (though rather mystical) speculation (p. 338) on the whirl of appearances into reality by an increase in "the pace of the rhythm of time" had been strengthened and perhaps sobered by a study of Royce's conception of the differing time-spans, as distinguishing selves of different orders.¹ The mention of Bradley suggests also the comment that Miss Sinclair might have made the distinction, necessary to idealism of the monistic type, between lesser reality and ultimate reality, without retaining Bradley's misleading "appearance" as the unvaried contrasting term to "reality."

¹ The World and the Individual, Series II, Lecture V, pp. 228 ff.

A more significant comment may be made on Miss Sinclair's superficial reference (p. 289) to the contrast between the Absolute and God. Truly, philosophy is not religion, and the object of the one is not necessarily identical with that of the other. Yet reasoned thinking may supplement personal feeling or loyalty; and nothing forbids the religious attitude toward the Absolute, conceived in Miss Sinclair's terms as Self or Spirit. A final comment has to do with Miss Sinclair's teaching about the self. As the preceding summary has shown, this is a concept basal both to Miss Sinclair's doctrine and to her method. Reality, in her view, *is* a Self manifested in selves; and the argument for this conclusion throughout makes appeal to every man's experience of himself. It is to be regretted, therefore, that at the outset of Chapter III, Miss Sinclair presents so needlessly confused an account of that "ultimate fact," as she later (p. 297) truly calls it, the self. For though "irreducible," the self is not therefore indescribable. And it must be added that, as Miss Sinclair proceeds, her conception of self gains definiteness and precision as that of a unifying, changing, persisting perceiver, imaginer, thinker, feeler, or willer. There is danger, however, in her reiterated assertions that the self is a "pure" self (p. 318), a self "over and above its own experience" (p. 317). Miss Sinclair may mean no more by these statements than that the self is "more than the sum of its states" (p. 297), that it is no mere impersonal "totality" of experiences, memories, feelings, and the like, regarded without reference to any self. She runs the risk, however, by the words "pure" and "beyond" and "over" of being interpreted as if she subscribed to the outlawed doctrine of soul-substance, non-conscious self. For though one cannot too emphatically assert the existence of a self that is not a mere "percept" or "feeling," one must insist with equal fervor that the only real self is a self who is conscious, a perceiving, thinking, feeling, or willing self.

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A REALISTIC UNIVERSE. An Introduction to Metaphysics. JOHN E. BOODIN. The Macmillan Co. 1916. Pp. xxii, 412.

In a previous work, *Truth and Reality*, Professor Boodin had already described himself as a "rabid realist." Truly enough, he is a realist as tested by the one point of doctrine on which all realists agree, namely, that neither the existence nor the qualities of objects